Selling a Feeling:
New Approaches Toward Recent Gay Chicano Authors and Their Audience

Dissertation

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Abstract

Gay Chicano authors have been criticized for not forming the same type of strong literary identity and community as their Chicana feminist counterparts, a counterpublic that has given voice not only to themselves as authors, but also to countless readers who see themselves reflected in their texts. One of the strengths of the Chicana feminist movement is that they have not only produced their own works, but have made sense of them as well, creating a female-to-female tradition that was previously lacking. Instead of merely reiterating that gay Chicano authors have not formed this community and common identity, this dissertation instead turns the conversation toward the reader. Specifically, I move from how authors make sense of their texts and form community, to how readers may make sense of texts, and finally, to how readers form community. I limit this conversation to three authors in particular—Alex Espinoza, Rigoberto González, and Manuel Muñoz—whom I label the second generation of gay Chicano writers.

In González, I combine the cognitive study of empathy and sympathy to examine how he constructs affective planes that pull the reader into feeling for and with the characters that he draws. I also further elaborate on what the real world consequences of this affective union—existing between character and audience—may be. In Muñoz, I consider how, through the destabilization of the narrator
position, the author constructs storyworlds that first pull the reader in, and then push them out of the narrative in a search for closure. Here, I theorize that he forces the reader to mind read his narrators in order to discern their true intentions. In Espinoza, I explore the typification of Latino/a literature in the marketplace and how it has become tied to magical realism. Here, I posit that Espinoza has created a magic realized novel, one that presents itself as something magical realist, but systemically discredits the notion of magic throughout the work. I use cognitive theories of surprise to explain how readers may perceive this discrediting, and what the wider implications of a novel such as his Still Water Saints may be for Latina/o literature.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I move the study towards how readers form cybercommunities of authors online. I present data collected on Amazon.com and discuss relationships found between authors through the website’s feature “Customers Also Bought Items By.” I conclude that readers do indeed appear to be connecting this second generation of gay Chicano authors online in ways that they do not appear to do for the first generation, potentially resolving the issue of these authors not forming these communities themselves.
Dedication

I would not be where I am without my grandmother, who always encouraged me to keep studying enough though it kept me away from home. You have been my greatest support, and I will never be able to repay you for it. And to the rest of my family, who don’t really understand why I’m still in school, but encourage me anyway.

I also dedicate this to my fantastic friends: Mariana (even though she left us for a Ph.D. in Edinburgh), Amanda (my academic wife these past five years), her husband Cliff and daughter Charlotte, Chantal (my sister from another mother for the past 20 years), Kristina, Ale, Naomi, Erin and Joanna (who have all gone onto great things since our Master’s), Theresa and Indra (who have kept me moving this past year—literally), and the countless other friends I have made over the past eight years.

And finally to Marco, whose love and support have kept me going throughout the entire Ph.D, and will far into the future. Te amo, guapo.
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Coming into this project, I knew very little about Latina/o Studies, and much of the knowledge that I have gained owes a large debt to Dr. Frederick Luis Aldama. He has also offered invaluable support and welcomed me into the world that he has built at The Ohio State University with open arms. It is much thanks to him that I feel as though I've finally found a place in academia, and words do not truly express how grateful I am for that.

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Introduction: Positioning Gay Chicano Literature (and its authors)

During a visit to Toronto in September of 2012, a friend asked if I could give her an overview of my current project, that which I will develop here over the coming chapters. Given that many of my friends are Latin Americanists who are not necessarily familiar with Latina/o literature, I strove to boil this description to its most basic elements, explaining that I was working with three recent gay Chicano novelists, Alex Espinoza, Rigoberto González and Manuel Muñoz, who have not yet been widely studied. Normally, I assume that many people that I speak to outside of academia will not be familiar with these artists, or Chicano/a novelists in general, with the exception of a few important names that have been successful in the marketplace, such as Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo. And indeed, this friend was not familiar with any of the authors that I include here, but she did immediately share her love of Chicana feminist authors, and the seminal This Bridge Called My Back in particular. Edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and first published in 1981 by Persephone Press, Bridge was foundational in the Third Wave women’s movement, collecting essays by Chicana and non-Chicana names such as Audre Lorde, Ana Castillo and Norma Alarcón, among others. For my friend, an Afro-Latina Canadian lesbian, Bridge represented what it likely did for many others:
affirmative writings by those who looked like her and mostly loved like her—a turn of solidarity and, importantly, the seeding of a community. In reference to Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, Martín-Rodríguez explains that the work demonstrates a “female-to-female” tradition, something that had been lacking until the Chicana feminists entered the scene (77). Before this, he explains, Chicana characters in novels were mostly restricted to the house, the church, brothels or cantinas (72), but instead, *House* draws these characters as the basis of everyday life.

If we extrapolate this to Chicana feminist literature in general, both literary and expository, we are able to see the same formation of a “female-to-female” tradition—female run publishing houses printing works collected by female editors, containing essays by female authors such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, and others. It is in this relationship that we uncover one of the most important functions of the Chicana feminist movement in general—to both write works and to make sense of them—creating their own unique space after being pushed aside and ignored for so long, both by a patriarchal society and the Euro-American women’s liberation movement. For readers, the consequence of creating this space was to provide a literary home that reflected their bodies, minds and hearts, such as in the case of my Afro-Latina friend in Toronto. Ultimately, I believe that we find the true importance of any text in its relationship with its reader; specifically, how works and authors speak to their audiences, and in turn, how their audiences make sense of them. It is generally much more difficult to consider gay Chicano authors within a similar context because these authors have not formed the same type of strong literary identity and
community as their Chicana counterparts. Thus, considering the role of their audience becomes even more important, and for this reason, this project primarily concerns itself with how readers may make sense and meaning of the works of three authors mentioned earlier, Espinoza, González and Muñoz. Through an analysis that uses the tools of narratology and the cognitive sciences, I explore how these authors employ careful control of language, narrative technique, and imagination to represent a range of human emotions, moral dilemmas, and cognitive capabilities, and how, in turn, readers may use these tools to make meaning of their literary creations. I have expressly chosen these authors because I consider them as forming the second generation of gay Chicano writers—all were born after 1970 and have published their works mostly within the past decade. Nevertheless, just as in the case of the previous generation, including authors such as John Rechy, Arturo Islas, Richard Rodriguez and Michael Nava, they have not yet collaborated in the formation of a communal identity as the Chicana feminists have. Thus, instead of considering community in the context of how it is directed by the authors, I look at it from the perspective of the reader. In sum, my intention in this project is to move from a discussion of how authors make sense of their texts and form their own communities, as in the case of the Chicana feminists, to how readers may make sense of these texts, and finally, to how readers make community.

Although I had already been several chapters into the current study before discovering my friend’s love of Chicana feminist authors, her explanation of what they meant to her truly spoke to the heart of many of the questions that I had been
considering in terms of their male counterparts. From my perspective within the academy, their lack of a cohesive authorial community has manifested itself both in the existence of fewer of them, and a noticeable absence of their works from curriculums in higher education. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera*, for example, has found space within a range of academic departments, from Spanish to Women’s Studies, but there is no gay Chicano author that has had that sort of reach, with the possible exception of Richard Rodriguez, who has gained recognition (and notoriety) for other reasons. Although studies of these authors continue to lag those of Chicanas by a wide margin, recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in gay Chicano/Latino studies, a development long overdue considering that one of the first novels from these authors, Rechy’s *City of Night*, was published 50 years ago. One of the major hurdles that both queer Chicana and Chicano literature has faced in overcoming its lack of visibility is that these works have challenged, or at the very minimum questioned, the dominant patriarchal societal model that has tended to dominate the communities where these authors originate. Even as the various Chicano and Latino movements gained strength in the 1960s and 1970s, they left out, by and large, their queers, and this exclusion extended into their literary canons. The Chicano movement, as Alvarez, among others, explains, tended to exalt male privilege and prescribed gender roles (3) and many of the novels produced by Chicanos during the years afterwards tended to reinforce these perceptions (7). As Aldama writes, it was not until the 1980s that gay Chicanos managed to force open the door that had hidden their lives from mainstream view (*Brown* 21), with writers
such as Rechy, Arturo Islas and Richard Rodriguez becoming among the most prominent of their authors. Nevertheless, as Cherríe Moraga has pointed out in her seminal essay “Queer Aztlán,” Chicana lesbians have been much more vocal and openly political than most gay Chicano authors, resulting in a far greater variety of works spanning both the creative and expository. Critically, Moraga lays the blame squarely at the feet of the early generation—Islas and Rodriguez in particular—for not creating the same type of community as Chicanas, herself included, a movement that gave voice to perspectives that my friend felt so important to her own discovery of self.

“Queer Aztlán,” published in 1993 in the anthology The Last Generation, and republished various times since, could be counted as one of the most important documents of the Chicana feminist movement because it so clearly lays the progression of their community and the obstacles they faced. Moraga ultimately believes that the wider Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s was “deformed” by its insistence of the preservation of the traditional Chicano family, one of its core tenets. Even though this this broader groundswell subsided in the 1970s, she believes that lesbians, one of the most critical components of Chicana feminism, have since carried the torch, speaking from a position that had been silenced by the males who led the resistance for so many years. What they ultimately sought, she writes, was a culture that allowed for natural expression, explaining that in a “Queer Aztlán” “there would be no freaks, no “others” to point one’s finger at” (267). If we consider the Chicano movement as a counterpublic, as it was against the dominant
Anglo public of the time, the Chicana movement then positioned itself as the
counterpublic to this counterpublic.¹ Moraga’s essay is revelatory, reading almost as
a manifesto, but also problematic in the scorn that it directs towards gay Chicanos,
whom, she believes, “[u]ntil recently . . . have been silent over the Chicano
Movement’s male heterosexual hegemony” (266). She envisions a utopic alliance
between all queer Chicanos, but believes this to be impossible at the time that she
wrote because queer males “still cling to what privileges they can” (266), pointing
out their misogyny in particular. Moraga goes on to criticize gay Chicano authors for
removing silent and names Arturo Islas (whom Moraga does call a friend) and
Richard Rodriguez in particular. After categorizing gay men as either queens, those
who are loud and proud, or passers, those who hide in the closet, Moraga takes
these authors to task for remaining in the latter category, an especially egregious sin
when the HIV/AIDS epidemic was taking the lives of so many gay Chicanos. She
writes that “[u]nlike the “queens” who have always been open about their sexuality,
“passing” gay men have learned in a visceral way that being in “the closet” and
preserving their “manly” image will not protect them, it will only make their dying
more secret” (267). Islas and Rodriguez, she believes, did not come out when they
should have, did not write about their homosexuality in an overt, honest way,² and

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¹ The Chicana Feminist movement has positioned itself as a counterpublic not only to the mainstream
Chicano movement, but also to mainstream Euro-American feminism, as we will see later. When I use
the term “counterpublic” here, I do so with Michael Warner’s book *Publics and Counterpublics* in
mind. I enter into further dialog with this term in Chapter 4.

² In an interview with Torres, Islas recounts the difficulty that he had in publishing *The Rain God*, and
how, in its original form as *Día de los muertos/Day of the Dead*, it was rejected by publishers for not
having “characters they could identify with” (69). Aldama specifies this rejection further, writing that
the novel that eventually resulted from this process, *Rain God*, was “greatly trimmed of its original
ultimately could have, but failed to, serve as a political voice for men who did not have one.

Although Moraga certainly does have a unique perspective in that she lived through this time and thus speaks from experience, I do find her condemnation problematic for several reasons. One of its more superficial flaws is that it selectively chooses authors in order to prove a point—in fact, there are at least two gay Chicano authors that have written their queer experiences rather openly in their narratives: Michael Nava and John Rechy. The Henry Rios series of detective novels written by lawyer/author Nava have directly dealt with the topic of AIDS and other concerns within both the Chicano and non-Chicano gay community, while Rechy had been publishing in the 30 years previous to her essay, including works with very explicit queer content, including City of Night (1963) and the documentary The Sexual Outlaw (1978). Rechy could be considered an integral part of the gay male counterpublic, and a formative gay Chicano one as well.

“Queer Aztlán” has generated some heated discussion, including criticism from Antonio Viego in his 1999/2011 essay “The Place of Gay Male Chicano Literature in Queer Chicano/a Cultural Work.” Viego believes that the primary flaw

Chicano caló and its queer characterization” (Brown 112). Ultimately, the publishers most likely did not see a “gay Chicano” market for such a book, at least at the time, but felt that it would be more successful aimed towards a more general marketplace given its “Latinidad,” as Arlene Dávila might put it. See note 14 of this chapter.


in Moraga’s reasoning comes from the assumption that the “lesbian Latina subject and the gay Latino subject are racialized in the same way, that they occupy the same structural position” (94). Furthermore, Viego explains that “[w]e seemingly anticipate (and assume) cultural alliances between gay Latino and Latina lesbian politics and this cultural alliance, indeed, might be a problem” (95). In short, he questions the entire comparison between lesbian Chicana and gay Chicano literature and specifically addresses the criticism that these authors have not reproduced gay Chicano subjects in their texts. He explains: “[w]hat maybe distinctive about the narrativization of a gay Latino subject concerns the different ways this expressive practice apprehends categories like race and sexuality in an effort to textually inscribe a coherent, readable ‘self’” (96-7). Unfortunately, Viego does not consider Nava in this equation, which I believe to be significant considering that his openly political narratives offer the very voice that Moraga chides both Islas and Rodríguez for not offering. While mostly agreeing with Viego, Richard T. Rodríguez goes further in his criticism of “Queer Aztlán,” rejecting the notion that gay Chicanos have not challenged patriarchal and heterosexist models, and insists that we must look past the names that are well-known to more obscure locations. For example, Rodríguez studies the paintings of Eugene Rodríguez, which he believes initiate a dialog between Chicano men, both gay and straight, “about their shared masculinity” (162). He also considers the out-of-print 1985 collection of gay Chicano poetry, *Ya vas, Carnal* (165), as well as representations in magazines.5

5 Rodríguez writes that “one needs to recognize that the cultural production of Chicano gay men is
An interesting point that Viego opens, but leaves relatively unanswered, is why “lesbian Latina subjectivity has emerged in dominant critical academic discourse” while gay Chicano literature has failed, by and large, to enter the academy (93). Viego touches upon an answer, explaining that the space in which one discourse emerged “may occupy an ambivalent, perhaps even antagonistic relation to the possibility of the other’s emergence. In other words, these discourses might not ever be visible (or present) to each other in ways that we recognize as empowering and supportive” (95). For him, it is pointless to compare the successful academic discourse of lesbian Chicanas and the nascent one of gay Chicanos because they are completely different movements that concern different groups of people. Rodríguez finds Viego’s position restrictive in that it does not allow for consideration of how these groups “occasionally strive for a sense of collective consciousness” (139). I also consider this answer lacking—perhaps instead of comparing the mere volume of work, it would be more useful to examine the conditions under which Chicana feminist discourse emerged, and how they differed from those of gay Chicanos. To enter into this discussion, we first must look at the role of the academy itself and specifically, how new dialogues emerge within it.

**Entering the academy**

Córdova, who writes from the Chicana feminist perspective, sees the academy as a place where knowledge is made legitimate, and where the power

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both in the emergent stage as well as contingent upon ‘recovery work’” (139). This recovery work includes, according to the author, collecting materials that are out of print, unpublished, or published in obscure places, recording oral histories, the distribution of new production, and critical examinations of the social and cultural positionings of gay Chicanos. (139)

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resides to decide what is “truth” and what is not (17). The author sees a great
coloniality in this setting, and as a consequence, it has been an “unfriendly” place for
her and her colleagues, due to factors such as “an ethnocentric curriculum, double
standards, assumptions of our inferiority, harassment, unfair evaluations, lower pay,
and bypassed promotions” (20). Finding themselves lacking power, then, how can
subjugated groups within the academy legitimize their experiences and gain
recognition? The answer, I believe, lies in conversing with those dominant groups,
even if in hidden ways—effectively serving as the counterpublic to their public. We
must remember that a substantial amount of scholarship is driven by the act of
disagreeing and taking the initiative to explain why, which produces what could be
termed academic tension. Indeed, the current discussion has been driven by this:
disagreeing with the position of Moraga and explaining why, which is also what
drove Viego to write his response. Although I may disagree with some of the
positions that Moraga takes, I believe that “Queer Aztlán” is particularly important
because it invites a response.6

Aside from the battles fought within the Chicano community for recognition,
a common theme in the expository writing of Chicana feminists is a tension with
Euro-American feminists, a group with whom we might otherwise falsely assume
alliances both within and outside of the academy. In This Bridge Called My Back

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6 As much as “Queer Aztlán” reads as a condemnation of Islas and Rodriguez in particular, it also
almost seems as if Moraga is issuing a double challenge: for these authors to explain themselves (only
Rodriguez, of course, as Islas had already passed away by the time that the article was published),
and for others to pick up the slack. In her interview with Weatherston, Moraga confirms this
intention. (70)
(1982), the introduction to the chapter “Racism in the Women’s Movement” calls this out rather clearly: “[i]n academic and cultural circles, Third World women have become the subject matter of many literary and artistic endeavors by White women, and yet we are refused access to the pen, the publishing house, the galleries, and the classroom” (61). In a 1991 interview with Torres, Castillo further clarifies this, explaining that she feels a closer connection with other women of color than to “Anglo feminists” (156). Cotera examines the historical struggles between Chicana and Anglo feminists—the former, she writes, had “little or no support from Anglo colleagues” (215), while *Chicana Feminist Thought*, the anthology in which Cotera’s essay appears, contains an entire section devoted to examining the gaps between these two factions. Furthermore, this antagonism appears to be widespread, as a 1988 survey by Pesquera and Segura demonstrated. Surveying the scholars of MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social), an association of Chicanas/Latinas in higher education, the authors write that the respondents “argue that the American women’s movement largely articulates issues best relevant to relatively privileged, well-educated, middle-and upper-class white women” and further criticize how this movement has positioned itself as global amongst *all* women, which they feel “obscure[s] important racial-ethnic and class differences” (300). In short, it is suggested that the mainstream feminist movement, a counterpublic to dominant patriarchal society, did not tell the story of all females despite positioning itself as doing so, and this also manifested itself within the academy. Nevertheless, as the quote from *This Bridge* attests, there were at least
some Euro-American female scholars within the academy that were considering the works of Chicana feminists, even if there were critical issues of coloniality. Because of this, I believe that feminist-minded studies within the academy (and outside of it) ultimately did serve to produce a sort of “tension” that proved to be a fertile creative breeding ground for Chicana feminists, giving them something to write against as a counterpublic, even if they did not necessarily begin writing within the academy. Thus, the Chicana feminists not only became a counterpublic to the general Chicano movement, but to mainstream feminism as well.

Aside from this academic tension, Córdova’s assertion that the academy is closed to new discourses is perhaps too broad reaching to because if this were true, none would ever emerge, and departments such as Women’s and Queer studies, more recently formed, would not exist. Norma Alarcón has also explained that the academy tends to exert a hegemonic discourse which manifests itself in a resistance to “[s]elf inscription as [a] focal point of cultural consciousness and social change . . .” (355), and examines this problem through Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. I believe that this is also too far reaching a statement—there are always some scholars within the academy who are interested in new discourses, and particularly ones that are counterhegemonic. Here, we can consider testimonial literature—many times these works speak out against the hegemony of the mainstream public and have been highly controversial (consider *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*), but that has not prevented them from becoming popular objects of study. Anzaldúa’s 1990 interview with Torres speaks to both this
hegemony and the counter-hegemony; she makes a number of comments about people within the academy who supported her, realizing that she was doing something unique and worthwhile, but also recounts how others rejected her work as not fitting within scholarly confines.

Returning to the idea self-inscription, while there may be resistance to the concept in academia, that resistance is not absolute, something to which Anzaldúa’s examples also testifies. Broadly speaking, Chicana feminists have used self-inscription of Xicanisma to tell their own stories, unify and theorize, a term which ties heavily into Anzaldúa’s self-inscription of the “new mestiza,” one in touch with her pre-Colombian roots, even if those roots were often times reconstructed. This Mesoamerican—frequently Aztec—imagery is critical to Borderlands, and has been heavily used by many Chicana feminist artists and writers, including Moraga and Ana Castillo, among others. More recently, the 2011 collection by Moraga, A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness, spells these roots out rather clearly in its prologue. To return to Viego, it was not merely Chicana feminists “reproducing

7 In Borderlands/La Frontera, Anzaldúa explains that her “Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance. The Aztec female rights of mourning were rights of defiance protesting the cultural changes which disrupted the equality and balance between male and female, and protesting their demotion to a lesser status, their denigration. Like La llorona, the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing.” (43)
8 This indigenous focus, termed “Floricanto,” was not invented by the Chicana feminists, but rather appropriated by them from the mainstream Chicano movement of the 1960s. Rodolfo “Corky” González’s epic poem “I am Joaquin,” considered by many to be the most representative work of that movement, relies heavily upon this indigenous imagery, as do works by influential poet Alurista, and playwright Luis Valdez. The main difference with the Chicana feminists is that they worked to recover the image of Malintzin—the Malinche—who became a symbol of their movement.
9 These roots are also apparent in This Bridge. See “Cascada de Estrellas: la espiritualidad de la chicana/mexicana/indígena” (Inés Hernández) in the Spanish edition Esta puente mi espalda (this essay does not appear in the original English version), and Norma Alarcón’s “Chicana Feminist
themselves” in texts that powered their movement, but also how they actively formed a counterpublic in their expository writings, one partially based in self-inscription, that both defined and refined their work. I would argue that this counterpublic has been successful in the academy precisely because it uses language and frameworks that are conducive to study within these institutions, and has been helped by the authors themselves entering the academy, and other interested scholars within it. Generally, many of these expository texts are directed more towards an academic audience, and this can be seen in the style of language that they use, as opposed to their creative writing which has had a good deal of success in the marketplace. Considering a canonical text of the Chicana feminist movement, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera* (1987), we see a large amount of expository writing that recounts the life of the author herself, as well as poetry, and can be hard to classify because of how it bends literary categories. Nevertheless, aside from the oft-quoted line “[t]he U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (25), which contains extremely powerful imagery, we can consider the book as being conceived with the academy in mind, and if not, these institutions have certainly been critical to its continued success. Indeed, *Borderlands/La frontera* holds a powerful position in many different areas of the academy, including Spanish, Women’s Studies, Chicano Studies, Borderland

\[\text{Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object” in the original English and Spanish translation.}\]

\[10\text{In an interview with Torres, Anzaldúa recounts the substantial resistance that she encountered in combining theory with creative writing, and it was this “tension” that drove her forward in order to prove that she could indeed do it (130).}\]
Studies, and English departments, and has spawned innumerable critical articles, which Sonia Saldívar-Hull, who wrote the introduction of the second edition, does note (1). For these reasons, we can consider the Chicana counterpublic as one that has been very successful in giving voice to those who did not have one and fighting institutional discrimination within the academy, but also as a movement that has many times used language and frameworks conducive to the academy to accomplish this.

**Gay Chicano discourse in the academy**

Nevertheless, much of this expository writing is missing amongst gay Chicano authors, at least when considering what has been produced by the authors themselves. Although scholars have been filling in the gaps, particularly within the last 15 years, outside of Richard Rodriguez, gay Chicanos authors lack the wide array of expository writings that Chicanas have produced, aside from a scant few autobiographies and essays. In the particular case of Rodriguez, his writings were not necessarily directed towards the academy but instead towards a larger public, and were not usually tied to the topic of homosexuality. As mentioned previously, Moraga believes that many of these writers were trying to hold onto whatever male

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11 Chicana feminists have taken a very Hannah Arendtian path to fighting for their own space. Arendt, who faced discrimination and worse as a Jew living in Nazi Germany, explained in an interview to Gaus that “[i]f one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew. Not as a German, not as a world-citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man” (Lambrecht 7). One of the many things that is admirable about the Chicana feminist movement is that they have defended themselves primarily as Chicana women and/or lesbians, not as mere people who deserve “rights” because they are human beings. They have embraced who they are and have defended themselves on the basis that who they are is worthy of recognition and respect. One of the few gay Latino works that comes close to this approximation, I believe, is Jaime Manrique’s *Eminent Maricones*, which creates a similar counterpublic out of gay authors Manuel Puig, Reinaldo Arenas and Federico García Lorca. I further discuss this work in Chapter 4.
privilege they still had, and thus remained silent ("Queer" 266). While I believe that this explanation is likely part of the answer, and Moraga certainly has a more personal experience with these authors than I do, I also feel that it overlooks the function of the academy from the perspective of these authors. Here, I intend not just to point out that the gay Chicanos have not produced as much expository literature as their Chicana counterparts, which Viego describes as a “fairly rote” observation (91), but more precisely look at possible reasons why this is so.

One of the most important of these reasons is that, unlike Chicana feminists, gay Chicano authors mostly lacked a positioning conducive for a counterpublic to form within the academy. Although they were also oppressed within scholarly confines, they did not have a specific public against which to form their counterpublic, as the Chicana feminists had with Euro-American feminists, a far more entrenched group. If we consider that gay Chicano authors were not able to dialog with feminists and departments devoted exclusively to Chicano or Queer Studies were nascent, we may find an explanation for the marginalization of their literary production within the academy. Even today, gay Chicano literature is difficult to find in higher education, and I believe that this is reflected in the relatively small (but growing) number of scholars working with it, in comparison to

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12 Moraga’s categorization of gay men as “queens” and, in particular, “passers” in “Queer Aztlán” complicates the extent to which we can quantify any such oppression. Theoretically, “passers” can fall back onto the fact they are males, a dominant group within the academy, which females clearly cannot.
very productive field of their Chicana counterparts. Simply put, without this tension, an academic counterpublic never formed.¹³

There is also the issue of alliances with Chicana feminists, which, as Moraga notes, did not really occur despite Chicanas encouraging them (“Queer” 266). Theoretically, had these authors formed alliances with Chicanas, their work would have been noticed, and this may have led to more discussion of it within the academy. While this is certainly possible, I would instead argue that there was scant space for their works within the Chicana movement. Aside from the dialog with other feminists that these gay Chicanos could not likely take part and/or be accepted into, in terms of style, these authors did not produce the highly inscribed texts that many Chicana feminist authors did. As I noted earlier, the use of Mesoamerican terms and identity categories in their expository writings and creative literature has come to be a hallmark of their production. It is difficult not to identify Anzaldúa with Aztec Goddess Coatlicue, and merely scanning the list of publications of Ana Castillo, who has also been successful in the marketplace,

¹³ Scholarly writing produced over the past 15 or so years has largely recognized authors such as Rechy, Rodriguez and Islas as the forefathers of a sort of gay Chicano counterpublic, much in the same way that Marta Cotera and others were the forbearers to the larger Chicana Feminist movement that blossomed in the 1980s. One of the primary differences is that the Chicana movement saw an explosion of interest relatively quickly, whereas the Chicano movement developed later and much more slowly, and has still not reached, or has even approached, the critical mass that the Chicanas achieved more than two decades ago. Those considered the major voices of Chicana feminism are a testament to this—Norma Alarcón and Cherríe Moraga, both of whom appear in This Bridge in 1982, are still writing and producing Chicana feminist works. A counterpublic consisting of gay Chicano authors may never form, given the increasing acceptance of queers in American society. I believe that gay Chicanos may have “missed their moment,” so to speak, as many of the fundamental battles for both gay and Chicano equality has largely already been fought. Although there is still much inequality, the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s of both communities have ensured a climb towards the ultimate goal—recognition and respect.
reveals a similar use of indigenous terminology. The name of their movement—Xicanisma, with its Nahauatl influenced spelling—also speaks to this. Chicana writers have also frequently identified with the maligned Malintzin/Malinche figure, the most powerful Mexican symbol of the female alongside the Virgin of Guadalupe, something which gay Chicano writers have not generally taken part in, or at least as overtly as their female counterparts. Aside from these limitations, Moraga has recently recognized that the Chicana movement, at least from her perspective as one of the major voices in it, was rather exclusive in the 1980s, and that this ultimately created a split between her and Gloria Anzaldúa while they were working on This Bridge. She writes:

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14 There is also an important question here of how much this indigenous focus has been used to market these authors, a topic which I will touch upon in Chapter 3. In her 2001 book Latinos Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People, Arlene Dávila looks at how marketers have tried to reach “Latino/Hispanic” market, but only after being convinced that it would be wise to do so given their growing spending power. Here, she examines the invented concept of “Latinidad,” an archetype of what it means to be Latino, and notes that it includes a great deal of simplification and typification (14), and, we can assume, exoticization. She quotes a Time magazine article from 1978, which states that Latinos generally “have a strong regard for the family and maintain close kinship ties across the generations…. Most intangibly, Latinos offer the U.S. an amalgam of buoyancy, sensuousness, and flair that many northern peoples find tantalizing or mysterious—and sometimes irritating or threatening” (56). If we consider stereotypes of Latino literature, we can see those exact qualities—the importance of family bonds, flair, etc. An important question to consider is that, after more than two decades of use and focus, does this indigenous identification, once novel and new, now fit into a stereotyped, even tropicalized, version of Latinidad that readers have come to expect? Of the authors that I will explore here, I believe that Espinoza falls more often into this “Latinidad” than either González or Muñoz, perhaps because of his use of magic realism, itself a sort of cliché expected of Latino writers.

15 Gay Chicano authors have not widely used these themes in their writing, with the important exception of Francisco X. Alarcón.

16 Norma Alarcón explores this connection to Chicana literature in her This Bridge essay “Chicana Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malinche: Putting Flesh Back on the Object.” Malintzin also plays a critical role in Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera.

17 Torres believes that Rodriguez did obliquely tackle this in Hunger of Memory, a text in which “[h]e betrays his chicanidad/Mexican America to Anglo America as Malinali betrayed the Aztec empire to Cortés by sleeping with and translating for him” (276). Torres does not mean this in a negative way, of course, but more as a summary of the reactions to this highly controversial text.
As I saw it, our movement, *in practice*, had not arrived at a place of such inclusion. We were still barely understanding how to effectively move beyond the racial categories and strategies of political resistance and identity politics formulated in response to the 1960s and 1970s people-of-color movements, as well as to white feminism and gay liberation . . . For my perspective, to be “inclusive” of (even) queer men and white women, at this stage of U.S. feminism of color, would be to suggest that our movement had developed beyond the need for an autonomous dialog entrenos. (*Xicana* 123)

As Moraga further explains, her co-editor did not share this vision. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, for example, Anzaldúa specifically calls out to other homosexuals, writing that:

> Being the supreme crossers of culture, homosexuals have strong bonds with the queer white, Black, Asian, Native America, Latino, and with the queers in Italy, Australia, and the rest of the planet. We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods. Our role is to link people with each other—the Blacks with Jews with Indians with Asians with whites with extraterrestrials” (106-7).

In her collection *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, Moraga seems to have expanded her notion of what sort of alliances she hopes to create, focusing not only on Xicanas, but also Xicanos, in hopes of creating cross gender/sexuality awareness through shared indigenous roots. Perhaps we can consider Moraga’s opening of
alliances with other marginalized groups as an indicator of the maturity of the Chicana feminist movement.

**Review of Literature**

As we have seen in the case of Chicana Feminist production, there has been a strong marriage between author and academic production, leading to the formation of a communal identity that has spoken to many readers, including my Afro-Latina friend. Many times, this expository production has been produced by Chicana feminist themselves, even if they do not reside within the academy. Because gay Chicano authors have not produced this variety of expository works, it is critical to look at the small by growing number of works produced in academia. As Hames-García and Martínez have written, gay Chicano/Latino studies only came into focus academically during the 1990s, and because of this, there is still substantial ground to be covered in the area. In *Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Identities*, published in 1999, Manuel de Jesús Hernández-G. outlines work done up until that time, including that by critics such as David William Foster, Juan Bruce-Novoa, Charles Tatum and Carlos Zamora, as well as various artists. Two of the key, early texts that he outlines are Tomás Almaguer's essay “Chicano Men: A cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior,” and Bruce-Novoa's article “Homosexuality and the Chicano novel,” both published in 1986. In the first, Almaguer questions how Chicano/Latinos can cultivate a “gay identity” specifically by looking at the problem of the gay identity in Mexico, or lack thereof, at least at the time. Meanwhile, Bruce-Novoa's work serves as a brief overview of Chicano novels with homosexual themes.
written up until the publication of said article, with a particular focus on Rechy. As expected, the Hernández-G. summary is dominated by Chicana criticism and works, as is to be expected given the relative paucity of gay Chicano texts. Because the author provides a succinct, and oft-referenced, summary of works, I will mainly focus on the criticism that has been published since that time.

Hames-García and Martínez’s, *Gay Latino Studies*, published in 2011, aims “to re-member” (in the sense of constructing from its various parts) Gay Latino Studies by including essays that examine this genre from a number of different stances and theories instead of placing the entire book within a certain theoretical framework. The included essays span a number of fields, from anthropology to literature to theory, and the authors explain that they do this in order to “encourage more visibility and in-depth work on the histories and creative life strategies of gay Chicano and Latino men” (6) and to bring attention to cross-disciplinary studies. In the lead essay, Hames-García looks at Queer Theory and why it might not be suitable to create spaces such as these, while further essays look at gay shame (La Fountain-Stokes), the aforementioned essay by Viego, the carnality of gay Latino writing (Richard T. Rodríguez), gay Latino masculinity (Cantú), while editor Martínez looks at Manuel Muñoz’s first collection of short stories, *Zigzagger*. Here, the author asserts that Muñoz shifts the site of queer enunciation from the gay Latino characters to the subject’s siblings, friends, parents, etc., and that this “enables a deeper understanding of the intersubjective and social contexts in which queer subjects come into being” (227). This is an observation that I believe is important to
Muñoz’s first collection of short stories, although it is not necessarily applicable to the second, The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue, specifically because of a change in narrative strategy on the part of the author. This becomes more evident in my discussion in Chapter 2.

In their anthology, Hames-García and Martínez mention the importance of David William Foster’s Sexual Textualities (1997), which contains essays on “queer/ing” Latin American writing. Foster maintains that in many places in Latin America, the critic must keep in mind that, although there is a possibility of same-sex relationships, there is a lack of a “gay” identity, and thus, in many of the works that he studies, he sees a questioning of masculinity instead of the creation of a new identity category (3). In his chapter on gay Chicanos, he furthers this, questioning the homoeroticism commonly seen in the works of Cherríe Moraga, John Rechy, and Francisco X. Alarcón, wherein this concept is framed by mainstream, white society. Instead, he sees them as critiques of gender performance, wherein the “maricón” is a behavior, not a personality (74-5), and maintains that these authors demonstrate a homoeroticism that is different from what may be seen outside of the Latino/Chicano community (78). Outside of these particular works, I would argue against Foster’s position given the characterizations of several well-known authors in Manrique’s book Eminent Maricones; in short, written in 1997, I believe that Foster’s book could be considered outdated in many ways. An important anthology by this author is the aforementioned Chicano/Queer Homoerotic Identities, which contains the article of Hernández-G. Much broader than the collection of Hames-
García and Martínez, it includes essays on Chicana Lesbian writing, poetry, Cuban and Puerto Rican artists, and performance art, among other topics. A third book, solely written by Foster and published in 2006, *Ambiente Nuestro: Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Writing*, is much more narrowly focused than *Chicano/Queer*, centered solely upon Chicano/Latino homoerotic writing from the male perspective. Foster frames the debate by giving a brief history of the virtual invisibility of gay male writers within the Chicano movement (7), stating his aim of examining the production of homoerotic writing from a Marxist point-of-view. Specifically, he aims to look at the non-romantic issues of identity and how cultural power within communities comes into play in its creation (12), including issues of race, gender and ethnicity. To accomplish this, he looks at a number of familiar names, including Alarcón, Nava, Rechy, and Manrique.

Another important scholar in the field of gay Chicano/Latino studies is Frederick Luis Aldama, particularly for his work with Arturo Islas’ archive and his 2005 book *Brown on Brown*. In the latter, the author proposes returning to more foundational elements when studying literature, meaning that, instead of looking at queer Chicano/a production purely through the lens of Postcolonial and/or Borderland theory, which often tends to be idealistic and/or non-material, scholars should instead turn to “rationalist and empirical methods of gathering and analyzing data and formulation hypotheses that might help us better understand the reality we live in and the actions that really transform it” (138). For Aldama, this means paying attention to how authors construct their works and aesthetics via “verifiable
elements... like style, point of view, tempo, tense” (138) to study the ways in which authors both engage and disengage their readers, keeping in mind that “[e]verything we do is realized within society—therefore within certain societal conditions” (18). Within that framework, he goes on to look at, for example, how Rechy engages and then disengages different literary conventions and racial, social and cultural configurations, and how Rodriguez’s Days of Obligation works to queer heteronormative locations, particularly in Mexico City and San Francisco. In sum, Aldama’s approach to looking at this production is closer to how I will analyze Espinoza, González and Muñoz in the chapters to come—a closer textual analysis of these novels to explore the narrative strategies that these authors use to capture their readers. Aldama has also written extensively about Islas who, along with Rechy, Rodriguez and Nava, was one of the first widely recognized gay Chicano/Latino writers, in an anthology of his previously uncollected works (2003), and Dancing with Ghosts: A Critical Biography of Arturo Islas (2005).

In my view, these are the major published works of gay Chicano literature studies since Hernández-G.’s overview in 1999, but there have also been several minor works that are also important to review. In Liberation Theology in Chicano/a Literature (2007), Alma Rosa Alvarez studies the dialectic of Catholicism in Chicano subjectivity, and specifically how it affirms a single subjectivity within a community that is typically patriarchal and shuts out gay and lesbians who may not fit into prescribed gender roles. Liberation theory is also important here, and the author traces how it accorded these Chicanos with a way to establish multiple and full
subjectivities rooted in spirituality (22), exploring the works of Anzaldúa, Castillo, and Rechy. In *What have you done to my heart? Popular Culture, Race and the Question of Utopia* (2005), Daniel Contreras looks at “sentimental investments made upon popular culture,” focusing specifically on gays and lesbians of color and using the works of Islas as one example. Earlier, I also looked at Richard T. Rodríguez’s *Next of Kin*, although this particular work is not entirely queer focused.

Espinoza, González and Muñoz, the three authors that I have chosen to work with here, have received little critical attention so far, although I do expect that to change in the future. I believe that this stems from the fact that gay Chicano/Latino Studies, being the newer field that it is, has tended to recover the most prominent names first, Islas, Rechy and others, excluding a number of lesser known authors. This is not necessarily a purposeful oversight on the part of the scholars in this field, but more of an indication that there is much work yet to be done. The most studied gay Chicano author appears to be Rechy, perhaps because his works stretch from the 1960s onwards, and due to his incorporation into the mainstream gay literary canon as his works often times involve protagonists who are not specifically Latina/o. Islas also takes up a substantial portion of the gay Latino literary criticism, as does Francisco X. Alarcón, Rodriguez and Nava. We can consider all of these authors as representing the pioneering generation of gay Chicano authors, and while there is still much work to do with their output, it is also important to recognize the next generation, which includes, prominently, Espinoza, González, and Muñoz. These authors were all were born after 1970 and have truly only begun their
writing careers, particularly Espinoza and Muñoz, who have five published works between them. González, although around the same age, has been far more active, having published a number of works of poetry, novels, an autobiography, children’s books and a collection of short stories. Despite this impressive output, González has received little scholarly attention, while there is one article that looks at Muñoz’s Zigzagger, summarized earlier. Espinoza’s Still Water Saints, meanwhile, is included in Tongson’s 2011 study Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries, which looks at how several queer authors have “imagined” suburban Southern California, where “strange and while things grow . . . where they shouldn’t” (5). Although Still Water Saints does not have a particular chapter devoted to it, it is mentioned several times in the work. Overall, I believe that this lack of scholarship will change and eventually we will see much more written about these authors because they have written entertaining and worthwhile narratives, and promise more to come.

Espinoza was born in Tijuana, Mexico, the youngest of 11 children, but immigrated to the Los Angeles area when he was two. He received an M.FA from U.C. Irvine, and currently teaches at California State University Fresno. Still Water Saints (2007), to be looked at here, is his first published novel, with The Five Acts of Diego Leon following in 2013. González, the son of California farm laborers from Mexico (he himself was born in Bakersfield, California, but crossed the border many times as his family moved between work in California and home in the state of Michoacán, Mexico), has published a number of works, including poetry, novels, and a memoir. He was to complete a Ph.D. at the University of New Mexico, but dropped out in
order to pursue a career in writing and currently teaches at Rutgers University at Newark. Here, I will look at his memoir, *Butterfly Boy* (2006), as well as his earlier novel *Crossing Vines* (2003). Muñoz, who is also the son of Mexican-American farm workers, grew up in California’s Central Valley and continues to use it as his literary backdrop. He received his M.F.A from Cornell University and currently teaches creative writing at the University of Arizona Tucson. He has published three works of fiction, all of which will be considered here: two sets of short stories, *Zigzagger* (2003) and *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* (2007), and his first novel, *What You See in the Dark* (2011).

**Chapter Organization**

This project encompasses five sections in total: the current introduction, a chapter each on the narratives of González, Muñoz, and Espinoza, and a bookend chapter that explores how readers are organizing and reorganizing these authors into cybercommunities on websites such as Amazon.com. I have decided to order the author-based chapters according to what I perceive as the broadness of their audience, with González as the most narrow, Espinoza the most broad, with Muñoz falling somewhere in the middle. This organization is not tied to the content of their works, but is rather based upon their diverse publishing outcomes. González mostly publishes with smaller press, almost guaranteeing him a niche audience, Muñoz mostly with mid-market Algonquin, and Espinoza with Random House, the largest publishing outfit in the world. Given some of the statistics that I will look at, particularly in the last chapter, it can be argued that Muñoz has had more success in
the market than Espinoza, even though Algonquin does not have the broad reach that Random House possesses.

In this introduction, I have looked at how gay Chicano authors have not formed the same type of unique literary identity that their Chicana counterparts did, who have also made sense of their own works in their expository writing. Given that readers have generally been left to contextualize and make their own meaning of these gay Chicano writings because of this lack of community, the literature focused chapters of this study explore how readers may accomplish this by using the tools of narratology, reader response theory and the cognitive sciences. I have taught selections from all three of these authors in an advanced Latino/a Literature course, and base my theses in the reactions and commentaries of my students.

In Chapter 1, I look at how Rigoberto González uses what I term “affective planes” in order to invoke sympathy and empathy for the characters that he draws in both Crossing Vines and his autobiography Butterfly Boy. Here, I propose that the author shifts affect toward one character before reversing the narrative flow, but importantly, I assert that Vines is more likely to evoke sympathy and Butterfly empathy because of the audiences that these works appear to be directed towards. Here, using the tools of narratology and cognitive studies, I show how, through the employment of a regimented narration shift in each chapter of Vines, the implied audience of this novel may be led to feel sympathy for the characters, while in Butterfly Boy, the author shifts the affective plane within chapters to create empathy for both the author and his father. Both of these shifts are notable because they may
work to change preconceptions that readers bring with them to the reading process, which can also speak to their larger implications in the real world. To this end, I also discuss the pro-social function of sympathy and empathy, and how these works, and others like them, may or may not work to change perceptions of both migrant workers and homosexuals.

One of the most salient features of Manuel Muñoz’s works is the idea of playing with the role of the narrator, the filter through which the reader witnesses the storyworld. Across a number of his stories, Muñoz’s narrators use the second person “you” and “we” narration, openly confront the reader, or simply do not provide the names of characters. In Chapter 2, “Bridging the Gaps and Confronting the Narrator,” I propose that the effect of Muñoz’s narrative technique is to first draw the reader into the story, and then subsequently push them out in a search for meaning and closure. Furthermore, I propose that Muñoz forces his readers to mind read these narrators, employing Theory of Mind to discern what their true intentions and/or motivations are. The first type of salient narrator that I identify in Muñoz is the vague, who purposefully leaves information gaps in the story that pull the reader in, but many times are left unresolved, subsequently pushing the audience out of the storyworld. In their search for closure, the reader may consider these gaps as stemming from the topic of homosexuality, which is treated as shameful and hidden in a number of his stories. The second type of narrator, the emotive, confronts the reader, pulling them into the storyworld either through judgment or jealously, subsequently pushing them out when the narrator reveals
what his true intentions are. In this chapter, I primarily consider the narratological aspects of the narrator position and marry this to the cognitive study of Theory of Mind to show how readers may connect with Muñoz’s works, which they increasingly do, according to available sales figures.

In Chapter 3, I shift focus towards the newest author to be looked at here, Alex Espinoza and his sole novel, *Still Water Saints*. I discuss the market dynamics of Latina/o literature and how big publishing firms such as Random House have tended to stylize these books in particular ways that have fostered the creation of reader expectations of what this genre should be. This stylization extends to book covers, words used in reviews, and importantly, the content itself. For better or for worse, as Martin Rodríguez has written, Latina/o Literature has often been linked to the larger Latin American literary tradition and magical realism in particular. A reader approaching Espinoza’s novel would likely expect a magical realist reading experience given the cover, the reviews, and the first chapter of the novel itself, which tells us that protagonist Perla is a curandera who holds magical powers such as walking on water, and that she fights the devil on a nightly basis. Nevertheless, something curious happens as we advance through the chapters: despite this set-up, the author completely deconstructs the idea of magic and that the protagonist possesses the ability to perform it. What we are left with, then, is a novel that may surprise the reader and deconstruct their notions of what Latina/o Literature is. Here, I link the cognitive science of surprise to this transformative capability to
show how readers assess and reassess plot and themes based upon incoming information from the work itself.

As I noted earlier, one of my primary interests in choosing these three authors are their vastly different publishing outcomes: González primarily in smaller presses, Muñoz at mid-level Algonquin, and Espinoza at Random House, the largest publishing firm in the world. In the past, these outcomes may have sealed their fates as far as the ability to sell books and making a living as an author, given that the reach and marketing ability of Random House is far greater than that of a university press. Furthermore, in terms of readers being able to find these books, it is unlikely that many bricks-and-mortar bookstores would carry *Crossing Vines*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press, while *Still Water Saints* most certainly had much wider penetration when it was released. While physical stores are still a force, much of this market dynamic has dramatically shifted in no small part thanks to Amazon.com, the world’s largest bookseller. Amazon has, in effect, leveled the playing field for publishers large and small, and it is indeed easier to find Rigoberto González than Alex Espinoza through links to other authors on the website. In much of this project I have theorized how actual readers respond to these novels, based upon observations I made of my own students who read some of these works in a Latino/a Literature course that I taught. As a bookend to the current chapter, in Chapter 4, “Repositioning Gay Chicano Literature (and its readers),” I expand this scope to examine how audiences are organizing and contextualizing these novels and authors and creating their own literary
cybercommunities with like-minded readers. The base discussion of this chapter, that gay Chicano authors have not organized themselves into communities as their Chicana counterparts have done, is thus potentially resolved through the actions of the reader in their own formations. Here, Amazon has proven to be extremely useful as we can see how communities of readers are grouping these authors through user-generated features such as “Customers Who Viewed This Item Also Bought” and “Customers Also Bought Items By,” linking to other authors. This chapter is more exploratory in nature, but may serve to point out future avenues that could prove successful for these authors and others.

What this project ultimately hopes to accomplish is to fill in a number of perceived gaps in the study of gay Chicano authors. First, I want to explore why these authors have not formed the same type of cohesive literary identity and community as their Chicana counterparts, and the role of the academy in fostering this. Secondly, I attempt to move the discussion from the established names amongst these authors, including Islas, Rodriguez, Rechy, and Nava, to the second generation, which prominently includes Espinoza, González and Muñoz. Third, I consider the reader as the end-game of these authors—that they write to sell books—and in turn look at how readers make sense and meaning out of what they write. And finally, I offer an exploration of the market and how it has both manipulated these authors and provided them with new opportunities, and how, within this structure, readers are increasingly deciding how authors are organized into cybercommunities. I believe that this multi-pronged approach anticipates
future avenues that these authors may take, and serves as another piece of the puzzle in bringing these authors into the academy and thus, further study
Chapter 1: Reading Sympathy and Empathy in González’s *Crossing Vines* and *Butterfly Boy*

In a recent advanced undergraduate course in U.S. Latino/a Literature, what was notable to myself both as a teacher and researcher were the works that students seemed to connect with, and more importantly why. Of the works included in this project that I used in class, I had expected students to prefer Manuel Muñoz’s 2011 novel *What You See in the Dark* over selections of Rigoberto González’s 2003 novel *Crossing Vines* as I regard Muñoz’s work as more interesting from a narrative perspective. Final response papers did bear out this assumption—*What You See* was mentioned by a number of students as their favorite work that we covered, while *Crossing Vines* picked up far fewer fans. Nevertheless, in-class discussion would seem to indicate the opposite—given that *Crossing Vines* generated far more student discussion than Muñoz’s work, my goal then became to reread both and ascertain why. *What You See*, I concluded, is the type of novel that readers, particularly those in a literature program at the university level, feel that they should like: it is dark and introspective, and experiments with narrative forms and timelines. One student described it as “una novela muy oscura, ambigua, compleja, y misteriosa,” while another wrote that the identity of the narrator is not clear and they were never really certain of the internal motivations of the characters, which greatly added to the complexity of the story. Nevertheless, despite these perhaps ambiguous
responses, both cited it as their favorite work of the class.\textsuperscript{18} Although \textit{Crossing Vines} may not be as complexly constructed as \textit{What You See}, students did seem to react more strongly to it as a whole, and to the individual characters in particular. Upon rereading the novel, it became clearer why González’s work generated so much discussion: the author frequently uses affect in order to connect characters to readers, which perhaps explains why my students became so protective over the character of Chela, a single mother whose boyfriend frequently skips out on her—students believed that they could feel her pain and understand why she was so caustic, or, at the very minimum, feel for her pain. The difference in opinion between \textit{What You See} and \textit{Crossing Vines} may be better explained by Tan’s summary of A and R emotions in viewer reception of art. A emotions, as he writes, are related to the artifact itself and manifest themselves as an appreciation for the work on an artistic level, while R emotions are feelings generated for what is portrayed (120). Given student responses, it could be said that they reacted to \textit{What You See} on the level of an A emotion—an appreciation for the artistry of the novel—while \textit{Crossing Vines} generated far more R emotions, with pleasure in reading derived from the

\textsuperscript{18} As I.A. Richards demonstrated in \textit{Practical Criticism}, gauging student reactions can be problematic. In his study, the author presented undergraduate students with a number of poems, devoid of contextual information such as author or title, in order to study “inferior literary response.” For him, the analyses of these poems from otherwise intelligent students were startling, as were the variability in their responses. He wrote that “[i]t was interesting to observe the wide range of quality that many individual readers varied through. They would pass, with contiguous poems, from a very high level of discernment to a relatively startling obtuseness . . .” (316). While the meaning of “discernment” and “obtuseness” is certainly in the eye of the beholder, his study reminds us that in reader-response exercises, it is important to remember that readers are not always engaged in what they are reading and that their responses will likely reflect this. This engagement may be a manifestation of their knowledge base—perhaps they are more familiar with a particular style of literature and thus pay more attention—but this lack of engagement may also stem from factors outside of the act of reading itself—for example, being distracted while reading, tiredness, etc.
manipulation of emotion in the text, something directed by the author himself. This manipulation is evident throughout the novel and notably, it is almost always driven by oppositional characters. Students not only felt for Chela, but also for Cirilo, the boyfriend who abandoned her and their three children, and I believe this to be due to González’s narrator shining a spotlight on each in different chapters. This dual narrative also popped up amongst a wide variety of other seemingly oppositional characters in the novel, and is a testament to the true strength of González’s literary technique: the commitment to telling both sides of every story and in doing so, creating an affective plane that readers must navigate throughout the novel. He gives space to Leonardo, toward whom Don Manuel, his father, is rather abusive, but also to Don Manuel, who we see as being set in his ways and not taking kindly to Leonardo returning home from college and preaching to him about how he needs to be more politically aware. Although I did not use González’s autobiography *Butterfly Boy* in this class, we can see the same sorts of dynamics in play in this work: the reader feels for the grievances that the author has against his father, but, at the same time, also understands how he may be unfair in how he airs them, and how the father may too be worthy of sympathy. Nevertheless, that González frequently evokes affect in his works is not entirely notable; in fact, one could say that it is a rather common trope in literature. Roberts, for example, refers to the novels that she studies as “schools of sympathy” (10) that are designed to make us feel (3), and undoubtedly, this sentiment could also easily be applied to other forms of narrative, including television and movies. What is interesting about González’s use of
affective planes in both *Crossing Vines* and *Butterfly Boy* is found in how he constructs them and their implications: through the employment of a regimented narration shift in each chapter of *Vines*, the implied audience of the novel may be led to feel sympathy for the characters, while in *Butterfly Boy*, the author shifts the affective plane within chapters to create empathy for both the author and his father. Both of these shifts are notable because they may work to change the preconceptions that readers bring with them to the reading process, which can also speak to their larger implications in the real world. That *Vines* likely generates sympathy and *Butterfly* empathy is its readers is a critical component of the message of these works, which is why I will first discuss these terms so as to establish a framework to move forward.

**Feeling with and feeling for**

An extensive review of the literature of sympathy and empathy reveals a wide array of at times conflicting findings, and this occurs in studies with origins as diverse as literature, film, psychology and the cognitive sciences. On a basic level, Keen as defines, sympathy as feeling *for*, and empathy as feeling *with* (“Narrative Empathy” 63), and, if we sort through the various theories and findings, this tends to hold true across disciplines. As Wispé notes, Adam Smith is considered to have introduced the concept of sympathy to the social sciences (11), although it has

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19 In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith theorized sympathy as “as an imaginary change in situations,” leading to a sense that “I consider what I should suffer if I was really you” (349). While it is important to establish this base for the study of sympathy, here I will focus on more recent, precise findings in the field.
been around since the time of the Greek philosophers. Wispé, for her part, considers sympathy as containing two actions, the first being a heightened awareness for others, and the second an urge on the part of the sympathizer to take action to alleviate the pain of the other, making sympathy necessarily altruistic in nature (68). I will further consider this altruistic component later. Ratcliffe, in a more literary-based analysis, considers sympathy as being nearer to an object, which, in her particular case, is the characters in literature. She also takes the stand that the common usage of sympathy normally includes the idea of empathy, which she defines similarly to Keen (19). In another literature-based approach, Marshall considers sympathy as the capacity to feel the sentiments of somebody else, or, as he terms it, a general sense of “fellow feeling” (3). In the context of his study, based in the works of Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelly, he writes that he finds the term empathy to be too vague, specifically, that we cannot know another’s pain, so we must “rerepresent” it, a notion that, at least in his conception, necessarily excludes empathy (5). Carroll, in his study on sympathy in literature, considers it as

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20 As Ramage and Bean point out, the idea of sympathy can be dated back to Aristotle’s theory of appeals, divided into ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (emotions). With pathos, the authors write that it “is often associated with emotional appeal. But a better equivalent might be “appeal to the audience’s sympathies and imagination.” An appeal to pathos causes an audience not just to respond emotionally but to identify with the writer’s point of view—to feel what the writer feels. In this sense, pathos evokes a meaning implicit in the verb ‘to suffer’—to feel pain imaginatively …” (82).

21 Nevertheless, Wispé also writes that, even though there is an “urge” to help the other, this does not always occur. For example, when reading a book, the reader knows that there is no way to help a potentially sympathetic character. Somewhat more disingenuous is the notion of sympathy leading to selfish helping. Wispé uses the example of a martial arts expert helping out somebody being attacked; not out of a sense that they should help, but rather to demonstrate their prowess (70). In the context of González’s works, I believe that we may see this selfish vindication amongst some of the readers of Crossing Vines, who may revel in the suffering of the characters because it reinforces their view that agricultural workers are mistreated and/or caught in an unjust system. In fact, I believe that the character of Leonardo falls exactly here, and we will see why later.
“non-fleeting care, concern or, more broadly, a non-passing pro-attitude towards another person,” a category in which he includes fictional characters (173). He continues, explaining that “[s]ympathy, construed as an emotional state, involves visceral feelings of distress when the interests of the objects of our pro-attitudes are imperiled and feelings of elation, closure, or satisfaction when their welfare is secured” (173), noting that sympathy and empathy may overlap, and a character must be worthy of this pro-attitude on the part of the reader (174). Eisenberg and Eggum, meanwhile, see sympathy as an “emotional response stemming from the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition,” that is not necessarily the same as the other's emotional response that provoked the sympathetic feeling, but rather “sorrow or concern for the other” (71-2). Eisenberg et al. suggest that sympathy stems directly from affective empathy, and indeed may be generated from cognitive processes (“Empathy Related”). Returning to the idea of the pro-social attitude, in “Prosocial Development” Eisenberg et al. suggest that this is the true difference between empathy and sympathy; that sympathy does not create the same personal distress that empathy does, wherein the perceiver is experiencing the same feelings as the other. Thus, sympathy is connected positively to pro-social behavior, whereas empathy is not because a feeling of empathy, given that it is likely stronger

22 That elation and satisfaction can be considered part of sympathy can be a particularly interesting view as many theorists of sympathy, notably Wispé, believe that it only occurs for negative emotions because, as she writes, “sympathizing with another person's happiness... would seem inappropriate and insincere” (69). It must be noted that Wispé is, of course, referring to interactions between real people, while Carroll speaks generally of fictional characters. It would be interesting to gauge the difference in sympathetic reactions towards fictional characters and real people, given that we may modulate our responses in front of people who are able to judge us based on those reactions, something that fictional characters cannot do.
and or more personal, may make the subject want to distance themselves from the other; in other words, empathy is self-focused (647). Trout, in his socio-political study *The Empathy Gap*, sees sympathy as a feeling, as opposed to an “accurate understanding,” in which one does not take the perspective of the other (21), while Stotland et al. assert the view that sympathetic feelings are indeed one’s own, instead of those of the other (8).

As we can see, sympathy and empathy are often explained in tandem because they are perceived to be similar in nature. Nevertheless, just as there is discord in the study of these two responses, empathy itself has been a divided field. More recently, this has manifested itself as division between those who ascribe to simulation theory, more cognitive and motor focused as almost an involuntary reaction, and theory-theory, with more affective roots as something that one has some level of control over. In terms of theory-theory, Matravers, for example, sees empathy as simulating mental states, noting that if the spectator merely “imagines,” it falls short of empathy and is most likely sympathy (21-2). The author also sets a test for this mind frame, writing that it has succeeded if the audience is “[p]resumably, not . . . surprised by, or [is] able to predict, fine shades of behavior of the agent” (27). Steuber reiterates the importance of perspective-shifting, here called reenactive empathy (131), in which we “re-enact or imitate in our own mind the thought processes of another” in order to understand their complex behavior (21). Goldie, meanwhile takes a stand against the idea of perspective shifting, instead, considering empathy as imaging “how it is” to be the other person (306),
not imagining a perspective from inside the other because, as he writes, this stance is infused with “dispositions of character and personality, and with a conception of oneself as having a past and a future in the light of which decisions and choices are made—decisions and choices which one has to live with” (317). Because the other cannot possibly know these factors, they cannot accurately feel exactly what the other person feels but instead can only imagine what it might be like to be that person in their state. I would tend to concur with this view as well.

On the simulation theory side, which tends to be more empirically based, Colm Hogan’s *Cognitive Science, Literature and The Arts* has been an invaluable resource in making the connection between cognitive scientific studies of the mind and how we may be able to apply these to literature. While it is impossible to fully summarize the work that he has compiled, what is of particular interest here is how, as he explains, humans categorize “fragments” of experience that are recalled in everyday life; for example, when we partake in the arts (161). This categorization is important for several reasons; as he explains, long-term human memory tends to “cluster” similar experiences and lexicons into schemas, prototypes, and exempla (44)—for example, when presented with the word dog, we may envision a general image of a dog, which then may be further delimited as we receive more information. In the case of literature, the terms that we read activate other terms in our memories (57-8). He further writes that humans are sensitive to emotional triggers in new experiences, and if we feel, for example, happy or sad because of this new experience, it is because an emotional memory has been triggered, even if we
are not aware of it (182-3). Writ large, experiences or scenes that we read may then activate other clusters of similar memories of our experiences, which is why we are able to “relate” to literature, and empathize with characters within those stories.\(^23\) Other researchers are moving into empirical studies of empathy in literature, such as Natalie Phillips who is performing fMRI studies that scan readers as they read Jane Austen (Goldman). Similar to Colm Hogan, Gallese sees empathy as mirroring the emotions of the other on a cognitive and/or motor neuron level (8). Vignemont, to name one example, differentiates between strong and weak empathy; in the former, the spectator imitates the emotions of others through an automatic motor response while in the later, action becomes a model of understanding (183). If empathy is indeed automatic, as the author writes, we would them have to empathize with sometimes conflicting emotions at the same time, which we know does not typically occur (184). On the weak form of empathy, the author further specifies that we may not empathize when expected to (185), some emotions may be easier to share than others (187), the emotion must be strong in order to capture

\(^{23}\) Earlier cognitivist studies of literature, particularly when keeping in mind the views of Colm Hogan, appear to leave little room for sympathy in this discussion—in short, if what we read triggers memory fragments, and it is these fragments that make us feel, whether we are aware of this process or not, we are almost always empathizing to some extent—in my view, we are necessarily feeling with precisely because of those triggered fragments, even if our emotional reaction does not mirror the other’s. Perhaps this is why sympathy is also referred to as “empathetic concern” in cognitivist circles (see Clark, Misery 60). Keen uses the term “broadcast strategic empathy” when referring to how an author may appeal to a reader in terms of universal emotions (“Narrative” 71-2), and I believe that this best encapsulates the cognitivist position at its most basic level—even when a reader reads something that they cannot identify with because it falls too far outside of their experience, they may still empathize because of these recalled fragments that are a part of the reader’s lived experience. Nevertheless, as we see with more recent fMRI studies, scientists have located the neural differences between both terms (see Decety and Michalska), which is why I feel comfortable distinguishing between the terms in their use in this study.
our attention, and it must belong to our past experience repertoire (188), something which Colm Hogan also speaks to.

fMRI neural research into sympathy and empathy seems to reflect the mix of findings mentioned above, although stronger lines have been drawn in more recent studies. Singer and Lamm summarize the wide body of fMRI research involving the pain of others, and how the subject reacts to it, explaining that empathy for the other is indeed observable in neural structures, but that it is also a “highly flexible phenomenon” that is changeable “with respect to a number of factors” (81). Among these, the authors raise the question of pro-social behavior, which I will explore later in this chapter. In a 2011 study by Lamm, Decety and Singer, participants were shown pictures of body parts in painful situations which activated cranial areas “underpinning action understanding (inferior parietal/ventral premotor cortices) to a stronger extent, eliciting empathy by means of abstract visual information about the other’s affective state more strongly engaged areas associated with inferring and representing mental states of self and other” (2492). Interestingly, the authors found that these patterns held true “across studies performed in different countries, by different investigators on different MRI scanners, and using different types of paradigms” (2500), suggesting that empathy is hard-wired in most humans and not merely cultural in nature. Unfortunately, there are far fewer studies that look solely at sympathy. Decety and Chaminade, in an experiment in which participants were shown videos of actors telling sad stories as if they had happened to them, found changes in neural patterns, suggesting that “feeling sympathy . . . relies on both the
shared representations and the affective networks” (127). However, the authors do mention that their definition is of sympathy is “a combination of sympathy and empathy, and reflects a common sense level how we may in everyday life automatically interrelate with other people” (127). Likewise, much of the earlier literature in this field does not seem to make a large distinction between sympathy and empathy in neural patterns, making a 2010 study by Decety and Michalska a landmark. Here, the authors claim to have found “partially distinct neural mechanisms subserving” the two (886), meaning that, cognitively, we can properly speak of a distinction between the two terms, which may resolve some of the discord and conflation in this field.

The above studies are not an exhaustive list of the debate between sympathy and empathy, but do represent a variety of views on this topic. In using these terms, I will heed the words of Batson, who recommends that researchers recognize a schema of difference between sympathy and empathy, and use it consistently (8). To this effect, he outlines eight different concepts of the idea of empathy, and presumably these are the basic schemata that researchers should recognize and employ, whether they label them as sympathy or empathy. Thus, I have decided to

24 The authors explain that “many recent functional neuroimaging studies confuse empathy and emotion contagion (also called resonance or mimicry) based on the putative mirror neuron system . . . There is a problem with equating empathy with motor resonance because the latter does not convey insight into another’s internal state and does not account for any other-oriented motivational state that characterizes sympathy.” (896)
25 Batson’s categorizations of empathy are: 1) Knowing another person’s internal state, including her/her thoughts and feelings, 2) Adopting the posture or matching the neural responses of an observed other, 3) Coming to feel as another person feels, 4) Intuiting or projecting oneself into another’s situation, 5) Imagining how another is thinking or feeling, 6) Imagining how one would think and feel in the other’s place, 7) Feeling distress at witnessing another person’s suffering, and 8)
return to Keen’s summary of feeling for as sympathy and feeling with as empathy because it appears to best encapsulate the tone of this discussion. Nevertheless, one of the greatest difficulties with applying these terms to reader response in literature is that, without performing an empirical study of readers, it is impossible to know exactly what they may feel during the reading process. This is one of the reasons why I have decided to focus on the idea of the implied/represented audience of González’s works and how these readers may react to his writing. First, I believe that there exists a clear delineation of these roles within both Crossing Vines and Butterfly Boy, and second, that uncovering these readerships will shed light on why the former would likely generate a feeling of sympathy, and the latter empathy.

However, this chapter will not ignore the real readers of these works, keeping in mind the reactions of my students upon reading Crossing Vines, as well as others as an “overheard” audience later in the chapter. Here, we must also keep in mind that literature is artfully directed by the author—González is the filter through which these storyworlds are created, and it seems that he actively constructs his stories to elicit these affective responses. It is critical to move students beyond R-level reactions to texts, deriving pleasure from the manipulation of emotion, into a deeper discussion of the inherent rhetoric of why González may have chosen to structure his texts in this way. As we will see in Crossing Vines, this may be somewhat difficult

Feeling for another person who is suffering. The final categorization fits closely with the term sympathy, which is also known as empathetic concern. See Batson 4-8 for full descriptions of these terms, as well as research that explores them.
to accomplish, particularly given the preconceptions that readers may bring with them even before they turn the first page.

**Cultivating sympathy in *Crossing Vines***

At its core, *Crossing Vines* is a novel about a community of grape-pickers in the Imperial Valley of California (or, as it is referred to in the novel, the Caliente Valley), presumably set around the time that González published it, 2003. There are a number of plot points spread throughout the novel that may resonate with the reader—the threat of the United Farm Workers (the workers in the novel are not unionized, and some adamantly refuse the proposal), the death of former transvestite Moreno at the hands of an overzealous police officer, and a confrontation between the union and the pickers in a grape warehouse, which leads to the shooting of two central characters, Jesse and Amanda. González has structured the novel in the form of one single day in their lives, beginning at 3:05 a.m. when the grape-pickers begin to awaken for their long day of work, and ending at 9:45 p.m. with a brief power-outage before bedtime. Each chapter is marked by a different time of the day and roughly, the first half of the novel corresponds to their work in the fields, while the second-half is far more plot-driven, pushed by the events mentioned above. Somewhat unique in the novel is that each chapter focuses on a different character so that, by the end, the reader has become familiar with a good number of the workers. Because each chapter is devoted to a particular grape-picker, it is difficult to name a “principal” character, although several do have more than one chapter devoted to them. With this in mind, we can observe how González
goes about creating the affective plane that I believe ultimately drives reader responses to the novel as a whole. To use Gerard Genette’s terminology, the narrator of *Crossing Vines* is extradiegetic, meaning that they describe the experiences of multiple characters in the novel and exist outside of the storyworld, but they accomplish this from a homodiegetic-like (first-person) position, and herein we find the function of the affective plane.\(^{26}\) For example, in the early chapter devoted to Cirilo, the narrator, although remaining in third-person, only describes the internal perspective of his character and no other, while in a later chapter devoted to Chela, the same is true for her. This internal perspective is most times limited to how that particular character may view the world—how they have been treated unfairly, their feelings towards others, etc., instead of their actual thought processes. There are, however, a few instances where the reader is explicitly privy to private character thoughts; for example, in the chapter “Chingada,” the narrator relates that “Chela straightened up and continued picking, recalling the scene at the daycare center at dawn . . .” (49). Nevertheless, the internal perspective offered by the narrator is generally implicit within the narrative itself. Later in the chapter, the narrator relates that “Chela wanted to be a part of her daughter’s schooling but las chingadas teachers all thought the Mexican mothers backwards . . .” (51). The reader may pass this off as being an observation of the narrator, but the strong language used here more reflects the way that Chela speaks— it is not used in Cirilo’s chapters, for example. Thus, we see a narrator that at times changes narrative tone

\(^{26}\) See Genette’s *Narrative Discourse Revisited* for a more in-depth discussion of these terms.
based on whichever character is the focus of the chapter, in this example taking on the perspective of Chela, although remaining in the third-person. To enter further into the field of narratology, I believe that Crossing Vines offers an important example of narrator as focalizer. Some narratologists, Chatman and Prince in particular, see the narrator role as almost entirely objective, specifically that, in Prince’s view, the narrator “is an element of discourse and not of story;” in short, they serve to report and present (“Point of View” 46; see also Chatman, Coming to Terms 144-5). Phelan disagrees with this position, writing that narrators do indeed act as lens in the story, even if they are not present in the story-world (“Why Narrators” 58), and continues on to list several examples of how focalization through a particular character may be contained within the narrator’s own focalization, an argument which appears to rely heavily on semiotics. Nevertheless, as Bortolussi and Dixon discuss in Psychonarratology, much of the argument about focalization is centered upon who “sees” and who “speaks,” a distinction which many readers may not make (177), making this a discussion almost entirely between theorists of the topic. However, I do believe that this distinction between who sees and who speaks is important in Crossing Vines because of the set-up of each chapter. Most readers, particularly those in post-secondary education such as my Latino/a literature students, are able to distinguish between first and third person narrators as a basic function of a text. Crossing Vines differs in that the first page of each chapter gives both a title and the name of a particular character, thus, after reading through even part of the book, the named character immediately
produces an expectation in the reader—we know that in a chapter dedicated to Chela, for example, that the third-person narrator will shift focus towards her and may embody elements of her speech patterns. Here, Phelan’s more recent rhetorical theory of narrative is useful—in it, he describes textual instabilities (between characters) and tensions (between implied authors, narrators and audiences), how readerly dynamics form in reaction to these, and what judgments readers “are guided to make” (“Voice” 58). In Crossing Vines, even though the reader may not be familiar with and/or understand the concept of focalization, there is clearly a tension at play in the narration of the work, and I believe that this manifests itself as the affective plane. The focalization at play in González’s work seems closer to what Miall and Kuiken call the spatiotemporal shift, which is included in their theory of aesthetic focalization. They write that this shift has both an internal and external perspective, the first being character based, while the second relies more on the narrator. As the authors explain, “[d]elimited in terms of a character, a narrator, or even an author’s stance towards fictive time and space, this seems analogous to the use of camera position in film” (290). I will now look at some examples of this shift in spatiotemporal perspective in the novel itself, which, in turn, will help to show how González constructs this affective plane.

As mentioned, students who read excerpts of Crossing Vines seemed to take to the character of Chela almost immediately. Interestingly, however, it is not her who the reader meets first, but rather Cirilo, at 4:45 a.m., as he awakens with his friends Moreno, Ninja and Tamayamá in what is assumed to be a workers camp.
This chapter almost perfectly exemplifies how González uses this spatiotemporal shift both in the formation of these characters and in the construction of the affective plane. As Cirilo prepares himself to eat, the narrator observes: “What bothered him was having to dig into the same undercooked pot of beans from last night. Chela would savor these, his small miseries…” (23). Immediately, the reader is confronted with the characterization of Chela as rather vindictive, but with reason—the narrator continues: “…such was her hatred of him for having left her after the birth of each child” (23). Nevertheless, despite actions which the narrator describes as “selfish” (23), something akin to a justification is presented to the reader: “…Chela couldn’t understand why he left each time even though it made perfect sense to him. The first time he simply became nervous and anxious about this child,” later adding that Lucita’s cries almost drove him to insanity, and that “[a] solitary wasp of a thought crawled out at the very end: hadn’t he witnessed his own father succumb to madness the firth months Cirilo’s younger sister arrived?” (23). Implanted in the reader is that idea that perhaps it is not Cirilo’s fault that he fled, but rather it was an urge that he inherited. Chela is understandably upset, but does she go too far in expressing it? It is noted that Cirilo does indeed miss his children, and Chela does not let him see them as often as he would like (23). Chela also goes as far as absolutely humiliating him at the birth of their third child, who she decides to name Mickey, after the Disney character, completing his emasculation (24). When he demands an answer as to why, she snaps “Because el chingado mouse has more character and certainly more money!” She later goes on to push a nurse “violently”
on the bed before storming out of the room (25). Certainly, at this point, although readers may feel Cirilo to be a negligent father in some respects, do they truly hold him at fault? Chela is certainly not portrayed as a sympathetic single mother—she may be mentally unstable, is prone to violence toward people she does not know, and actively keeps her children away from their father as a form of punishment. Thus, in some way, the reader is able to feel sympathy for Cirilo and his predicament, even in spite of his considerable faults and may find themselves falling on Cirilo’s side of the affective plane, given these emotionally resonant passages that the narrator constructs from Cirilo’s internal perspective.

The reader does not meet Chela in person until 7:45 a.m., in the aforementioned chapter entitled “Chingada,” a word which she frequently uses. The narrator, after building her up as almost an awful person, immediately begins to soften her, or at least suggests to the reader that she has reasons for being as rough as she is apart from Cirilo’s abandonment of her and their children. It is noted that Chela despises her job in the fields (49), mostly because it takes her away from her children. The narrator also writes that her children face racism at the neighborhood inflatable pool, and she herself encounters scorn when dealing with governmental channels in the community:
She was here to prove even the social security workers wrong, but chingado, it was getting harder every year: more restrictions, more paperwork, more cutbacks, and the same bug-eyed secretaries looking down at her as if she’d just gotten off the sofa long-enough to walk her overfed nalgas to the welfare office. They treated her like she made those three babies all by herself... (52)

Despite her gruff exterior, which is not softened in any way in this particular chapter, Chela’s motivations become more apparent through further details that the narrator offers. She encounters derision and racism wherever she goes, cannot rely on the father of her children, and clearly does not want to depend on anybody (54).

This is a fairly stark contrast to what the reader initially encountered at 4:45 a.m.—Cirilo’s first chapter—in which she appeared almost crazy. Because of the narrator’s spatio-temporal shift in focalization, resulting in a corresponding shift in the affective plane, the reader is able to feel for both Chela and Cirilo, even knowing that both have a multitude of flaws. The story of these two characters comes full-circle at 7:25 p.m. when Cirilo comforts Chela after the shooting death of cousin Moreno—despite both of their considerable faults, the reader may hope that, somehow, they will find their way back into each other’s arms.27 The way that González cultivates affect in the reader for both of these characters also recalls Clark’s idea of sympathy

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27 This juxtaposition of oppositional lovers is mirrored in Amanda and Jesse, who work as supervisors to the grape-pickers. They are not well liked amongst the workers because they treat them with scorn and derision (45, 50, 71), but, just as in the case of Chela and Cirilo, both receive sympathetic treatments in their respective chapters, which effectively softens them in the eyes of the reader.
credits. The author posits that each person has a limit to the amount of sympathy that another will provide to them over time—essentially, a credit based upon a myriad of factors. When these sympathy credits are exhausted, no more may be extended. In the example of Cirilo’s first chapter, he builds up many “credits” within the reader given what he endures with Chela, but the reader may also subtract credits because he has abandoned her and their children. When we arrive at Chela’s first chapter, she may indeed have negative credits, but quickly builds them up as we learn more about her and her circumstances. This idea of sympathy is also related to justice as we are likely to feel more sympathy for a character that we perceive as just, or deserving of it. As van Peer suggests, whoever is considered more “just” in this situation may depend upon who is reading (333), and therefore it may be difficult to gauge toward whom the reader feels more sympathetic.

Indeed, Chela and Cirilo’s final chapter together, in which they are sympathetic towards each other, may make the reader feel affect for both.

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28 Clark’s study limits this, typically, to in-person interactions. She writes that a person may “build-up” sympathy credits with others, what she calls their “sympathy biography.” She also outlines a number of rules of etiquette for people seeking sympathy, including not “making unwarranted claims to sympathy,” not claiming too much, exchange sympathy with others to keep the sympathy “account” open, and to “repay sympathizers with gratitude, with sympathy, or with both” (“Sympathy Biography” 290). A person reading a novel cannot “exchange” sympathy with a character, but it would be interesting to study this concept more in-depth and the limits to the sympathetic union within literature.

29 In van Peer’s study, he presented subjects with three versions of the same story, one from the perspective of a wife, and another from the perspective of her husband. From the wife’s perspective, she finds the husband inconsiderate when he won’t turn down the television volume in order to “have a talk,” while, from the husband’s perspective, he questions why the wife will not leave him in peace. The husband then turns down the volume. A neutral version omits these one-sentence internal perspectives. The husband is considered to be more considerate than the wife, as gauged by readers, in all versions, while the results are mixed in the case of “justness.” This suggests that who reads is as important as what they read—perhaps a single mother reading Chela’s account will find Cirilo’s actions unconscionable no matter how much the narrator attempts to cultivate sympathy for him.
The other spatiotemporal focalization shift in the affective plane that I will examine is found between Don Manuel and Leonardo, father and son. The fact that Leonardo, a university student who has returned home to do an ethnographic study on his mother, has physically removed himself from the realities of the grape-pickers causes much of the friction between him and his father, but as in the case of Chela and Cirilo, the reader witnesses this from two different angles. The reader first meets Don Manuel at 3:05 a.m. as his wife is recording oral histories for Leonardo. The husband sees this as pointless, and does not hesitate in expressing so, noting that “[i]t’s a waste of time that’s what it is. Idle talk is a waste of time” (7), and proceeds to pass gas in front of Leonardo, further teasing him by adding “I saved it just for you” (8). Almost immediately the reader is confronted with what appears to be an earnest son returning home to capture the history of his family, and a father who is, as Leonardo puts it, a cochino (8). In the terminology of Clark, Leonardo quickly builds sympathy credits with the reader as Don Manuel loses them. Nevertheless, as we saw in the case of Chela and Cirilo, the narrator complicates the affective plane when the spatiotemporal focalization shifts at 8:15 a.m. as Don Manuel is at work in the fields. Here, Leonardo comes across as so arrogant and irritating that readers may shift their sympathies more towards his father. This chapter talks about the considerable pride that Don Manuel takes in work, and about how, when he returns home, he wants to simply relax in peace. Unfortunately, Leonardo does not allow that to happen: bringing home “crazy ideas those Chicano professors had put between his ears” (55), he tells his father that the
Virgin de Guadalupe was just a creation of the Spanish missionaries (55), that the farm workers are being exploited (59), that his favorite program Cristina “dulls your brain” and that he should read instead (59). After witnessing the hard work that Don Manuel puts in at the fields, the reader can sympathize with his desire to relax and thus, may understand his outburst:

Don Manuel yelled out with a burst of energy that made Leonardo drop his book. “I do! I watch that show. This is my house and my time to relax and those jototes are prancing around in heels just for me! I don’t have the energy or desire to sit around reading books after my long days. You would know that if you knew anything about working in the fields.” (60)

Leonardo takes this anger as a sign that Don Manuel should drink herbal tea to calm his nerves, something that will perhaps help him to cut back on his drinking. The final straw for Don Manuel comes when Leonardo suggests that Joaquin Murrieta, considered to be a Mexican patriot by the father, may have actually been Chilean. For Don Manuel, it was “one pendeja too many” and he physically attacks his son (60). At 8:05 p.m., near the end of the novel, the spatiotemporal focalization shifts again as the reader encounters the first chapter dedicated specifically to Leonardo. Despite the earlier characterization that Leonardo was attempting to tell Don Manuel what was best for him and the other workers, the narrator reveals that “it was a good thing he was studying his parents because he realized how little he knew about them” (201). It is also revealed that Leonardo has struggled with school,
which may come across as a surprise to the reader given his apparent studiousness. When he came home, he wanted to impress his family, but “had managed to alienate them further” (201). In the next and final chapter of the story, just as with Chela and Cirilo, Leonardo and Don Manuel end the story on seemingly good terms, as the family sits around to listen to Doña Ramona record further oral histories. These two characters are perhaps the most important oppositional pair in *Crossing Vines* because many readers, upon post-reading reflection, may consider Leonardo to be a proxy for the author of the novel for reasons soon to be explained. Nevertheless, I believe that instead of inhabiting this role, Leonardo actually represents what classical narratology calls the *implied reader*, and it is here that we can perhaps uncover the divergent rhetorical possibilities of the novel.

**Leonardo’s shift from author to reader**

Here I will look at three fundamental areas in regards to how we may process a text: who is writing it, who is intended to read it, and the implicit message, or rhetoric, found within it. In a previous version of this chapter, I explained these roles by way of Chatman’s well known schema (*Story* 151):

\[
\text{real author } \rightarrow [ \text{implied author } \rightarrow \text{(narrator)} \rightarrow \text{(narratee)} \rightarrow \text{implied reader} ] \rightarrow \text{real reader}
\]

However, after attempting to use this schema to analyze a number of different texts in a recent advanced Latin American literature class, it became clear that students may have a difficult time discerning between some of these roles, and even if they
do understand them, they may not be able to apply them to literature. The role of the implied reader and narratee in particular was challenging—in a text such as Hernán Cortés’ *Tercera carta de relación*, students were able to identify King Carlos I of Spain as the narratee because Cortés specifically addresses the text to him, but other texts proved unsolvable for them. As Chatman originally noted, some texts do not have narratees (*Story* 150), thus, his schema would move directly to the implied reader. However, as Bortolussi and Dixon discuss, many readers feel that the text is directed towards *them* (79) and furthermore, frequently conflate the narrator and the implied author, particularly in cases where the narrator appears to be cooperative (74), which fits the case of *Crossing Vines*. For these reasons, here I have decided to simplify this schema, taking cues from Bortolussi and Dixon. When I speak of who is writing the text, I have in mind these author’s category of the narrator, which may “consist of information concerning the narrator’s knowledge, goals, and perspective” (77), a role which may be conflated with that of the represented author (74), something that I believe likely to occur in González’s work.30 Toward whom the text is directed encompasses their idea of the represented reader, which may correspond with the real reader in the eyes of many (79). Finally, what I refer to as the implicit message of the text consists of those narrator and

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30 As Bortolussi and Dixon write, the *represented author* is not the real, historical author, but instead, in order to “understand the use of a narrator with a given set of characteristics, readers are likely to infer the existence of a creative figure with a set of goals and plans” (76). The authors do believe that, in some cases, the represented author and the narrator are maintained as distinct entities in the eyes of the reader, particularly when the reader has extratextual information about the author (76). I would also consider this as particularly true in cases where the unreliable narrator is used, as it is here that authorial manipulation of the narrator to specific ends becomes more evident to the reader. It is not likely that this occurs in *Crossing Vines*, however, and readers may easily conflate the narrator with author González.
author goals that were referenced earlier, driven by the tensions and instabilities in the text. Iser's definition of the implied reader is also useful here, which he describes as “incorporat[ing] both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process” (*Implied Reader* xii). The potential of Iser's “implied reader” is powerful, and seems to describe how most critics approach literature—that readers will read texts in certain ways that grasp prestructured meaning as intended by the author. While I also generally follow this line of criticism in this project, with “Crossing Vines” I also attempt to take into account an imperfect readership, such as the students of my Latino/a Literature class, who brought their own values and beliefs to the text that may have hampered their actualization of the “potential meaning.”

Given that the narrator of González’s work is ever-present in the novel, the reader may look to pinpoint which character inhabits this role. Here, the chapter “Coro,” the sole in which the spatio-temporal focus shifts towards Leonardo, is critical. The reader already knows that Leonardo has returned to his hometown in order to complete an ethnographic project, based upon recordings that his mother has made for him, but it is the tentative title of this study—*Crossing Vines: A Field Study of the Culture of Work (Grape Pickers Are People Too!)* (204)—that simplifies this search for the narrator. Given that this is the same title as the novel itself, it may be easy to infer, at least retrospectively as this chapter comes near the conclusion, that he is narrating the events in the novel, even though the third person narration is used throughout. Nevertheless, as this book is being written as an ethnographic
project for a college class, a reader in higher education may not pay this continued third-person narration much attention—academic essays and studies are frequently written in the impersonal. Interpreting Leonardo as author may also be problematic in that he is a very isolated character within the work; he clearly has very limited contact with the multitude of characters whose histories form the vast majority of the stories, with the exceptions of his mother and father. But again, this is solvable, in this case through the narrative device embodied by the tape recorder. Indeed, there is an extensive narration of Leonardo reading the transcription of the tapes, in which Gertrudis, Doña Ramona, Mariana and Chela all speak. It is noted that these are friends of his mother, whom he has never met (200). The reader is not privy to further transcriptions, but it can be assumed that, even if he was not a personal witness to the stories recounted in the novel, they were either recorded or recounted to him by his mother via tape recorder, and he later reconstructed these stories into the novel. The role of the narratee is also important here, which Keen, who draws from Chatman, defines as the readers to whom the narrator “directs its discourse” (Narrative Form 32). As noted earlier, readers in my advanced literature class has difficulty in pinpointing the narratee of a text unless it was explicitly mentioned, and in Crossing Vines it is—Leonardo is submitting his ethnographic project to a Chicano Studies professor for review (205). In this case, we would see an alignment of the roles of represented reader and narratee in the professor. In looking at the message or rhetoric of the text, the bracketed title of the work—Grape Pickers Are People Too!—may also explain the construction of the affective plane.
The title implies that there are people who do not consider grape-pickers as worthy of consideration, so it would seem that Leonardo wants to bring some level of understanding to his community and defend them against those who are dismissive of their plight. My own initial reading of Crossing Vines indeed took this as the message of the text, as did many student response papers—the bringing to light of the difficult lives of these workers and the system that holds them down. There is certainly much evidence to support this—the long, drawn out descriptions of the difficulty of working in the extreme heat (84, but one example), which includes one character suffering from heat stroke (104), encounters with and rumors of the Migra (96), and Chela's desire to escape and start anew (23), even though the reader knows that it is not likely to happen. In this case, does the careful cultivation of sympathy in the novel truly matter? Given that the represented reader is a Chicano studies professor who would likely be sympathetic to these people anyway, the novel/project becomes less about changing minds than reaffirming views of grape-pickers as downtrodden class. An extension of this represented reader would be an audience that is amenable to the idea of grape-pickers as downtrodden class, and is naturally more receptive to the sympathy that González bestows upon these agricultural workers. This was certainly true of the majority of the students I taught—humanities majors in the liberal, multicultural classroom that are likely familiar with issues of labor exploitation.31

31 Vermeule, in Why Do We Care About Literary Characters, believes that readers “animate” characters, effectively making them “real,” and because of this, may actively seek out allegories in literature. Many critics, such as Kim (later discussed in this chapter), find this conflation with real-life
Nevertheless, this reading of *Crossing Vines* may be problematic for a number of reasons, which is why I believe that, upon reflection, the rhetoric of the novel differs from what we may at first infer, shifting Leonardo out of the role of represented or implied author and into being the represented reader. Although there is much evidence to support the idea that the novel is about a group of downtrodden workers—essentially victims—only considering the novel in this light pushes aside a wealth of textual evidence that counters this. Don Manuel, for example, seems to enjoy and take pride in his job and feels that even simple things, such as knowing the ultimate destination of the grapes he picks, gives his job a purpose (60). In fact, the narrator even cites Don Manuel’s complaints about Leonardo’s way of looking at the grape-pickers, recounting:

... Leonardo had built up resentment towards something he knew nothing about. Even worse, Leonardo wanted to educate him about what life in the fields was really all about—exploitation of labor, oppression of the farm worker, violation of worker’s rights.

Pendejadas! (58-9)

Furthermore, the narrator also gives a sympathetic treatment to both Amanda and Jesse, supervisors, who take a rather dim view of the field workers—“Let them strike. We’ll get rid of each one of them if we have to. They’re all dispensable, for crissake” (20), says Amanda. Lozano, the owner of the field, whose characterization to be problematic, but stepping outside of the critical role, we can see many of our students seeking out these allegories, as was the case with my class in *Crossing Vines*. Reader animation of these characters is more difficult to gauge.
takes a beating during the altercation with the union at the warehouse, especially after he refers to the workers as “wetbacks” and is called a malinchista (156), is redeemed in a chapter focused upon him, “Shots,” at 6:10 p.m. Even the organization that would assuage Leonardo’s concerns, the union, is given a rather blurred treatment in the novel. In fact, it would be easy to say that the United Farm Workers Union haunts the novel much like a ghost. A few characters do mention that they would like to join the union, including Doña Gertrudis (72, 73, and 116) and Chela (49), the latter of which ultimately does side with them in the warehouse incident, but the reader also gets the sense that they are not entirely relevant or effectual.

When recounting atmosphere surrounding the death of César Chávez, the narrator notes that Pifas, a worker, “who had never met Chávez nor was a member of the United Farm Workers Union, couldn’t help feeling nostalgic. For what, he wasn’t sure” (108). Another worker in the warehouse asks, confused, “Do we still strike in the Valley?” (155). Ultimately, the union’s forced entry into the warehouse is treated with a flurry of confusion and chanting that leads to two people being shot (Amanda and Jesse), but it does not appear that this revolt actually goes anywhere or effects any change.

Returning to the idea who is writing the text, we can assume that if Leonardo inhabits this role, he likely would not focus on those details which may hamper the message of downtrodden grape-pickers who suffer from exploitation of labor. Instead, we may be able to consider the use of sympathy in the novel as an indication that the lives of these people are not as black-and-white and somebody
like Leonardo would otherwise assert, somebody who, as his father notes, has never worked in the fields (58) and whose resentment may come more from “some crazy idea those Chicano professors have put between his ears” (55) than lived experience. That is not to say that there is not exploitation of labor, or anything else that Leonardo attempts to educate his father about, but instead that the issue is more complicated than this simplistic analysis would indicate—these are real (fictional) people who have a myriad of different issues, including, but not limited to, being single parents (Chela), sexual minorities (Moreno, Aníbal), worrying about getting enough hours in at the fields (7, 10, 38, 49, 51, 72, 82, 128, 131), making sure that their children receive decent educations (52), racism, abusive parents (Jacarinda), aging and being alone (Don Nico), among other issues. This point is also strengthened by the fact that González employs a sympathetic narration even with characters that should, if we follow this idea of exploited workers, be perceived as the enemies: Jesse, Amanda and Lozano in particular. If we return to the title of Leonardo’s report—*Crossing Vines: A Field Study of the Culture of Work (Grape Pickers Are People Too!)*—we may come to realize that the González’s novel is not really about the culture of work of these characters, but instead, and perhaps more simply, about their lives and the various issues they deal with every day. Leonardo notes that one of the goals of his project is to find out “what made [the farm workers] tick” (202), but it may become clear to readers that although he may put together a report acceptable for a university setting, he truly does not understand them at all because he has become so far removed from their reality. This point is
driven further when, in the final chapter, he continues pestering his mother to record more stories even as she tries to absorb everything that occurred that day, including the shooting of Moreno and the warehouse incident. She finally snaps and knocks the recorder out of his hands (210), which may come as surprising given that she is almost always been portrayed as very loving and considerate of his feelings. In short, as the novel ends, the reader may feel no sympathy at all towards Leonardo, especially given that even one of the most sympathetic characters in the novel loses patience with him. Because of this, in this reflective reading of the story, we can consider Leonardo more the in the role of the represented reader—the story is being told to him rather than by him, in hopes that, through the multi-faceted use of sympathy, he will come to understand what really makes these characters tick.

My original reading of this story, and how many of my students also perceived it—that of these characters as victims of circumstance—is problematic not only because it ignores substantial textual evidence, but also because it effectively denies agency to these characters. Reader expectations of literature are important to discuss in a novel such as Crossing Vines, a novel whose readerly dynamics and rhetoric, I believe, is highly influenced by what a reader brings to the experience. That the subjects of the novel are migrant farm-workers is established either by the cover, which depicts people working in the fields, or almost immediately in the first chapter. As mentioned, I taught this novel to a class in a university that, like most, prides itself on multicultural, liberal approaches. Thus, we could consider most of these students as at least sympathetic and/or versed in the
plight of migrant workers, and would likely bring a number of preconceptions to their reading of the novel. As Kim writes in the case of Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, there is a tendency amongst such readers to conflate these writings with an entire group of people, and goes on to examine how this has occurred in Kingston’s work. This is problematic, however, because “such a reading infantilizes the cultural other and distances the reader’s self and responsibility from a problematic situation that includes the reader” (104-5). In the case of *Crossing Vines*, viewing these characters as lacking agency effectively infantilizes them, even if that is not the conscious intention of the reader. Considering the characters of *Crossing Vines* as merely being part of a larger class struggle may indeed put the represented reader, such as Leonardo, or my students, on the side of the characters—we need to advocate for these characters because they are unable to it for themselves, casting ourselves and our deeds as altruistic in nature. Kim further explains that, in the case of reader reactions to Kingston’s work, “[s]uch distanced sympathy, rather than empathy, characterizes the reading mode of liberal multiculturalism . . . in which such texts . . . function as . . . representatives in a buffet style approach to discrete, exoticized cultures” (105).

Extending Kim’s comments to González’s work, I would conclude that what readers feel in the novel is likely this distanced sympathy. Ultimately, this is also what I view as the message that is eventually rejected in *Crossing Vines*, and perhaps over the course of reading the work, the reader would reflect and modify their perception of these characters and people like them, leading to a more empathetic,
and less infantilizing, response by the end of the novel. The critical question is if readers actually do grasp the rhetorical possibilities of the novel, or merely take from it the message that fits their world view. My assumption is that, even if readers do not grasp the entire nuance of the rhetoric, an in-depth reading should not be able to dismiss chapters that demonstrate Don Manuel’s pride in his work, as well as the humanization of otherwise antagonistic Amanda, Jesse and Lozano—I would indeed describe such details as salient features of the novel, emphasized to such an extent that they cannot be dismissed. While I have not completed an empirical study of the novel apart from in-class responses, cognitive studies have suggested that we tend to be critical of “not true” (fictional) works, even as we enjoy the creation of the storyworld (Cosmides and Tooby 91). Tan, for example, suggests that we frequently go back mentally and reevaluate works, as my students did in their final response papers. He calls this the “law of closure,” and explains that it “manifests itself in a search for structure and meaning” (120) even after we have put the work down. In conclusion, and returning to Tan’s theory of emotion, Crossing Vines appeared to generate R emotions in my students due to the construction of the affective plane and the tensions it generated, to use Phelan’s terminology, although the true rhetoric of the novel, found in its instabilities, may lead to a more A emotion type reaction in this search for closure.

The dual empathetic readerships of Butterfly Boy

Butterfly Boy and Crossing Vines differ in that former is an autobiography and the later fiction, but they also share much in common in terms of themes: both deal
with a community of agricultural workers (González’s family, in the case of
*Butterfly*), the same sorts of interpersonal relationship issues that make *Crossing
Vines* an interesting read and, importantly, significant queer content. In *Crossing
Vines*, as noted, both Aníbal and Moreno are queer, the first being homosexual and
the second a former transvestite, albeit one who is not gay, while *Butterfly Boy* more
or less tells of the author’s own path to self-realization. It chapters are also spliced
with sections entitled “Ghost Whispers to My Lover,” a person that the author is
desperate to forget. In this section I have decided to treat the two books as
narratives, given that this is how they were written. This is significant because many
narratological studies specifically refer to “fiction,” a category into which *Butterfly
Boy* quite obviously does not fit. Nevertheless, I do consider the book almost fictive
in quality—González clearly takes poetic license with his life in the book. This is not
to imply that any of the events are exaggerated in any way, but instead that the story
is not told in a linear fashion, with cuts to the beginning of his life mingling with his
bus ride to Michoacán with his father, and well as the aforementioned letters to his
lover. In fact, when the two works are read in tandem, they can almost be
understood as being one work, with *Butterfly Boy* taking a look at just a few of the
characters that might be amongst the workers of *Crossing Vines* that the reader does
not have the opportunity to meet. Another quality that *Butterfly Boy* shares with
*Crossing Vines* is González’s use of affect in order to capture the reader. Perhaps this
is not surprising given that the work could generally be considered a *bildungsroman*,
and, as Keen writes, works in this tradition “may have a special role to play in
cultivating empathy” through a feeling of injustice (Empathy 108), something which I will look at later. Nevertheless, this feeling of empathy through injustice would appear to be almost necessarily one-directional—in the case of Butterfly, that would be towards the young author, whose trials and tribulations we experience in the narrative. However, just as he does in Crossing Vines, González constructs an affective plane that, in Butterfly Boy, primarily positions the author and his father at opposite ends of its spectrum for reasons that will become clear. Returning to the idea of the represented author and reader, in the case of Butterfly these roles are much less fluid than in Crossing Vines, mainly because there is a first person narration, and we become at times intimately involved with said narrator. I do, however, believe there to be two distinct intended/represented readerships of the book, and that this has an effect towards whom empathy is felt in the narrative. First, a queer readership, such as González, the author, and a heterosexual-one, perhaps with a queer child, like his father. While the first audience would likely be far more likely to pick up this work than the second, I believe that both audiences may be able to feel empathetic to both father and son, although for different reasons.

**Different empathies for different audiences**

The argument that different audiences will perceive Butterfly Boy in different ways—which character we feel with—will be buffeted by Keen’s excellent deconstructing work found in “Narrative Empathy.” After a substantial review of literature regarding the more cognitive findings of empathy in clinical tests, the author’s goal becomes uncovering narrative techniques of empathy—how authors
invite their audience to feel for the characters they construct, something which frequently occurs with political aims ("Narrative" 83). In this, she is able to pinpoint three techniques in particular, all of which I believe may be applicable to *Butterfly Boy* depending on the intended reader discussed earlier. In general, Keen defines these types as *strategic empathy*, in which an author may “attempt to direct an emotional transaction through a fictional work aimed at a particular audience, not necessarily including every reader who happens upon the text” ("Narrative" 83). The first such type, *bounded strategic*, many times follows along markers of identity or an “in-group,” such as gay, black, etc., but can also be directed along a plane of experience, such as those who have lost a partner, a parent, have been married, etc. Here, the reader either belongs to the in-group or they do not, and if they do not belong, the work may not be suited for them. The second type that Keen defines is *ambassadorial strategic empathy*, in which an author may try to write to two groups simultaneously, “hoping to bridge the gap between them.” As Keen further explains, this type of empathy “addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end” (84). Finally, Keen outlines the broadest type of empathy, *broadcast strategic*, which calls upon readers to identify with “common human experience, feelings, hopes, and vulnerabilities” (85). As the author writes, this type of empathy is often derided by critics exactly for being too broad, and perhaps simplistic, but it is also easy to see where this can come into play in any number of narrative works, where the reader may identify with a character based upon a particular emotion they feel at a particular moment. However, before
entering into the discussion of how these concepts apply to González's work, I will examine how the author constructs this affective plane to lead the reader to feel with both himself and his father.

**How flawed individuals drive empathy in *Butterfly Boy***

As mentioned previously, *Butterfly Boy* differs from *Crossing Vines* in that González is narrating his own life from the autodiegetic position. Because of this, at no point in the work does the reader witness anything that the author himself was not privy to, including the thoughts of others. The reader is thus more naturally inclined to feel with González, if he shows that he “deserves” such sentiments. And indeed, I believe that he does, and that this is evident from the very first chapter, where he recounts his relationship with his boyfriend. Effectively, the author invites the reader to feel with him—he primes the text to elicit these emotional responses as the entire chapter is a juxtaposition of the schizophrenic moments of an abusive relationship, in which González finds himself being the victim. This culminates in the author storming out of his lover’s apartment, knowing that the relationship is over, and I believe that the use of descriptive words here works to open the reader to feeling for the author along a cognitive standpoint. He writes:
“I’ll walk back to my apartment,” I say.

“I wasn’t offering a ride,” he says. I feel the sting all over. And then comes his dare, “Is something holding you back?”

...

Out of habit I’m about to say, “I’ll call you later,” but I hold the phrase just in time and it drops like a weight inside of me. (6-7)

In particular, the descriptive phrasing of “sting” and “drops like a weight inside of me” may take any reader back to the end of a relationship, where words become arrows intent on damage. With the reader primed to feel with González, further events in the work may elicit even stronger affect, particularly the death of the author’s mother, especially given that, at the time, he is a child who does not seem to fully understand what death means. At the funeral home, after a lady tells González that his mother is now asleep and waiting for God, he takes a closer look for himself, indignant that nobody really knows what she looks like when she is sleeping. Suddenly, the author sees foam bubbling from her nose. He writes:

“Look! Look!” I shouted. “She’s moving!”

...

“Is she alive?” I asked, but no one heard me... After a brief and subdued commotion, small pieces of white cotton had been stuffed into my mother’s nostrils. I looked on in horror. (109)

While this passage maybe more affective for somebody who has lost a parent, or has tried to explain death to a child, it is difficult not to feel for the young author in this...
moment, when he suddenly gets a very real lesson as to what death means. Aside from these passages, readers are invited to feel for the author when he describes the poverty he suffered in Zacapu, his hometown in Michoacán, after his father left to return to the United States. He recounts:

We were going hungry. A person who experiences hunger never forgets that feeling. It is more than emptiness more than an ache at the center of the stomach—it is a waking up and going to bed with shame, as if this stiffness of the jaw and the hardening of the belly is part of some punishment. The flesh begins to feel transparent, and a strange echo resounds in the room when you admit to your weeping mother that you want real food, not tortilla with cheese and hot sauce, which she’s been feeding you the entire month. (52)

Instead of simply writing that the family was going hungry, the author instead attempts to draw the reader into the world of personal famine, and although the average reader likely cannot approximate that feeling, González may bring them as close as possible to doing so.

The above passages could very well draw any reader into feeling with the author, but, given that the work is heavily queer focused, I feel that it would have particular resonance with that audience. *Butterfly Boy* is not just an autobiography about a poor young Mexican-American boy who frequently migrates across the border with his family, but is also about how he comes to terms with his homosexuality and what the perception of this is in his family, to whom he is not
out. This situation would likely create a strong sense of empathy, of Keen’s bounded strategic variety, amongst many queer readers, who have likely had similar experiences in coming to terms with and exploring their own sexualities. This is particularly true in passages that deal with the author as a child entering adolescence. In one passage he is mercilessly teased by his cousins and brother because of the affectionate relationship between him and his mother (62), and called a maricón and sissy by him for his high-pitched voice (90). After this incident, he wonders is he had been meant to be born female, writing that:

I wanted to be a girl because I wanted to do girl things: comb my long hair, sit on the back of the pickup truck and whisper secrets, and wash dishes and stick my tongue out at the boys when I caught glimpses of them playing ball through the window over the sink. All the boy activities just seemed like too much work. (91)

Apart from simply wanting to perform these female-coded actions, he actually does so on a number of occasions. In one scene, as he is playing with ragdolls he has created out of bandannas, his brother comments, to their father: “He’s so stupid. . . Look at the stupid games he plays.” González is quickly admonished by his mother, even though he insists that they are not dolls, but snakes (94-5). Another time, the young author decides to walk out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his head, turban style. He recalls:
I had no idea I was doing anything wrong because I had seen my mother do this every night. I liked the way a few damp strands of hair stuck to the skin of her nape and forehead... My waltz had been carefully choreographed from the bathroom to the living room so that everyone in the house got to see me. (95)

However, soon after stepping out of the bathroom, his mother yanks the towel off of his head and punishes him with his father's belt (95-6). Again, this is another scene that is primed to resonate with a gay-male audience—being punished for transgressing gender roles—although it may be difficult to make this assertion without falling into stereotypes or explaining to a heterosexual audience why wrapping a towel around one's head may seem like a glamorous thing to do.

As with Crossing Vines, it is important to consider the preconceptions that readers may bring with them to Butterfly Boy, and how these may be changed by the instabilities and tensions found within the text. As discussed earlier, this work would likely attract a gay male audience, perhaps Latino, because it speaks to them as readers, like a number of González’s other works. While I do not want to enter into a discussion in stereotypes of Latino communities, generally, we know from a wide variety of literature, some discussed in the introduction of this study, that gay Latinos, and gays in general, often times have problematic relationships with families who are not accepting of them. Thus, the reader of Butterfly Boy likely

32 González has also published Men Without Bliss (2008), a set of short stories that feature several gay Chicano protagonists, as well as The Mariposa Club (2009) and Mariposa Gown (2012), adolescent-oriented novels about growing up gay and Latino.
comes into the work expecting those sorts of textual instabilities between the protagonist and other members of his family and community. González himself feeds into this expectation on the page before the body of the autobiography:

Of curse I love my father.

typo in an email to a friend

Children begin by loving their parents; after a time, they judge them; rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.

Oscar Wilde

This artful direction by González may lead the reader to believe that the author has problems with his father, even before the work has properly begun, and, given the context of the autobiography, we can assume that it is because he is gay and his father is unable to accept it.

Nevertheless, what is perhaps most interesting in Butterfly Boy is that González does not wallow in self-pity. Despite the hardships that the author recounts, he is also quite critical of himself, particularly when it comes to his interactions with his father, and this is where the reader must navigate the affective plane of the work. The two have a very contentious relationship, and a good deal of this stems from his father’s alcoholism, his abandoning of teenage González and his brother after the death of their mother, and his father’s perceived offense at the author’s effeminacy. The reader first encounters this friction soon after González returns home from Riverside, where he studies at a university, and immediately confronts his father about a ruined picture of the father and his mother. González
viciously attacks his father about the picture, to which his father responds: "Why don’t you shut up? . . . What happened to this photograph hurts me much more than it does you” (15). Perhaps to the surprise of the reader, the author immediately backs down, writing that “I feel as if he’s kicked me in the stomach because I know it’s true . . . I’m like a child in a tantrum . . . Why don’t I feel that level of rage for [my boyfriend]? Why am I so cruel to everyone else?” (15). As this scene demonstrates, unlike in Crossing Vines, the construction of the affective plane is not regimented by chapter, but rather exists within chapters, with the effect of creating a more natural narrative. González effectively draws empathy towards himself, then turns and reflects it towards his father, often at a cost to how readers may perceive the author himself.

González’s willingness to paint himself in a negative light also surfaces on the bus-ride to Michoacán from Indio, California, noting, at different points, that he ignores his father’s attempts to make small talk (23), fakes politeness with him (30), treats beggars with disdain, for which his father scolds him (29), treats other passengers on the bus as nuisances (103), and talks of how much he wants his father to “go away” (105). From what González recounts to the reader, his father truly attempts to connect with the author on the bus-ride: he establishes a paternal role in making sure that the author has food to eat (33), says that he just wants his son to be happy and smile more often (35), and allows his son to rest on him in order to fall asleep (36). Despite their difficulties, González appears to have a great admiration for his father—he recounts how they bonded over Sci-Fi movies and
how his father was obsessed with UFOs (38-9), and how his father was a local singing sensation in Michoacán (17-8).

Returning to the theme of the author’s gender transgressions, there is one particular scene which I believe best illustrates the two potential intended audiences of the work, and how empathy is directed by the author. Through a number of these scenes occurring during his childhood, González writes how, despite being “effeminate and demure” (88), he attempted to exert a more masculine persona around his father, including cursing when he hurt himself, playing with his brother’s action figures and talking about soccer, despite the fact that he hated sports (88). When his father tried to teach him how to sing, he was convinced that he “embarrassed [his] father with that feminine voice” (90). Interestingly, for his gender transgressions, it was almost exclusively his mother that punished him, such as in the towel incident described earlier. He recounts:

I learned quickly that my mother’s actions were not necessarily meant to protect me, but to protect my father. My father didn’t beat me for being a sissy, but I knew it bothered him greatly, so it became my mother’s responsibility to censor and punish me. (95)

This passage may demonstrate how the reader never truly gets a sense that his father is actually bothered or ashamed but his son’s actions, but rather does not know how to react to them. This is evidenced a few pages earlier when the author, home alone, decides to experiment with his mother’s clothing and nail polish. When
his father walks in, the author is, of course, expecting perhaps violent reaction. His fear is palpable:

There I was, his firstborn, his namesake, experimenting with fingernail polish. I froze up, hoping I’d become invisible. I tried to trigger a seizure but my brain went numb . . . the panties crawled down my arm and caught at the elbow. My face burned with fear. All I saw were my father’s eyes growing in size and intensity as he took in the whole living room without blinking. Would collapsing at his feet begging for mercy help? It was worth a try. (92-3)

This humorous reflection is likely something that would generate a significant amount of bounded strategic empathy amongst the gay intended readership, but I believe that his father’s reaction is perhaps even more important. To the author’s surprise, his father says nothing and goes to the bathroom, only coming out after a sufficient amount of time has passed for the young author to clean himself up. After that, the father still says nothing, instead cooking dinner while the author plays with the father's guitar (93).

Here, I believe it becomes clear that there are indeed two intended readerships of *Butterfly Boy*, a queer one, which is more obvious, but also a heterosexual one, perhaps parents or relatives or kin of queers who have found themselves in similarly uncomfortable situations. Although González does have legitimate issues with his father, it is also clear in the work that he does not seem intent on portraying him as a monster, but rather somebody who has made some
poor choices and does not always know how to deal with more sensitive topics, such as his son’s homosexuality, or the death of his wife. Nevertheless, González clearly still loves and admires his father in spite of his faults. Thus, this secondary intended readership would likely not feel guilty for empathizing with the father, finding him worthy of such feelings, and may indeed find themselves in a bounded-strategic empathetic relationship with him, based upon shared experiences of not knowing how to react to their child/relative/friend’s homosexuality and/or experimentations. If we continue to follow Keen’s logic, and because the author has put much work into making both him and his father flawed, yet empathetic individuals, if would stand to reason that there would be cross-empathy amongst the intended readerships. In fact, I believe this cross-empathy, getting the reader to, in the words of Keen “feel with the alien other” (“Narrative” 83), is one of the successes of Butterfly Boy. A gay readership may very well feel empathy for the father in an ambassadorial-type scheme, while a straight readership would likely feel the same for the author. In this type of empathy, writes Keen, the author may try to write to two groups simultaneously, “hoping to bridge the gap between them” (“Narrative” 83), and ultimately, I believe that is what González attempts in Butterfly Boy, to show homosexual readers that their parents/relatives cannot be perfect, and indeed likely deal with their own demons, and to give insight to heterosexual audiences on what it is like to grow up “different.”

It is likely that writing Butterfly Boy was likely a cathartic action for the author, and reading it may very well be for its audience, too. In a general sense,
Scheff summarizes the theory of catharsis as “thrill-seeking [as] an attempt to relive, and therefore resolve earlier painful experiences which were unfinished” (13). Certainly, in the case of González as author, it is easy to see how writing this work would be cathartic. However, Scheff also describes how drama can be cathartic for audiences, specifically that we may cry over the fate of Romeo and Juliet in order to relive “our own personal experiences with loss . . .” (13), and if we accept this to be true, then *Butterfly Boy* can also easily be understood as a cathartic read for these two intended audiences. If we consider the audience referenced earlier that is most likely to pick up this work—the gay male audience—perhaps there is a didactic lesson to be found here, as in *Crossing Vines*. Even though González primes the reader to expect his father to be portrayed in a certain way, the construction of this affective plane may serve to open their minds to their own families, or queer relatives, and reevaluate these relationships.

**The political function of affect**

Alongside considerations of what literature does with its readers, we also must keep in mind what readers do with literature—the effect of affect in *Crossing Vines* and *Butterfly Boy* is not only found between their covers, but also in the world outside of the works themselves. Here I will turn towards a discussion of the effect that this affect would have in the real readers of his works—those who actually buy his writing and consume it. Part of the problem with sympathy and empathy in literature, is that, as Keen reminds us, the reader cannot offer the characters aid as they might in the real world (“Narrative Empathy” 70), granted that they feel that
they should. What readers can do, however, is apply what they feel for fictional characters to like-groups in the real world. As noted earlier in Kim’s analysis of The Woman Warrior, this conflation of characters and their real-life counterparts is problematic for a number of reasons, but many readers seem to do so regardless, as many of my students did with Crossing Vines. For this reason, it becomes important to study what the larger implications of works such as these might be. This idea of the real readership may overlap substantially with the intended/represented readership, but we also must remember that the author has no control over who picks up their works, or their reaction to it, despite whatever clues they may implant in these stories. Here, I would like to divide the real readership into three primary groups: those who are sympathetic/empathetic to González's works because they agree with the views he puts forward, those who may be inclined to be sympathetic/empathetic towards these views, although they may not have considered them before reading these works, and those who reject his views, thus rejecting any sympathetic/empathetic union that the author attempts to put forth.

Studies into the effect of sympathy and empathy generally agree that when these techniques are successful, they may produce a “pro-attitude” or “pro-social” behavior (Eisenberg and Eggum 71; Singer 20). However, for readers who are already sympathetic/empathetic towards to plight of migrant workers, or gays, in the case of González’s stories, this hardly matters because his works are unlikely to make them feel less for these groups. For some readers, it may be because they identify with González, his father, or the characters of Crossing Vines. Hoffman, for
example, uses the term “empathetic bias” to describe situations in which a person is more likely to feel empathy for those “like them,” and less likely to feel so, or at least less strongly, for those who are different (67), something which he finds troubling in some situations. Similarly, while summarizing a number of studies, Wispé observes that “we groups” may form, which entails a feeling of kinship, although she notes that this positioning is complicated by the “determinants of similarity” in empirical testing” (74-6). Trout, meanwhile, writes that we are more inclined to help people we know, or people like them, “because our experience with them decreases the social distance between us” (36). Nevertheless, identification does not necessary need to occur. Carroll, for example, writes of “solidarity” with protagonists in narrative texts, particularly when these characters are morally good (175). In turn, “antagonists instills anger, indignation, hatred, and sometimes even moral disgust in us” (176). In Crossing Vines, the reader may feel this resentment towards the mechanisms of dominant society, particular those who are racist toward Chela and her children (52), or towards the police, who shot and killed Moreno with little reason (149), but probably not toward Lozano, the owner of the grape-field, who also received a sympathetic turn as described earlier. Wispé also describes a much more disingenuous form of sympathy which I have labeled “selfish vindication.” For the author, such a form of sympathy may entail a martial-arts expert helping out a

33 While in Crossing Vines the reader may feel solidarity with just about everybody, due to the way in which González lays out the narrative, the case in Butterfly Boy is much more ambiguous as there are few true antagonists in the biography. As discussed earlier, one could consider the author’s father the antagonist, but that is not likely given that he is, many times, also seen as a victim. González’s grandfather could also be seen as an antagonist, but he is not pitted sufficiently against the author to truly see him that way. Instead, I believe that feelings of solidarity in Butterfly Boy would like fall along the lines of the father/son, as discussed in terms of empathy in the previous section.
person in distress, doing so more to demonstrate their skills than out of a feeling of
duty (70). In the case of *Crossing Vines*, for example, this type of sympathetic reader
may get a perverse sense of joy out of how the migrant workers suffer, if only
because it reinforces their views that these workers are treated unfairly or caught in
an unjust system, which returns to the idea of pleasure in the manipulation of
reader emotion. While there still exists the idea of solidarity with these
people/characters, it is also somewhat self-serving, such as in the case of Leonardo
in *Crossing Vines*. In these cases, as mentioned, the readers already have a
predisposition towards feeling empathy/sympathy when reading these works and
while the author's composition of his texts may intensify these feelings, they are
unlikely to change the political opinions of the readers.

The second type of readership that I envision for these works is perhaps the
most important: those who may be inclined towards feeling sympathy and/or
empathy, but had not really seriously considered the plight of migrant workers or
gays before picking up these books. As noted earlier, many theorize that sympathy
and empathy lead to pro-social behavior. For Galloway-Thomas, empathy is crucial
to “addressing intercultural issues” (4), seeing it as being able to “enter into and
participate in the world of the cultural Other cognitively, affectively, and
behaviorally” (8). As she further notes, Hochschild pinpoints empathy as the reason
for the abolishment of slavery in the British empire, as white abolitionists managed
expose ordinary Britons to see the harsh practices behind the products they
consumed (12). Similarly, Hoffman outlines an idea of “empathetic injustice,” which
focuses on the victim’s plight, but only if that plight is perceived as “not deserved” (56). Turner and Stets write that, over time in modern societies, those who are considered “eligible” for sympathy have become more numerous, a list which now includes “the plight of people subject to racism, sexism, patriarchy, discrimination, urban blight, lower class position, poor job-skills, difficult family life, and the like” (58-9), while Trout writes that “[e]mpathy is alert to the humiliation and indignity of being treated differently for reasons that are morally irrelevant, such as race or class” (17). Also, Hoffman observes that empathy can, over time, change attitudes (65), and furthermore, that moral dilemmas may arise because of it (66). Empathy has also been tied to democracy; for example, Morrell defines this concept as a “deliberation that puts empathy at its heart” because of the need to “give citizens equal consideration” (159). In considering these last two points, we can point to local elections in many U.S. states to ban same-sex marriage in the 2000s as a case where empathy and morality may create a dilemma, particularly for some of the religious faithful who may also personally know gays. The question here is whether or not a sense of empathy for these “cultural others” is able to overcome some sense of religious duty when they cast their ballots. If it can, we may see a case of altruism, which has also been an important concept in the sympathy/empathy discussion. On a basic level, Singer writes, backed by empirical data, that human beings have an innate sense of fairness and are generally altruistic, “whether because he feels for the other or because he has a sense of social justice” (25), while van Lang et al. see empathy as generating generosity in clinical experiments, even when it has a
personal cost to the empathizer, something generally agreed to be altruistic in nature (101). Shott sees empathy when sharing negative emotions, such as shame or guilt, as motivating empathy to alleviate the burden of the other, and to prove themselves as “morally adequate” (1327). Thus, the political function of Crossing Vines and Butterfly Boy for this group of readers would be to open their minds to “others” that they may not have previously thought of, or thought negatively of—to see them as sympathetic/empathetic humans—which might perhaps lead to pro-social behavior on behalf of their real-life counterparts, up to and including acts of altruism. Of course, what sorts of altruistic acts may result are too numerous to present here and would depend on the specific reader, but in an age where rights of gays and lesbians, as well as migrant workers, are hot button political fodder, changing hearts and minds of individuals is an important way to win battles.\footnote{There are two important caveats here. First, Miller writes that, in cases of potentially altruistic acts, the observer may ask why it is their responsibility to help (107). This is an important point to consider, and some may feel that it is not their responsibility, or worse, as we will see later amongst the overheard audience. Seglow, amongst others, also advances the idea that altruistic acts must contain some cost to those who perform them (145). I do not entirely agree with this assertion; one could argue that casting a ballot in favor of same-sex marriage is an altruistic act that carries no cost whatsoever to those who do so.}

It is important to note here that most of these researchers on empathy/sympathy, pro-social behavior and altruism are speaking of real-life, face to face situations. Thus, what role is there for fiction in generating these feelings? When American Vice-President Joe Biden came out in favor of same-sex marriage in May of 2012, he cited NBC sitcom Will & Grace (1998-2006) as a milestone in gay-acceptance, particularly given that, at its peak, it was watched by upwards of 20
million viewers a week and generated little controversy. This led the way for gay characters to become a staple in American television programming to the point where a gay or lesbian character is no longer a notable occurrence. Here, I specifically use the example of television series because they have a much wider reach than literature, particularly works such as those of González that have not appeared on any best-sellers list. Television programming such as this is likely part of the reason that same-sex marriage and/or civil unions are currently supported by more 62% of the American public, a number which rises to 70% amongst those ages 18-44 according to a recent poll (“Poll”). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that changing hearts and minds on issues such as gays and migrant workers is a battle fought on an individual basis and here, literature such as the works of González may play an important role.

35 I would give more credit to comedienne/actress/talk show host Ellen DeGeneres for “opening doors.” For many, her and her eponymous character “coming out” on her ABC sitcom (1994-1998) was a milestone, and although she faced swift and harsh backlash, she would later go on to even greater successes by hosting a bevy of awards shows, becoming a model for Cover Girl cosmetics, and her aforementioned talk show in which she frequently refers to her life with her wife, actress Portia de Rossi. Before Ellen, ABC sitcom Roseanne (1988-1997) featured multiple gay and lesbian characters. It was ahead of its time in many respects, especially considering that it was much more popular than Ellen was, ranking amongst the top five most watched programs in the US for six seasons, and featured gay characters in the context of a working class setting, wherein for them, their sexuality was just another part of their lives. Particularly interesting in Roseanne was the intersection of sexuality and economic class, where the gay and lesbian characters shared the same economic concerns as any of the other characters on the show.

36 While gay and lesbian characters have become quite popular on mainstream television, the same is not true of migrant/undocumented workers, at least amongst English-language networks. Molina-Guzmán notes that ABC's Ugly Betty featured a storyline involving the protagonist's undocumented father (134), while more recently, a 2011 plotline on Desperate Housewives revealed that Gaby Solis' (Eva Longoria) daughter had been switched at birth. Upon finding the other parents, the situation is complicated by the fact that they are undocumented, so Gaby must make the decision to report the parents to immigration and keep both children, or let the situation continue as it is. If undocumented and/or migrant workers were more often featured in English-language television in the U.S., would empathy and altruistic behavior towards this highly maligned group increase as it has for homosexuals? Undoubtedly, there are a multitude of factors that differentiate the two cases, but it is an interesting question.
The “overheard” audience of González’s works

Before turning towards the audience that would reject the sympathetic/empathetic union suggested by González, I would like to return to the notion of the implied readership of the text. There are a number of different points of view amongst narratologists in regards to who composes the message of the text—the author, or the reader—which maps closely to Iser’s two poles of the text, the artistic, formed by the author and the aesthetic, formed by the reader. The critic writes that both are of equal importance because “…the text only takes on life when it is realized… The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work in existence…” adding that this realization is never exact, or at least cannot be studied as such (Act of Reading 274-5). Iser also sees the potential text—the convergence—as infinitely rich (280) because the reader provides the unwritten part of the text and the author never sets down the entire picture (282). Because each reader is different and the author intentionally leaves space, it makes sense that there would be as many possible configurations of meanings as there are readers, at least in the view of Iser. Rosenblatt seems to agree with this interpretation as well, seeing the work as the unison of reader and text, something that is continually refined as new information comes in (14). However, this assumes that all views are created equal, and Fish does not seem to believe that to be the case. To support this, he defines the “informed reader,” and asks that, if a reader does not share the central concerns of a work, are they capable of responding to it? Fish believes that they are not (50). The idea of the intended/represented reader would seem to fall somewhat within the
line of thinking of Fish, meaning that the author is directing a work to a specific audience, but this does not necessarily mean that readers not in this audience would be unable to respond to a text. García Landa, for his part, labels these readers, those outside of the intended/represented readership, as “unintended readers,” and believes that they “overhear” texts and make meaning of them as well (192). Although he notes that market dynamics may help to ensure than an unintended reader may have difficulty in finding a text (196), this is not always the case. He also notes that some actual readers will be able to identify with the implied readership even if they do not belong to it, while other may simply remain “eavesdroppers” (204).

Thus, who might be the overheard audience of works like Crossing Vines and Butterfly Boy? Respectively, I have suggested that the intended audience of the first would be one that sees the grape-works as victims of circumstance without agency, leading to the didactic message that these characters (and people) are worthy of respect, not mere pity, while in the second, I see both a homosexual and heterosexual intended readership, bound together through the idea of empathy and catharsis. The focus of the latter part of this chapter has been the proposal of the sympathetic/empathetic union in these works, and how audiences might respond to that call. Thus, if we consider the view of García Landa in conjunction with the idea of the intended readership, we may very well see members of this “overheard audience” that accept the affective union that González lays before them. Here, I am more concerned with those of the overheard audience who do not feel either of
I would like to look at some reader-generated reviews to gauge what the reaction has been to González’s writings. *Butterfly Boy* in particular has a significant amount of reviews online, the vast majority positive, but here, I am more interested in those who seem to fall within this overheard readership. On goodreads.com, where the novel has a large number of reviews, the user Yasmin writes that she did not understand why the author “blame[d] everything on his father. A father that was by no means perfect, but there seemed to be something missing” As noted above, González seems to recognize this himself in the autobiography, which is why he has such a conflictive relationship with his father in the first place—he blames everything on him, but perhaps knows that he should not. Here, it is difficult to judge empathy and/or sympathy, however this reader is likely among the overheard audience who has perhaps not experienced dynamics similar to González and his father. Another reader on the same website left an extremely scathing review, stating that “I don’t know if I ever will finish. I get tired of self-righteous or pitiful authors. I am sorry you are gay and people don’t understand you... I just can only be empathetic to a certain extent!” (Renee). This reader is clearly amongst this overheard audience that rejects González’s empathetic union, recalling Clark’s idea of sympathy credits that was discussed earlier. Of course, there are other potential readerships not discussed here. There may be readers who are potentially sympathetic to the plight of undocumented workers, by are repelled by

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37 It is important to note there may very well be readers who fall within the intended audience that also reject the affective union for their own reasons. When we speak of real readers instead of prototypical intended readers, the study becomes much more complex and difficult to demonstrate on a theoretical basis.
Chela’s abrasive attitude, or who may consider González as overly self-absorbed in *Butterfly Boy*. Capturing these diverse readerships is certainly an area where further scholarship would be productive.

**Conclusion**

It is difficult to speak of these diverse readerships in a novel such as *Crossing Vines* and *Butterfly Boy* because they have not appeared on a best-sellers list, and there is little internet chatter about them. Thus, while we can speak of the theoretical politics and implications of these works, in reality, they likely do not hold that much sway. Nevertheless, even minor works do have an important role to play in changing individual's perceptions of disfavored groups such as migrant workers and gays. Perhaps the importance of a work like *Crossing Vines* is to capture readers who have or may have sympathy towards these characters and their real-world counterparts and transform this into empathy—effectively peeling away the infantilizing rhetoric and replacing it with a realization that these characters (and people) do possess agency and are worthy of respect, not mere pity. The role of *Butterfly Boy*, meanwhile, could be to sway readers to reevaluate their own relationships, realizing that nobody is always a victim or a villain. I believe that González may indeed accomplish these important goal in his works, if, importantly, readers pay attention to evidence that may conflict with their preconceived notions and be willing to accept the transforming rhetoric that the author puts forward.
Chapter 2: Bridging the Gaps and Confronting the Narrator across Manuel Muñoz’s works

Manuel Muñoz could be considered one of the most important emerging voices of Latina/o Literature. His works—short story collections *Zigzagger* (2003) and *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* (2007) and novel *What You See* (2011)—have all received critical acclaim, he was the recipient Whiting Writer’s Award for fiction in 2008, and importantly, he has generated sustained sales, positioning him well for continued success. Although I will explore this last factor more in depth in the final chapter of this study, *Zigzagger* has been a frequent entry on Amazon’s U.S. Hispanic Literature 100 best-sellers chart, and his works consistently outrank those of both Rigoberto González and Alex Espinoza, the other authors included here. Reader reviews have also been overwhelmingly positive, and these readers seem to go on to consider his other works. Amazon’s “Customers Who Viewed This Item Also Bought” feature frequently shows a highly degree of interconnectivity amongst Muñoz’s works that González, for example, lacks.38 This suggests that those who consume Muñoz’s works are more likely to continue on to his other works, which is undoubtedly what publishing houses and authors desire—repeat business. It is also easier to find Muñoz on Amazon.com than either González or Espinoza—the feature

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38 These statistics were tracked in the summer and fall of 2012. See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion.
“Customers Also Bought Items By” contains significantly more “cross-connections” for Muñoz, meaning that he and Arturo Islas, for example, are both listed on each other’s pages.

Aside from considering Muñoz as an important emerging voice, on a more visceral level, his works appear to be highly enjoyable for the reader, as many online reviewers attest. Several students in the U.S. Latino/a Literature course that I referenced in the last chapter selected *What You See* as their favorite work of the class amongst a wide variety that included well established authors such as Sandra Cisneros and Junot Díaz. Nevertheless, unlike with González’s *Crossing Vines* or Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints*, of which fragments were used in the class, it would seem not possible to “lightly” read *What You See*—it is a work that requires the attention of the reader in order to, among other things, discern the motivations of the characters, how the various plot strands weave themselves together, and perhaps most importantly, understand the position of the narrator in the text.

Muñoz frequently plays with the narrator role across his texts, and the effects of this manifest themselves in various ways. For example, in *Zigzagger*, various narrators do not give names to a number of characters (“Zigzagger,” “Campo,” “The Wooden Boat”), while others are addressed directly to the reader, using the second person narrator (“you”). *Faith Healer*, meanwhile, is much more traditional in its approach, but *What You See* again plays with the narrator role, opening and closing the novel in the second person, but using the more common third person in the intervening chapters. This alternation in narrators, and the motivation behind it, seemed to
confound my students during their first reading of the novel, but may have also served to enhance their enjoyment of the work as they revealed in response essays. Given these responses, and my own experiencing reading Muñoz, it became my goal as a researcher to discern how Muñoz plays with the narrator role, and why this seems to make stronger reader involvement in his texts. After mapping out the narrator role across a number of his works, I propose that, many times, his storytellers first pull the reader into the text and then push them out, and it is this ejection from the text that may lead the reader to try to mind read the narrator in order to discern their motivations and find closure in the story, as I discussed with relation to Tan in Chapter 1. I also propose this pull and push action appears to be strongly correlated—the stronger that the reader is pulled into the text, the stronger the subsequent push factor will be. To be clear, I do not assert that this occurs in all of Muñoz’s works, but rather in those texts where Muñoz challenges the audience to read the narrator as if they were a character in the story. Here I will consider a number of his short stories and What You See in order to examine this pull and push, but will first look at the narrator role and specifically, how we can mind read an entity that is usually not physically present in the storyworlds that the author constructs.

**Reading the narrator**

On a basic level, the narrator is our port of entry into a story; they are responsible for what we read because we see the storyworld through their perception of it. As Prince observes, the narrator “is responsible for the shape and
tone of the story . . .” (“Introduction” 8) and “more or less explains the world inhabited by his characters, motivates their acts, and justifies their thoughts” (15). Without doubt, the role of the narrator has engendered a wide breadth of studies within the field of narratology—too many, in fact, to be able to fully summarize here. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Narrative Discourse, Genette distinguishes between a series of narrator positions based upon who is telling the story and where they exist in the storyworld, including the extradiegetic and homodiegetic. Booth, meanwhile, looks at distance between the narrator and the implied author (156), a term which he coined, as well as the idea of the unreliable narrator, which we will see later in this chapter. In the previous chapter we also saw Chatman’s scheme of the “narrative communication situation” (Story 151), which includes the roles of the implied author, narrator and narratee, among others. Of course, this is just a small sample of the work done with the narrator role, but what much of these studies have in common is that they approach the text on an almost semiotic level that some point may lose connection with average readers. Bal, who writes of the layers of narration of narrative, story and fabula, explains that the “analyst . . . distinguishes different layers of a text in order to account for particular effect which the text has upon its readers. Naturally, the reader, at least the ‘average reader’—not the analyst, does not make such a distinction” (6).

With Bal’s observation in mind, and because this study is interested in real readers and how they may perceive the narrators that Muñoz constructs, I have taken interest in Bortolussi and Dixon’s Psychonarratology, which has looked at
narratology from the empirical perspective of reader response. The authors theorize that readers recreate the narrator as if they were a conversational partner (60), that the reader’s perceptions of the narrator and the author likely overlap (74), and they perform a narrator analysis through explicit attributions and inference invitations. The first type of narrator recreation occurs “when characteristics, behavior, knowledge, or beliefs are attributed to the narrator explicitly in the text” (80), while the second “pertain to what is not said about the narrator and consist of those signs and signals that invite the reader to make inferences beyond what is stated in the text” (81). In the authors’ example, an ironic tone may suggest to the reader that the narrator harbors disdain for the characters, even if they do not explicitly say so. When narrators are a part of the storyworld as a character, as they further explain, their thoughts are readily available to analyze, but this is not true of the impersonal narrator, many times known as the third-person. Here, the authors suggest that readers may associate this narrator with a character that has privileged status; that is, that the narrative provides “detailed information about that character’s thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and behaviors” (82), leading to a transposition on the part of the reader, particularly when they do not offer these details for other characters in the same narrative. Nevertheless, I find this to be problematic in some sense as, in many cases, we encounter omniscient narrators that have access to the thoughts of multiple characters.

39 These authors also give a more in-depth overview of research into the narrator, some of which I have touched upon here. See 61-73 of their work.
Stanzel perhaps comes closest to approximating this view, writing that "the narrator . . . can either perform before the eyes of the reader and portray his own narrative act, or can withdraw so far behind the text that the reader is no longer aware of his presence," labeling these as the personalized narrator and the "invisible, unpersonalized stage manage behind the scene" (Theory 17). Here, we can consider Alex Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints*, which will be explored in Chapter 3. In the scheme of Bortolussi and Dixon, the reader may identify the narrator with protagonist Perla, but there are also many chapters in which she exists only a background character, troubling this transposition. In *Still Water Saints*, just as in any number of other narratives, it is likely that the reader does not actively take note of the narrator because there is little reason to do so. If we consider a number of the stories of Muñoz’s *Faith Healer*, there is a fairly straightforward narration in which *who* is telling the story does not seem important. This frequently occurs with third-person narrators who withdraw into the text—although there is always the issue of focalization, discussed in Chapter 1, the function of these narrators in found in introducing the reader to the characters and moving the plot forward, not giving the reader any reason to question their role or to consider them as an independent entity. In the story “Lindo y Querido” from *Zigzagger*, for example, we meet Connie, a housekeeper whose son was recently killed in a motorcycle accident. The narrator of this story builds the plot through carefully placed information gaps, but eventually does resolve the action, including that Connie’s son was in an accident

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40 Stanzel does consider the narrator’s voice as “always audible,” treating them as the mediar of the narrative (*Theory* 4).
with his boyfriend, and both of the young men died. What is of interest in this chapter are the narrators that Muñoz constructs that the audience *must* confront, and how they first pull the reader into the story, and subsequently push them out. I propose that many readers are likely to mind read these narrators in order to discern their true motivations, and will do this taking into account both the explicit attributions and inference invitations that the text contains. Before entering a specific analysis of these stories, however, I will look at the concept of mind reading, also known as Theory of Mind, and how it has proven useful in literature.

**Mindreading the narrator**

On a basic level, Theory of Mind (henceforth referred to as ToM) attempts to explain how humans manage to read each other in day-to-day interactions. As Peter Mitchell reminds his readers, “we are not capable of ESP” (3), meaning that we do not have direct access to the thoughts of others, thus the importance of ToM is found in how it explains how we may believe that we know what another person is thinking. As Mitchell explains further, “we can make an educated guess by observing what other people have or have not seen, and assume that what they think will be based on this” (6). To demonstrate this, he uses the example of somebody being given a box of chocolates and explains this person will believe that the box contains chocolates because they have no reason to assume that it does not. However, if chocolates are replaced with bananas the receiver of the box will still think they are chocolates until they are opened and the switch is discovered. If we, as outside observers, witness this scene in its entirety, including the replacement of chocolates
with bananas, we take into account both actions: that the receiver will still believe that the box contains chocolates because they would have no reason not to think so, but also that the box does indeed contain bananas (Mitchell 3).

Nevertheless, attributing ToM is not always as passive as the example above. Consider expressions such as “I know what you’re thinking,” which implies an interaction between speaker and receptor. Unless the person that we tell this to reveals exactly what they are thinking, we really do not know, because we have no way of accessing their inner thoughts. We can, however, read their behavior. To demonstrate this, Mitchell uses the example of how people attempt to make themselves appealing to another (6). The person who wants to make themself appealing may try to read what the other finds attractive, perhaps through their reactions around others. We may consider these reactions as indicative of what the other finds “attractive,” even if they do not verbalize it—in effect, mindreading them—and adjust ourselves accordingly. Mitchell notes that ToM is particularly useful in communication, where appropriate interactions depend upon the accurate assessment of the speakers’ motives (7). Zunshine, one of the most prominent scholars of the study of ToM in literature, describes it similarly—attributing behavior to underlying mental states, something we do automatically and in context, and further positions it as our endowment as a social species (Why We Read 8).

Leudar and Costall observe that ToM has become increasingly popular in empirical studies in cognitive psychology over the past 30 years (1), and a good deal of this literature has attempted to isolate who is not capable of ToM. The first study
that produced the term ToM did not examine human subjects at all, but rather cognitively capable animals. In “Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind,” Premack and Woodruff theorize that:

[a]n individual has a theory of mind if he imputes mental states to himself and others. A system of inferences of this kind is properly viewed as a theory because such states are not directly observable, and the system can be used to make predictions about the behavior of others. (515)

As Leverage et al. explain, Premack and Woodruff concluded that chimps do indeed possess ToM based on their study results, and soon after the study of ToM moved to humans, where there would be much more interest in the topic due to its practical implications (3), such as what age ToM develops and what its ramifications might be. Empirical studies by Wimmer et al., for example, generally cite age four as the time “when children begin to consider systematically the other person’s informational accesses in the assessment of the other person’s knowledge” (189). In other words, it is at this age that children begin to perceive the difference between their knowledge and that of others. The gap, at least for these researchers, was being able to perceive this difference and being able to detect “poor quality of informational sources,” which occurs at age six (191). In our context of the box of chocolates, it would not be until that time that children would be able to perceive a smirk on the giver’s face as being an indication that something is amiss with the box itself. In connection to human development, some of the most practical implications
of ToM came in the study of autism. According to Leslie, in a 1986 study that he published with Baron-Cohen and Firth, they found that autistic children fared quite poorly in tests involving mental states, even worse than children in the study afflicted with Down’s Syndrome (39). Carruthers summarizes this field, explaining that scholars such as Leslie and Baron-Cohen, across their body of work, argue that “autism should be identified with mind-blindness—that is, with damage to an innate theory of mind module, leading to an inability to understand the mental states of other people” (257). Carruthers believes that this is also reflexive, meaning that people with autism “might have severe difficulties of access to their own occurrent thought processes and emotions . . . they do seem to have difficulty in introspectively knowing what their current thoughts and emotions are” (261).

Aside from these developmental applications, ToM has more recently been applied to literary studies. Its use here is not in the same highly visual manner as those who originally studied it in chimps and the autistic, but instead in its more abstract definition—the “contemplation of others intentions, motives, beliefs and attitudes” (Mitchell, Introduction 11). In literature, this presents itself in how we may read the intentions of others through what we perceive on the written page—how the body gives up the true state of character’s minds. In short, as Zunshine writes, the body becomes the text that we “read,” making assumptions about character’s mental states (“Theory of Mind and Michael Fried” 185). In her influential Why We Read Literature, she explains that this “mind-reading” is pushed to the boundaries of its capabilities by literature, “testing” our ToM competence, and
that our cognitive rewards for taking part would be similar to those of pretend play (17). Furthermore, she believes that this “test” keeps us pleasantly aware that it is running smoothly (17). For example, we may read a certain character as being in lust with another through their corporal actions, also called embodied transparency, and if it is later confirmed there is indeed lust, we receive our “reward”—being correct, which may increase our satisfaction with the text itself.

Zunshine writes that we are able to do this because of “cognitive slippage,” meaning that, at least during the moment of reading, we do not distinguish between real and fictional people (Why We Read 19). In other words, we may become so immersed in a work that the world created within it becomes “real” for us, at least in the moment we are reading it, meaning we read the characters as real people. This can be a point of conflict between average readers of a text and more serious readers such as critics. While the former group may look at a text on a higher level—appreciating aspects such as narrative construction, among others, it is suggested that most readers are likely to appreciate a work of fiction precisely because of this “slippage”—we want to know what will happen to the characters that the author sketches, if the villain will get their comeuppance, if the hero will prevail, or if the star-crossed lovers will finally united after their many trials. The examples that

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42 As we saw in Chapter 1, Vermeule, in Why Do We Care About Literary Characters, believes that readers “animate” characters in literature, but also deanimate those who have negative qualities, such as killers (26).
43 This could also be considered as reading for plot, which Brooks notes has been generally disdained amongst critics as a low form of reading (252). Nevertheless, I consider it one of the primary jobs of the narrator to make the plot interesting to readers, and to maintain forward motion in the story. Pertaining to best-sellers, Schutte and Malouff observe that “one is struck by common elements of
authors such as Zunshine, Mitchell, et al. give are innumerable, but all work on the assumption that we will animate the characters in some way that is not necessarily written on the page and that, many times, the author forces the reader to do this in order to understand what is happening (Oatley 15). As Oatley suggests, ToM “is a requirement to understand this kind of narrative” (15)—it “builds-out” scenes in our minds, and, as Palmer adds, it fleshes out characters and adds context (14).

In Fictional Minds, Palmer theorizes that readers may “create a continuing consciousness out of the isolated passages of text that relate to a particular character,” and assemble these perhaps diverse pieces together into an “embedded narrative,” which includes “the whole of a character’s various perceptual and conceptual viewpoints, ideological worldviews, and plans for the future considered as an individual narrative that is embedded in the whole fictional text” (15).

Presumably, ToM would be a part of this construction. What interests me here is the idea of creating a “continuing consciousness,” and how, if we return to Bortolussi

44 While theorists of ToM may have been somewhat critical of more structuralist forms of narratology (see the introduction to Palmer’s Fictional Minds), there have undoubtedly been criticisms of ToM as well. Although the anthology Against Theory of Mind does not specifically delve into literature, editors Leudar and Costall are concerned that “there exists not one single published response in which proponents of Theory of Mind address systematically and carefully the objections to their programme” (1). Reddy and Morris, for example, see ToM as something that is now seen as “awesomely matter-of-fact – with a taken-for-grantedness hitherto reserved for those other staples of psychology such as ‘growth spurt’, ‘toilet training’, ‘short term memory’ and ‘secure attachment’ (91). Williams, meanwhile, in looking at autobiographies written by high-functioning autistics, writes that “we do not usually have to theorize that other people have minds in order to understand and relate to them” (144).
and Dixon’s idea of explicit attributions and inference invitations to the narrator in the text, it may be suggested that the reader does this for the storyteller as well. What I propose is that the reader will indeed “mind read” the narrator of a given text if they call attention to themselves, using the textual signals and features in order to do this. Theoretically, this may occur in any piece of literature, but in the case of some of Muñoz’s narratives, mind reading the narrators is perhaps more important than doing so for the characters, and furthermore, is necessary in order to understand what Phelan has called the “layered ethical situation” and “cultural narratives” (Living 20) of the stories themselves, concepts which I will explore later in this chapter. Across his works, Muñoz primary employs two distinct varieties of this mind readable narrator, the vague and the emotive, and in the following section I will look at how these narrators first pull the reader into the story and then push them out, and what implications this has for the message of the texts.

Vague narration and information gaps

As mentioned earlier, many of Muñoz’s stories depend upon carefully placed gaps information that are resolved later in the story. For Iser, who originally theorized gaps in literature, this idea of “indeterminate elements” is something that much literature shares in common, and indeed may drive reader arousal in the text.45 In “The Reading Process,” he explains that “[i]f the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when

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45 See note 43 for further studies on the concept of reader arousal.
everything is laid out cut and dried before us” (51). Thus, as he explains in The Act of Reading, “[w]hat is concealed spurs the reader into action,” and it is from this action that true reader-textual communication begins (169). In many cases, these gaps and blanks force the reader to “reconstitute” the text, a process of filling in gaps by evaluating what is both said and not said (169). For Iser, then, the reader is able to creatively fill in these gaps almost automatically through use of their imagination, and as Spolsky further explains, we do this because of innate cognitive structures (2). However, the gaps that I will consider here are more tied to plot development; specifically, questions that the text raises during the course of reading in order to arouse the interest of the audience, but ones that are typically resolved by the end of the story. An example of this may be found with “When You Come into Your Kingdom” from Faith Healer, where an opportunity for ToM and embodied transparency may also arise. We can infer from the tone of how the narrator describes protagonist Santiago near the beginning of the story that something is weighing heavily on him. After an exchange with a teenage working with him over the summer, the narrator writes “The teenager’s voice hangs with him—I'm a junior in September—the deep register, his Adam’s apple knotty. He is a boy progressing solidly past adolescence, and Santiago thinks of his son Alejandro, but refuses the memory” (78). Here, the reader has direct insight into the mind of the protagonist—something is clearly bothering him, but we are also presented with a number of questions that serve to drive the momentum of the story forward. What is bothering Santiago? What does Alejandro have to do with the teenager with whom Santiago is
working? Why does he refuse the memory? Eventually, we discover that Alejandro inadvertently committed suicide because, at least from what the story tells us, his father constantly shamed him about being overweight.

In the case of the most narrators, this is what the reader expects from the narrator—a guide through the story that presents gaps in information in order to raise our arousal in the story, but also one that answers our most critical questions by the conclusion. Nevertheless, in a number of Muñoz’s stories, I propose that we are likely to go back to attempt to fill in these gaps, perhaps through a second reading, because the narrator does not give us enough information to provide for closure. Here, we must also distinguish which sorts of gaps in information are likely to cause discord within the reader and which will not. For example, in What You See, the narrator does not reveal where Dan Watson flees to after the murder of girlfriend Teresa, although the text does hint around at various locations. Ultimately, I do not believe that this detail is important in the overall scheme of the storyworld and thus it does not count as an “information gap” that may cause the reader to reexamine the text. Indeed, the reader may use their imagination to fill in these types of gaps, just as Iser envisions, but they are unlikely to make the reader stop and question the integrity of the text itself. When I talk of information gaps in Muñoz, I refer to those that affect our ability to understand the story—those that seem purposefully placed by the narrator in order to raise some of question within us, the readers, and to pull us into the story. What is salient in Muñoz's vague narrator is that they do not resolve the most critical gaps even though the answer
may seem obvious to the reader, and it is this dissonance on the part of the narrator that pushes the reader out of the story. This narrator is employed in a number of Muñoz’s stories, many times to different ends, which may lead the reader to employ Theory of Mind to discern why the narrator is so coy with its audience.

“Zigzagger,” which opens the collection of the same name, immediately confronts the reader with several information gaps that effectively set the tone for the rest of the book. Here, instead of focusing on what these gaps may be, perhaps it is better to summarize what the narrator does reveal. The principal characters of the story are the boy, the father and the mother, who are not given proper names. We know that the boy came home sick last night, vomited on the lawn, and his father and mother are now nursing him back to health. The mother is rather upset, while the father has become angry. The boy got sick after attending a dance, and it is implied that he consumed too much alcohol and attracted the attention of an older man. We also know that his friends come by to see him, but they insist that they do now know what happened to him at the gathering. The mother refuses to give them any information about his condition, insisting that “[t]hey don’t need to know anything” (15). What may be immediately striking to the reader is that, even though we do have a clear sense of who these people are and what their motivations may be, we are not given their names—instead, they simply go by the mother, the father, and the boy for the entire duration of the story. This may imply some sort of distance between the narrator and the characters, but this is contrasted with the fact that the reader is given personal insights into the characters, particularly the
mother. For example, as she is preparing a cream that she will use to heal the son (of what, we are not sure), the narrator writes:

She is crying in the kitchen, mixing the mint and the oil and the water, and to make it froth, she adds a bit of milk and egg. The concoction doesn’t seem right to her anymore, doesn’t match what he recalls as a young girl, her grandmother taking down everyday bottles from cabinets and blessing their cuts and coughs. The mother does it without any knowledge, only guessing, but it makes her feel better despite feeling lost in her inability to remember. (9)

Here, the lack of names, implying a distance, is contrasted with the immediate closeness of knowing the personal thoughts of the mother and being able to pull from her memories and feelings with ease. This also occurs with the son, particularly when he is at the dance hall and catches the attention of the older man. Thus, the reader may also be led to believe that the narrator is purposefully obscuring their identities, but we are not told why.

In terms of plot, the critical gap in information of the story, and what pulls the reader in, quickly becomes what happened to the boy—given that the story is centered upon his illness and how distraught it has made his parents, the reader needs this critical piece of information in order to obtain narrative closure. As the narrative moves along, parts of this gap are seemingly filled in by the narrator. The boy had a “violent sleep” as his parents watched over him through the night, that his body “glistened, his legs kicking away the blankets as he moaned” (5). We know that
the situation is severe because the mother has considered contacting a priest, or
even a doctor, but the narrator also observes that they cannot call the latter and
have “him witness this” (8). There is also a “rotten smell” emanating from him (10),
and the narrator makes sure to note that the mother is observing the boy closely,
presumably in case his condition changes. However, this information only leads to
more questions, particularly when the mother is examining his legs. The narrator
writes: “Her son’s legs are hairless and cool to the touch. There are no raised veins.
They are not reddened with welts. They are not laced with deep scratches made
with terrible fingers” (10). Why would they be laced with deep scratches? Whose
terrible fingers would have made the marks that do not exist?

Given that the narrator interlaces the home scene of the sick boy with the
dance the night before, the reader is led to assume that something terrible happened
at the event. The narrator relates that the boy attracted the attention of an older
man at the dance, who the boy knew “was not like them” because he did not have an
accent (14), and that they left together. With the question of what happened to the
boy still in mind, the reader can assume that something will happen between him
and the man. Somewhere outside, they have what might be able to be described as a
sexual encounter, but again, the narrator does not make this clear:
And though [the boy] felt he was in air, he saw a flash of the man’s feet entrenched fast in the ground—long, hard hooves digging into the soil., the height of horses when they charge—it was then that the boy remembers seeing and feeling at the same time—the hooves, then a piercing in the depth of his belly that made his eyes flash a whole battalion of stars, shooting and brilliant, more and more of them, until he had no choice but to scream out. (17)

This passage offers the reader all of the information that they will receive in order to try to fill the gaps of the story, but the passage is still fraught with ambiguities. On the surface, this may recount a sexual act, which would seem to connect with a fragment earlier that the boy had noted the man’s handsomeness. There may also be indications that the man slipped the boy drugs when he offered the boy a beer (14), which may also explain why the boy was so sick when he arrived home.

Nevertheless, the reader might also see this as the recounting of a beating of the boy by the man because of the former’s sexual advances, particularly in how the boy recalls the man’s feet with an animal-like comparison, then the piercing in his stomach, and his ultimate scream. This would also explain why the mother is preparing a cream, perhaps to rub on the boy’s body to heal his wounds. Here, we see a clear example of how the vague narrator carefully places these information gaps, but when it comes to the critical gap that would lead to understanding the entire story—what happened to the boy—the narrator becomes vague does not clarify, which pushes us out of the story in a search for closure. In essence, the
narrator reveals everything, focalizing to an almost extreme extent at both the party and at home, but at the same time, reveals little to aid in our understanding of the plot. Here, the reader may indeed attempt to mind read the narrator—why exactly does this entity refuse to clarify what happened to the boy? Does the narrator simply not know what happened? This seems unlikely given the details shared about the incident itself. Here, a revelation about the mother may shed light on why the narrator takes this approach, specifically: “[s]he believes, as she always has, that talking aloud brings moments to light” (18). If we are to believe that the man and the boy did have a sexual encounter, we can infer from this passage that homosexuality remains “hidden” if it is not talked about, thus if the narrator does fill in all of the information gaps surrounding the encounter, it does not become real. Following this logic, we may be able to read some sort of shame on the part of the narrator about the topic of homosexuality, given that events are implied, but never completely revealed.

“The Unimportant Lila Parr” is somewhat less vague than “Zigzagger,” but shares other similarities. Here, the narrator introduces the reader to Lila Parr, a widower whose deceased husband gave their land to their neighbors, a husband and wife. These neighbors are the protagonists of the story, but just as in “Zigzagger,” they are not given names, which may imply some sort of distance between the narrator and the story. Or perhaps the narrator does not reveal their names in order to strengthen the argument that they are not important—after all, if Lila Parr is “unimportant,” how important could those who remain nameless be? The reader is
quickly pulled into the story when the narrator observes that "[h]e looks at his own wife, how she stands on the brink of something, and can see her anger begin to light from across the yard, how much she is beginning to resent being like Lila Parr, suddenly childless" (41). Suddenly, an information gap is revealed—what happened to their child? If we are reading these stories in sequence, we may notice that this gap is similar to the one found in “Zigzagger,” although here it appears that we will be given more information to provide for closure. Later, the narrator reveals further details when the couple identifies their son’s body at the morgue:

    Their son’s body was naked and discolored, his eyes closed . . .
    The sheriff had told [the father] . . . that their son may have been strangled, that two needles had been resting on the nightstand. . . . He knew that the culprit had been caught . . . a young man the same age as their son. He knew that their son’s body had been found naked and he stopped himself from completing the picture with that young man’s involvement. (43)

It is clear that the father suspects that the son and the other “young man” were having some sort of sexual tryst, likely drug-fuelled, but the narrator never completely writes those exact words to close this information gap. What the narrator does relate are the insinuations of the townsfolk (43), and how rife with prostitution the motel is where the boy’s body was found (45), implying that is it seedy. Again, as in “Zigzagger,” the narrator comes close to closing the pivotal gap
towards the end of the story, but again dances around the theme of homosexuality.

The narrator writes, from the perspective of the motel owner:

[The motel owner] has denied that the motel allows such illicit activities, that he has never found such things as needles or plastic bags... He will consider writing to the young man's father and explaining that it was all about love as well as anger... He will write and tell him, plainly, that he saw the young man step out of the car. Then the other young man and how they stood by the door, close together and tentative, and then rushed inside. (46)

Nevertheless, this observation is nothing more than mere insinuation, just as with the townsfolk. That they stood "close together and tentative" does not necessarily imply that they were lovers, but this is the closest that the narrator comes to filling in the main information gap of the story—what happened to the son, which again pushes the reader out of the story in this search for closure. Read in conjunction with "Zigzagger," the reader again sees the theme of hushed and shameful homosexuality—that, if it is not spoken aloud, it is somehow not real.

The vague narrator appears a number of times in Zigzagger, including the flash fiction-esque "Swallow." This particular story immediately confronts the reader, starting: "You were a boy then. You are a boy now..." (47). Here, the use of the second person narration may disorient the reader, making it seem as though the narrator is addressing the audience directly. Fludernik considers the "you" narrator to be a highly odd permutation (114) that undercuts clear-cut dichotomies typically
at play within a work of fiction (101). The effect of this, she writes, is to play with the fact and fiction distinction in order to disorient, and in turn, reorient the reader (102). She observes that the you narrator was used to great effect in Michel Butor’s 1957 novel *La modification*, which sparked a significant amount of research into this area of narratology (107). Muñoz also employs this narrator in the first and final chapters of *What You See in the Dark*, which will be explored later. Of course, the reader of “Swallow” knows that they are not being addressed directly, but the use of this second person does immediately force the reader to take note of the narrator role. Although the story is just over one page long, the reader is presented with several information gaps that they make attempt to resolve, pulling them into the story. After the first line, the narrator continues:

> Look at those boys. Those boys looking at boys. But this is about way back when, as a little boy, and how you mimicked. You mimicked in the backyard the things you saw. They took you to the circus and you saw the strong man. You eyed the strong man at the circus the way only a boy can. You admired him. (47).

Reading *Zigzagger* in sequence, the reader would likely realize that “those boys looking at boys” means that this is a queer themed story—that the “you” referred to in the narration is homosexual. Iser speaks to this in theorizing that blanks and gaps force “combination” in search of meaning (*Act* 182)—thus, a reader may consider this story in the context of those that came before it in the collection in order to find
Nevertheless, if the story was not read in sequence, or perhaps taken out of the context of the larger collection, we may be able to consider the “you” more simply as boys who admire other males, perhaps as role models, something strengthened by the final line this opening paragraph—“You admired him.” Notably, the narrator does not choose a more obvious phrasing, such “You were attracted to him,” but rather something much more benign and playful. As the story continues, this information gap, again, is never fully resolved. In the last third of the story the narrator comes close to closing the gap, but again withholds, writing:

You know boys who’ve swallowed fire. They ache for fire. It sits in their bellies and burns. You’ll burn too, your father tells you. You’ve burned already, for a strange boy who took you to a strange place. You did things that you no longer think are strange. (47-8)

This passage could be interpreted in two different ways, first, as confirmation that “you” is indeed gay—strange things done with a strange boy—and the father is warning him that he will burn in hell for it, or, alternatively, as a much more care-infused warning from the father to be careful when partaking in the dangerous, reckless things that young males sometimes do. Nevertheless, either of these readings still infuses reader derived meaning that is not necessarily present within the story itself because the vague narrator does not fully resolve these information gaps, pushing the reader out of the story in this search for closure. Again, as with

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46 Iser further explains that blanks break up connectability in texts (Act 182), but I would instead argue that, in least in the Zigzagger collection, blanks actually work to force connectability and create meaning for the reader—in particular, the theme of a hidden and shameful homosexuality.
“Zigzagger,” the reader may wonder why the narrator does not fully clarify the story, but in the case of “Swallow” that is a much more difficult question to answer given the short length of the story. Perhaps, once again, the reader needs to take the advisement of the mother in the “Zigzagger”—some things are better left unsaid—and because homosexuality is left unsaid, for the narrator and “you” alike, it is somehow less real.

This dance around the subject of homosexuality continues in “The Heart Finds its Own Conclusion,” from The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue. Here, Sergio has found himself in some sort of trouble, fleeing his home and urging his cousin Celia to pick him up at the bus station in Fresno. The immediate information gaps created by the narrator are if Sergio will indeed arrive in Fresno, something which worries Celia, and why he had to flee in the first place. Unfortunately for Sergio, his “trouble” has followed him by car, and arrives at the bus station in Fresno to confront Celia before Sergio arrives. Here, the reader may expect some of the information gaps of the story to be resolved, but again, the narrator remains elusive. After Celia asks the man what he wants from Sergio, he responds: “He’s got my heart,” which may push the reader towards the conclusion of a lover’s quarrel. Nevertheless, the narrator immediately adds: “the man said, melodramatically, holding his hands across his chest, but he sneered a bit when he said it. “He’s got a lot of things I want back” (58). The narrator’s observations here are vague in themselves—a sort of confirmation of a lover’s quarrel, but in an ironic tone—and may not lead the reader to consider the information gap closed. Further along in the story, when Sergio finally arrives, the
man violently reacts: “You little fucker—you think I didn’t know you’d come here?”

The man hit Sergio hard against the back of his head, his palm flat and backed by the force of his rolling shoulders” (64). If this were a lover’s quarrel, one may expect a more melodramatic scene—could the situation possible have a criminal element to it that the narrator does not reveal? The narrator never closes the gap, pushing the reader out of the story, so once again we may be led to consider the story as another in which homosexuality is spoken about in hushed tones given the context of Muñoz’s body of work.47

It is important to note that not all of the queer themes in Muñoz’s works are hushed or left unconfirmed. In fact, many are quite open—in Zigzagger, “Good as Yesterday” tells of an openly gay teenager who falls in love with his sister’s ex-boyfriend, despite the consequences, “Skyshot” looks at a pair of lovers who are film buffs, “By the Time You Get There, by the Time You Get Back” explores a how a father’s relationship with his son and his son’s unseen boyfriend, while Faith Healer is full of tales of gay characters, including Sergio, who we saw earlier. Likewise, not all of the vague narration that Muñoz employs is exclusively found in queer-themed stories. In Zigzagger’s “Tiburón,” kids anxiously await the man who sells shark teeth

47 A younger Sergio appears in the story “The Comeuppance of Lupe Rivera,” near the end of Faith Healer. In this story, the reader receives confirmation of Sergio’s homosexuality, and that, after a recent move from to Fresno from Bakersfield, “[j]ilted boyfriends come... by the house and pound... on the door” (186). Thus, the reader can likely assume that the man in “The Heart Finds its Own Conclusion” is also one of those “jilted boyfriends.” They key difference between “Lupe Rivera” and “The Heart Finds its own Conclusion” is that the first is narrated by Sergio himself, who obviously has access to all of the details of his own life, while the second is narrated in the third person, by a narrator who obviously does not have access to the same details. Muñoz frequently employs this strategy in Faith Healer—revisiting characters in later stories and picking up their thread from there. Overall, this strategy serves to create a more cohesive collection overall than his first, Zigzagger, although perhaps ones less conducive to a study such as this.
to come to town, and marvel at just how “valuable” these items are. Throughout the story, the reader may wait for some sort of indication as to what the significance of these teeth is, but none comes. As the last paragraph explains, “[t]hey hold their shark tooth between their fingers and poke themselves with it if their eyes shut, won’t let it leave now that they have it. Never wanted it to come in the first place” (32). Again, we have a gap in information that the narrator does not fill in, but here it is much more difficult to mind-read the narrator due to the lack of information in the story itself.

In “Campo,” also from *Zigzagge*, a boy (who goes nameless) takes care of other children in a migrant work camp outside of town, but is stymied by a woman who sees these children wandering around storefronts and decides to contact Child Protective Services. The gaps in this story consist of why the boy feels that he must protect these children, and the significance of another boy who ran towards him in the park and later appeared in his dreams. As the story draws to a close, the narrator recounts: “Next to him, the boy from yesterday stands so near now that he can smell his copper scent, and when the green eyes look at him, he does not want to know any longer what it is like to be so close to things” (62). The reader never discovers why the boy feels that he must protect the children, nor the significance of the other boy. We are effectively pushed out of the story, but lack the context to close these gaps on our own, and are likely unable to tie this story to a hidden and shameful homosexuality that Muñoz frequently explores in this collection.
Returning to Phelan’s conception of the cultural narrative, he writes it is something that “has a sufficiently wide circulation so that we can legitimately say that its author, rather than being a clearly identified individual, is a larger collective entity, perhaps a whole society at least some significant subgroup of society” (Living 8). Furthermore, he writes that “[c]ultural narratives fulfill the important function of identifying key issues and values within the culture or subculture that tells them . . .” (9). Phelan’s theorization of the layered ethical situation also speaks specifically to the vague narrator that Muñoz employs. He writes that “[a]ny character’s action will typically have an ethical dimension, and any narrator’s treatment of the events will inevitably convey certain attitudes towards the subject matter and the audience . . .” (20). The cultural narrative that we have seen so far in many of Muñoz’s narratives is that of homosexuality being hidden and shameful, something also seen in many other works, including González’s Crossing Vines and Butterfly Boy, as well as in the works of Arturo Islas, to name but a few Chicano authors. The way in which the vague narrator conveys the theme of homosexuality speaks further to the layered ethical situation, both in how the characters of a story such as “Zigzagger” cannot bring themselves to mention it, and the narrator merely skirts the issue.

Nevertheless, I also believe that the structure of Zigzagger also speaks to a further cultural narrative as many of these vaguely narrated stories, with the theme of homosexuality representing a good deal of the information gaps that the reader confronts, come in the first half of the collection. As I mentioned previously, there are also a number of queer-themed stories in the second half of the collection, but
the narration is not nearly as vague and the homosexuality of the characters is
treated in an open, honest manner. Some protagonists even find support in family
members, such as Nicky the gay teenager in “Good as Yesterday,” and this trend
continues in *Faith Healer*. I posit that Muñoz does this purposefully, perhaps to ease
the reader into what is a heavily queer-themed collection, despite no outward
indication of this on the book-jacket or in reviews, and to further indicate a
progression in how homosexuality is viewed not only in the Chicano community, but
also the country at large. In an interview with *Harvard Magazine*, Muñoz explains
that “[i]t's understood in my family that I am [gay], but we don't discuss it, which is a
very typical Mexican Catholic response” (Porter Brown). This is perhaps indicative
of how we can read the narrator in the stories highlighted earlier—it is understood
that the characters in these stories are homosexual, but the narrator never quite
arrives to the point of actually discussing it openly, instead talking around it,
indicating some sort of shame regarding the topic. The first-person narrator of the
story “Brother John” from *Faith Healer* also summarizes this: when Brother John is
confessing a relationship he had with a man while he was away at school, the
narrator, who does not share his own similar story, cuts him off rather abruptly. His
reason is simple: “…I learned a long time ago to keep things simple. Don’t tell much.
Don’t tell everything. Don’t reveal what people don’t need or want to know. It makes
it easier all around” (119).
The vague narrator as unreliable?

Earlier I wrote of a narrator that acts as an independent personality within the text, and indeed, in the stories examined to this point, the reader may only have their attention drawn to the narrator role because of gaps in information within the story itself. I have been careful not to label this vague narrator as unreliable, a term which brings with it a wide body of connotations that I truly do not believe apply here. This idea of the unreliable narrator was first coined by Booth in his foundational 1961 work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, who wrote that: “I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not” (158-9). Nevertheless, many critics have seen this definition as problematic given that it assumes that we can arrive at the heart of the implied author’s “norms,” when there is still much disagreement about what the implied author actually is.48 Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter, Bortolussi and Dixon consider the role of the “implied author” as problematic for readers in general (74). Chatman later theorized that the unreliable narrator may be employed to cast doubt on the “narrator’s integrity, sanity, maturity, astuteness, sobriety, intelligence, or whatever” (*Reading* 242), while Nünning sees this role as manifesting itself in dramatic irony or discrepancy awareness. The critic further explains that “[f]or the reader, either the internal lack of harmony between the statements of the narrator or contradictions between the narrator’s perspective and his own concept of

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48 See Nünning 55-6 for a summary of this critique

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normality suggest that the narrator’s reliability may be suspect” (58). Phelan sees six main types of unreliable narration, divided into two groups: misreading, misreporting, and misregarding, and underreporting, undereading and underregarding (Living 51). He further explains that readers, upon encountering an unreliable narrator, must “reject those words, and, if possible, reconstruct a more satisfactory account; or . . . accept what the narrator says but then supplement the account” (50-1). It would be easy to categorize Muñoz’s vague narrator as underreporting—purposefully telling less than they know (51)—forcing the reader to supplement with suppositions of their own. But we also must heed the distinction that Phelan makes between unreliable underreporting and reliable elliptical narration, specifically that the latter “leaves a gap that the narrator and the implied author expect their respective audiences to be able to fill” (52).

While I believe that we could consider some of Muñoz’s stories as employing unreliable underreporting, particularly in Zigzagger (for example, in “Campo”), because homosexuality is such a recurrent theme in his works, information gaps involving the theme become “fillable” very quickly, thus considering this reliable elliptical narration rather than unreliable is much more plausible. I view Muñoz’s use of the vague narrator as a precise artistic choice because of the anxieties it may produce in the reader—it forces them to both pay attention to the text because it pulls them in and subsequently pushes them out, and also to consider what it may be like to be homosexual in a Latino/a community. Even if we consider the more classical view of the unreliable narrator as being in conflict with the norms of the
implied author, here, the real author, Muñoz, is not in conflict with this entity, but rather he uses it to construct a message in the text, and the reader will discover this as they move along in his collection to stories where homosexuality is an open topic. Nevertheless, I do believe that there may be more of a space for consideration of unreliability in the second type of Muñoz’s narrators that I will address: the emotive.

**Judgment and jealousy in Muñoz’s emotive narrators**

The majority of Muñoz’s third-person narrators are the type that readers typically do not notice because they fade into the background of the story, including most of those employed in *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue*, and in every chapter but the first and the last of *What You See in the Dark*. It is generally in *Zigzag* that we see deviations from this in the form of the independent narrator which, as Stanzel writes, acts as a personality within the work (“New Approach” 163) even though, in many of the examples which will follow, they are not present in the storyworld. This type of narrator may serve to draw a reader deeper into a story as it adds an extra layer of complexity and intrigue. If we consider, for example, Clarice Lispector’s 1977 novel *A hora da estrela*, which I recently taught in another class, we find a male narrator who openly introduces himself as Rodrigo S.M. and almost immediately tells the reader what his intentions are. He writes that he saw protagonist Macabéa on the streets in Rio de Janeiro and decided to tell her story, even though he does not physically appear in the story world. He writes that: “I want my story to be cold and impartial. Unlike the reader, I reserve the right to be devastatingly cold, for this
is not a simple narrative, but above all primary life that breathes …” (12-3). As my
students continued in the novel, they became preoccupied with mind reading
Rodrigo S.M. to discern why he treats Macabéa the way that he does. Some
considered him a harsh person who revels in pointing out how awful this person’s
life is, while others saw him as manipulating Macabéa as a form of therapy in order
to work through his own problems. Instead of fading into the background or
creating information gaps that are left unresolved, this independent narrator is
often slanted and opinionated, greatly affecting our impression of the story and the
characters within it. Thus, it is easier to attribute ToM to these narrators because
they are opinionated and often tell us exactly what they are thinking, leading us to
form our own opinions in agreement with them, or sometimes not, as may be the
case in Muñoz’s works. The author employs this variety of narrator a number of
times across his works, divided into two primary types: the judgmental and the
jealous. This section will look at both, including how they are constructed, how the
reader is led to label them as judgmental and jealous, respectively, and how they
pull us into the story, and subsequently push us out.

The judgmental narrator is most prominent in "Monkey Sí” from the
collection Zigzagger, which tells the story of two young men from the Central Valley
of California, Nestor and Tomás, who travel to San Francisco to visit a gay night club.
Nestor is in love with Tomás, but it is not reciprocated because Nestor is not
deemed as “acceptable” enough to date by the other. Their trip ends in badly: when
Tomás leaves the club for a tryst with a man from New York, Nestor is drugged and
raped in an alley by two men who had been watching him closely. When Tomás later returns to the club in search of Nestor, he eventually discovers that he had been taken to the hospital. The two flee the scene, scared of the hospital contacting their parents, and drive back to the Central Valley, but barely speak a word to each other. However, the narrator does not leave the tale of these young men up in the air; he reveals that they never talk again—Tomás perhaps feels guilty and does not know how to approach Nestor, while Nestor seethes with anger because he believes that he would not have been raped had Tomás not abandoned him at the night club. Intensifying this anger is a surge of previously repressed feelings, specifically that Tomás never appreciated him at best, and was openly neglectful at worst. Because of the emotive narration, it becomes very clear in the story who the reader is supposed to find sympathetic (Nestor), and who they are not (Tomás). This sympathy is also tinged with the aspect of race: amongst the opening lines of the story, the narrator asks: “Do we already know the Nestor will lose out by the end of the story (and in life, because we have mentioned that he is dark skinned and small and these men don’t like either)” (167-8). This racial aspect is reinforced when the narrator writes that Tomás has given Nestor a number of nicknames, including “monkey” (177). Furthermore, Nestor is consistently drawn as a sympathetic, well rounded, caring person, whereas Tomás is quite the opposite. He dresses neatly (169) while Tomás does not (168), he is careful not to drink and drive even though Tomás insists that it “couldn’t hurt” (171), and Nestor buys Tomás’ entrance into clubs while the latter “lingers by the doorman, as if forgetting that he has to pay”
The narrator goes as far as to interlace scenes of Nestor’s rape with those of Tomás’ tryst with the New Yorker, writing that “Tomás is mean enough to wish that Nestor were there, watching this” (178), implying that not only Tomás is willing to give himself to a white stranger, but not to Nestor, but is also cruel and vindictive.

Before further examining how this narrator coerces the reader into judging these characters, it is also useful to look at how Muñoz constructs this role. Although the narrator here is omniscient, privy to the thoughts of both Tomás and Nestor, he is also somewhat distant and removed from the story. At times it appears as though the narrator is describing a series of photographs or a television show and providing a running commentary. For example, the narrator describes:

We can see then, from a distance, as a group of friends. . . but if we get close, if we let the adjectives take on their clothes (black pants, loose blue jeans, shiny shoes, shirts spread across impossible backs). . . we would find that the group is a mangle of hesitations. We can see two of the trying to walk on either side of Tomás, that Nestor is alone and trying to keep up. (168-9)

There is almost a filmic quality to this vivid description, strengthened in the “close up” paragraph that immediately follows:
Later, if we like, we can get as close to Nestor as we want when we listen to Tomás tell him about why the two were walking on either side of him. Nestor will be on the telephone... His heart will be beating fast and we will leave him alone to put down the receiver and do whatever he does when Tomás says these terrible things to him.

(169)

In the last sentence, because Nestor effectively moves “out of the frame,” the narrator can no longer relate what happens. At one point, during Nestor’s rape, the narrator asks the reader if we “want to see it happening? (We know what’s happening)” (175). The narrator will describe this scene in great detail on the next page, but readers may be led to feel they are given the option to stop the story in its tracks, even though we know this not possible unless we put the book down.

The use of the “we” also serves to automatically include the reader in passing judgment on these characters, sharing in the narrator’s thoughts, effectively pulling us into the story. “We” will leave Nestor alone “when Tomás says these terrible things to him” (169), “we” can consider Tomás insensitive “if we like” (174), “we” know that Tomas must resist internalizing the love that Nestor obviously shares for him (179), “. . . we purse our lips at Tomás” when he does not look for Nestor before he leaves the club (175), and after Nestor is raped, “we will hate him as much as Nestor will for the rest of his life” (180). Our mindreading of the narrator tells us that he thinks Tomas is a bad person, and we, the reader, should think so as well.

49 This is also an issue of focalization on the part of the narrator, which is discussed more in depth in Chapter 1.
But what if the reader does not agree with this assessment and declines to participate in the “we” narration? Perhaps they may not blame Tomás for Nestor’s rape, or may have had a similar admirer that they had to shake off despite hurting their feelings. The judgmental narrator does open a space in the story for some sort of sympathy towards Tomás in spite of his overwhelmingly negative portrayal, perhaps so that those readers who side with him are not demonized as well. “We” know that Tomás thinks he has “bad blood,” even if it doesn’t mean much to “us” (173), and “if we follow Tomás, we will see him go home and lie in his bed, and he will cry” (181) after the trip to San Francisco, but ultimately, he does not know why he does this; “we can’t know because Tomás doesn’t have a clue, either” (181). At the same time, however, these descriptions almost serve to reinforce the negative judgment of Tomás given that he is incapable of rationalizing or explaining his emotions, even towards a sympathetic being such as Nestor. For those readers who still look past these details and take Tomás’ side of the story, the narrator sets a trap near the conclusion, asking innocently: “Who do we care about? Who do we identify with?” (181). This allows the reader to perceive, perhaps, an opening for some sort of sympathy towards Tomás, or an “agree to disagree” split between those who sympathize with Tomás, and those who side with Nestor. But the narrator closes this door as quickly as it is opened: after describing Nestor sitting and eating cereal after the incident, he writes:
His name is Nestor and some of us think he should levitate or endure something spiritual like that to close this story, floating right through the ceiling, sprouting wings... Some of us will stay with him. Others of us won’t (so go to Tomás, or Tommy, because he lets people call him that now). The rest of you can go to him on an invisible cloud... We will stay with Nestor... (182)

Here, there is a clear split in the “we” narrator—those readers who may side with Nestor, who we should side with according to the narrator, and the rest, the “you,” who side with “Tommy,” and it is those readers who are promptly pushed out of the story. In the end, the narrator is not only judging Tomás, but also any readers who may side with his character. These readers, following the narrator’s logic, should be ashamed of themselves for harboring such sympathies towards Tomás, and are effectively rejected from the story altogether.

This judgmental narrator is also employed in What You See in The Dark, although it may not be readily apparent to the reader. The novel follows the lives of three women in 1950s Bakersfield, California: Teresa, who works at a shoe shop and is brutally murdered after being involved in a love triangle, Arlene, an aging waitress who cannot come to grips with the rapidly changing world around her, and an actress in town filming a movie. Generally, aside from the use of information gaps in describing “the actress” and “the film” she is working on—clearly Janet Leigh in her most iconic role as secretary Marion Crane in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film Psycho, even though the narrator does not specifically name either—the narration of
the novel itself is fairly simple, following squarely within the third person. However, in the opening chapter the reader is confronted with the “you” narration, but we do not know who this “you” is, creating a number of information gaps that the reader may struggle to fill, pulling them into narrative. In the opening line of the novel, the narrator writes: “[i]f you had been across the street, pretending to investigate the local summer roses outside Holliday’s Flower Shop, you could have seen them through the café’s plate glass, the two sitting in a booth by the window, eating lunch” (3). The reader does not discover who “the two” are until a few pages later—Teresa and Dan Watson, son of Arlene—but the identity of “you” remains a mystery. Nevertheless, just as in “Monkey Sí,” where the reader is never quite sure if the narrator is somebody who knows these characters or is an outsider merely describing the scene, the “you” does aid in bringing the reader closer to the action—“You could see that girl walking to work at the shoe store” (4), “You can see Dan over in his pick-up truck” (11), and so on. It is not until deeper into the chapter that the reader discovers that the narrator is not referring to them, as readers, but instead to a woman who works at the shoe shop with Teresa (20). Given that the narrator’s mindreading of this character both opens and closes the book, the reader may expect her to occupy a substantial role in the plot of the novel. The reader is pulled further into the story, waiting for this character to appear, but the next time that we meet her is not until the sixth chapter, where we learn that her name is Candy and that she, surprisingly, appears rather harmless and inconsequential to the plot.
The contrast between the impression of Candy given in the first and final chapters and what the reader encounters in the sixth is astounding. When narrated to directly in the opening chapter, Candy is portrayed as an obsessive, jealous person, to an almost disturbing extent. She is clearly obsessed with Dan and intensely jealous of Teresa, and is constantly watching them around town. Even though we are led to believe that she is unable to avoid seeing them, it is clearly akin to stalking: “You can avert your gaze as they exit the supermarket . . . Or pretend not to see them loading boxes of tequila into the truck bed . . . They show up everywhere.” (8-9). During one scene at the local drive-in theater, which the reader must piece together from both the first and final chapters, “you” obsessively watch what is going on in Dan’s truck between him and Teresa, even though “your” boyfriend, loving and loyal, is by “your” side, attempting to be romantic (9-12). Even as Candy’s boyfriend proposes to her, promising her a comfortable if simple life, the narrator reads into Candy’s thoughts, writing that “it’s you who dream[s] of Dan Watson taking you away in his Ford pick-up truck, out somewhere to a big white farmhouse with a clothesline out back and a garden . . .” (246) and that “[y]our boyfriend’s thigh pressed against yours as you sat on the porch swing, and you wanted to open your eyes to see Dan Watson, his rugged and beautiful face . . .” (248). Candy even transposes memories of Dan and Teresa during her more intimate moments:
You extended your hand and he reached for it, strong and now clammy with sweat. She raised her hand to his lips very softly, and then rested it on his cheek, cupping his face. He kept his hand over yours, moved his fingers across his cheek . . .

He let go of her hands and she could not feel him at all. . . She floated, nothing tethering her but Dan Watson’s lips . . . (247)

Of interest here is how the narrator gives the reader access to Candy’s intimate innermost thoughts and desires, which she likely denies even herself, but portrays her as a mere background character in Chapter 6. After reading the first chapter of the novel, the reader may be left to wonder about the identity of this obsessive, jealous person, and anticipate her entry into the narrative in the chapters that employ the third-person narration. However, when Candy finally comes into focus, she is not at all what the reader expects; her characterization is so entirely non-descript that she barely matters at all. In presenting Candy as so normal and unremarkable in the main narrative of the story, but obsessive and jealous in her personal thoughts, I believe that the narrator forces the reader to search for closure, effectively pushing them out of the story. Indeed, I believe that the reader may come to the conclusion that they are the subjects being judged. In the shoe-shop scene, we can almost see ourselves reflected in Candy—friendly, quiet, and benign—which is what makes her drastically different characterization in the first and final chapters so disturbing. We can read the narrator as reflecting back upon the reader: we all have this sort of element within us—the ability to be obsessive, jealous, even creepy
and disturbing, despite whatever “normal” disguise we may present to the outside world.

It may initially appear that the judgmental narrator surfaces again in “Everything the White Boy Told You” from *Zigzagger* as, from the very opening lines of the story, the reader is assaulted with his snide comments. He writes:

Tell us, Celio, what the white boy told you that day. Celio at twenty-two with an unfortunate name, always the pause when you say. Tell us what he told you, though we already know what he told you because he tells the same story to everyone, all of us—we’ve all met him. (143)

The story takes the form of a letter written by an unknown narrator, or narrators, to Celio, who is dating a white boy. According to the narrator, Celio is falling in love with this boy because he is charming, but the narrator assures the reader, and Celio, that this has all happened before. Much of the letter seems intent on saving Celio from the irresistible charms of the white boy, who has apparently fetishized people like him. As the narrator explains, the white boy’s last boyfriend eventually came to his senses and left, and advises Celio to take note: “Did you ask how anyone can say *It’s over* to a man like the one in the last picture, the one with the brilliant white shirt and skin as dark as yours, his face beaming back what he can do better than you?” (144).

As in “Monkey Sí,” the narrator again employs the “we” narrator, effectively including the reader in the conservation and judgment, pulling them into the story.
The reader is also led to believe that the white boy is a bad person and that Celio should deal him the first blow, before he is taken advantage of: “We want you to surprise him—sooner than later—to save you, Celio” (146). The white boy has told Celio all that “he wants to tell” (146) about his family and his life, but it does not seem like it is reciprocal—he does not want to know about how Celio grew up, about “the rotted kitchen counters in a Brownsville apartment and how the snails appeared through the plumbing” (146). According to the narrator, the fetishization of Latinos on the part of the white boy is only skin-deep—he does not care about the history of Celio, or any other boy like him. As the reader nears the end of the story, the mindreading of the narrator is clear—the narrator clearly hates the white boy, and people like him, and wants to warn Celio to stay away in order to save him, which may make the reader consider the narrator as compassionate—a sort of watchman that saves unsuspecting Latinos from the advances of a man who only approaches them because of the color of their skin. Nevertheless, the very last line of the story throws this reading into doubt and effectively pushes the reader out of the story: “Do it, Celio. Give it all up to him, like we did. Tell him your whole story and see which one of us he comes back to” (147). Suddenly, our mindreading is shaken—is the narrator warning Celio, as a caring friend, or trying to scare Celio away, perhaps as a jealous former lover who wants to win back the affections of the white boy? In a search for closure, the reader may go back through the story and realize that the narrator does not give many specific details about Celio himself. For example, he writes: “[t]ell us if he asked anything about you, where you grew up in
Texas—near Corpus Christi or up by Abilene?—and if it mattered to him, Texas geography and where your people are buried. We have our guesses” (143). In doing this, we may instead mind read the narrator as jealous of his exes’ new boyfriend rather than judgmental, and is not trying to help Celio at all.50

Returning to the idea of the unreliable narrator, I believe that here we see more possibilities that the emotive narrator is unreliable, specifically in that they may misregard, to use Phelan’s terminology. As he explains, this “involves unreliability at least on the axis of ethics and evaluation” (*Reading* 51), meaning that a narrator may perhaps lie about a character they describe. I would like to expand this definition to include those narrators, such as those in “Monkey Sí,” who purposefully slant a story, twisting events to produce a certain outcome. In Phelan’s example, he writes of a character that “misregards” another by misrepresenting them in the narrative, but does it in a way that the reader knows what he writes is probably not true (*Living* 51). In the case of Muñoz’s emotive narrator, specifically in “Monkey Sí” and “Everything the White Boy Told You,” we do not necessarily have reason to doubt the narrator’s words, but instead their judgment, leading us to question their bias in the story. We could also consider the unreliable narrator in these stories as a product of who is doing the reading. For example, we may believe the narrator of “Monkey Sí” to be unreliable if we find ourselves in disagreement with their assessment of Tomás, but perhaps reliable if we share their viewpoint.

50 There is certainly the issue of an ethical situation here, particularly in the fetishization of Latinos by gay white males. Han explores the racial politics of exclusion within the gay community, writing that “…Latino men, like other men of color, also fall into two categories within the gay community. Either they are invisible or exist only as props for white male consumption” (56).
Consequently, the reader that sides with Nestor may not find themselves pushed out of the story, but rather pulled deeper into it.

**Conclusion**

I earlier noted that the more strongly that Muñoz's narrators pull us into a story, the more strongly we are pushed out. The vague narrator, I theorize, does not pull the reader that strongly into the story, and thus the consequent push is indeed weaker. In “Zigzagger” we are not given the names of the characters, and the story seems to be told as if under a veil. I have proposed that Muñoz does this purposely, in order to construct a cultural narrative about the nature of homosexuality and how it is viewed in the Chicano community that informs the author’s narratives. Nevertheless, given that the story opens the collection of the same name, a reader may find it difficult to be pulled into the story precisely because of this veiled narration, making it far easier to be pushed out. Coming to Muñoz’s works through this collection, this was my experience—it is a difficult story to grasp because there is so much that the narrator does not tell. However, in a story such as “Monkey Sí,” coming later in the same collection, I would conversely propose that the reader is drawn far deeper into the story because the narrator is so completely abrasive, and we are consequently pushed out of the story far more strongly when it comes to the critical moment of siding with Nestor or Tomás. Of course, each reader may have a different reaction, but this speaks to a larger point—Muñoz is difficult to define as a writer because both the subject matter that he chooses, and perhaps more importantly, his approach to narrative, varies so widely across the works he has
produced so far. After publishing two contemporary-set short story collections that feature a wide variety of gay characters, his subsequent *What You See in the Dark* was set in 1950's Bakersfield and centered on four female characters. It is also devoid of queer content, although it could be argued that it does have a queer sensibility. What I have done in this chapter, then, is look at some of the organizing threads of Muñoz’s narrative style, which commonly is the idea of playing with the narrator role to pull the reader into the story, and subsequently push them out. Given reader responses to his texts, both in online reviews and in my own classroom, it appears that this push-and-pull has ultimately served to pull readers towards Muñoz, and has perhaps helped to drive his success in the book market.
Chapter 3: Unexpected Surprises and the Magic Realization of Alex Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints*

One of the most interesting points of comparison between Manuel Muñoz, Rigoberto González and Alex Espinoza is their vastly different publishing outcomes despite their similar demographic profiles in terms of age, ethnicity and sexuality. As we have seen earlier, González has the longest and most varied publishing history of these three authors, producing poetry, a biography, a collection of short stories, a children’s book and a novel, but mostly remains in smaller presses. I do not want to color these presses as negative in terms of publishing fiction—on the contrary, they have been critical in publishing many newer Latino/a authors that may not have found space elsewhere. However, one of the disadvantages of being published solely in such firms is the smaller printing runs that they produce, and their limited ability to promote and place an author in the way that a larger firm such as Random House is able to. Indeed, some authors who start in these presses do make the jump to larger firms, a category which includes Muñoz, who moved from Northwestern University Press to Algonquin after his first collection, *Zigzagger*. Rarer still are authors whose first works are picked up by large firms, and this is where Alex Espinoza enters the picture: his *Still Water Saints* was published by Random House in 2008, and his second, *The Five Acts of Diego Leon*, was released by the same firm in March 2013. Being picked up by Random House is an
enormous accomplishment for a first-time author, and could very well mean the difference between making a living through writing, thanks to the higher market penetration and advertising that Random House can offer, and effectively writing “on the side”—engaging in more stable employment to supplement perhaps meager author royalties.

One of the particular questions that has been explored by Aldama and Martín-Rodríguez, in terms of Chicano literary production, is what factors go into deciding who becomes published, and where. While I will more fully explore both of their views in terms of these questions later, Martín-Rodríguez, for his part believes that larger American publishers have effectively linked Latina/o literature with the idea of magical realism and have pushed that onto the buying public. Thus, it would stand to reason that these same publishers are more likely to pick up works that have some sort of magical-realist bent to them, or are at least presented as such as they fit within an already defined brand of what Latina/o literature is. Indeed, when I first approached Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints*, there was little reason to believe that it was *not* a magical realist novel. The cover and blurbs on the back of the book all strongly imply that it falls into such a category, and the first chapter of the novel, important in setting the tone for the rest of the work, imprints the idea that protagonist Perla has mystical and/or magical powers—the first page alone asserts that she “could walk on water,” that she “summoned the spirits of the dead” and that “she fought the Devil.”
However pleasing it may be for the reader, as we will see later, this genre and its particular style is not unproblematic for the critic. Having primarily focused upon Latin American literature beforehand, I was well aware of the *crack* movement amongst some Mexican authors that attempted to break free of this type of literature and chart a new course that would live up to the initial novelty of the magical realist generation in Latin America.\(^{51}\) Essentially, the *crack* generation has primarily rallied against clichéd magical-realist literature, and the first chapter of *Still Water Saints* gave the strong impression that it fell into this very trap through its strong rhetoric of the mystical. Because of this, I would consider Espinoza’s novel to be magic *realized*, a term which encompasses many of the observations of Martín-Rodríguez that we will explore later. Instead of being a final product arrived at by chance, a magic realized novel instead is produced through a series of practices which serve to position a given work into the already established magical realist genre, almost necessarily implying that this positioning is deliberate on the part of both the publisher and the author.\(^{52}\)

However this publisher-author-reader relationship is not merely a top-down scheme—it is also important to capture how readers may perceive these works. To

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\(^{51}\) In “El *crack* en el vórtice de la novela mexicana,” one of the authors of the crack generation, Eloy Urroz, clarifies this goal, explaining that “[s]e creyó que atacábamos al realismo mágico y por ende a García Márquez, cuando sólo dijimos que nuestro desencanto era con algunas novelas epígonos del realismo mágico, las peores, las que no queríamos emular. Se creyó asimismo que renegábamos del boom o de la generación de Medio Siglo o de Contemporáneos, cuando se trataba justamente de lo contrario: de rendir tributo a estos tres grupos o momentos literarios con los que nos sentíamos y nos seguimos sintiendo deudores y herederos” (152).

\(^{52}\) To be clear, this does not imply that the work in question *must* be magical realist in tone; indeed, as we will see with Espinoza’s work, it is a novel that has been highly magic *realized*, but is probably not magical *realist*. 139
this end, I have turned to cognitive theory—sympathy and empathy in the case of González and the use of Theory of Mind in Muñoz’s works. With Still Water Saints, however, this is somewhat more difficult to do because Espinoza does not destabilize the narrator role like Muñoz, nor does he rely much upon the affective emotions that González does. Nevertheless, if we keep in mind that Saints appears to be marketed and categorized as a magical realist novel, the reader may experience a mismatch with what they read on the written page outside of that first chapter—it is rather surprising that virtually nothing occurs in the work that would fall outside of the empirical existence of the reader. As I mentioned previously, the first chapter of the novel introduces Perla as a bruja that “could walk on water,” but by and large, all of her “mystical” attempts at healing, spiritually and physically, the people who visit her botánica in Agua Mansa (a stand-in for Riverside, California) fail, and this is made clear quite throughout the novel. Simply put, there is nothing “magical” about this seemingly magical realist work, which may be quite a surprise for the reader in search of, or expecting, such a reading experience. Thus, despite what the novel appears to be, I believe that Espinoza, through the use of surprise, effectively unwinds and perhaps discredits the idea that Perla possesses the ability to perform magic, ultimately delivering a message to the reader that they likely had not expected: the importance of community in a rapidly changing world. Furthermore, through this use of surprise, the author effectively breaks down the borders of the apparent genre of the novel—magical realism—perhaps shifting the reader’s schema of similar Latino/a literature in the process. Espinoza’s use of surprise is
essential to the delivery of the message, and thus this study will also develop a
theory to explore exactly how he employs it in the novel. However, before entering
into this discussion, I would like to take a look at the book market, which will aid in
further explaining how a work becomes magic realized and why Still Water Saints
appears to fit into this category, an analysis which will lean upon the excellent work
of Martín-Rodríguez. Given that the one of the interests of this project is the diverse
publishing outcomes of Espinoza, González and Muñoz, I believe it is particularly
important with Still Water Saints to look at how Random House and the author may
have crafted this novel to fit within a genre that readers have come to expect from
Latina/o artists, even if the content of their works do not easily fit here, as Martín-
Rodríguez and Aldama have argued.

**Market stratification**

Given the overwhelming success of the 2008 Junot Díaz novel The Brief
Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, which spent more than 30 weeks on the New York
Times Bestseller’s list, it is not unreasonable to say that at least some Latina/o
literature has gone “mainstream,” meaning that it is not just Latinos who are

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53 In Postethnic Narrative Criticism, Aldama argues that, too often, critics view the use of magic
realism as a “fusion of aesthetic and ethnographic artifact” (8). The author instead renames magical
realism as “magicorealism” and looks at the narrative as a storyworld in itself, instead of conflating it
with the world outside of literature that the reader experiences (15-6), performing an analysis of
several Latino/a and other works and films, including Ana Castillo’s So Far From God and Gabriel
García Márquez’s Cien años de soledad. The current study only considers magical realism as
ethnographic fact insofar it applies to many Latino/a authors who have been expected to produce
these types of works, as we will fully explore later. In “Magical Realism,” Aldama also argues that
Latino/a authors frequently choose between realist and magical realist modes of storytelling, and
that there is little difference between the two. As he explains, “[t]hey both reflect reality to the extent
that by necessity their building blocks are building blocks taken from reality” (334), but magical
realist based literature also includes “events, actions, characterizations that do not conform to the
laws of nature” (355). His explanation for how readers integrate this reality and unreality is
something that I explore later in this chapter.

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purchasing and reading these works, but the general population as well. Before Díaz, no Latina/o work had spent so much time on that prestigious list, but there are other works that have had a deep cultural and sales penetration, such as Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, which has been incorporated into the curriculums of schools across the United States. As Anne Messitte, publisher of Vintage Español has explained, many Latino/a works have a “long tail,” meaning that, even if they have small shipments during the week of their respective releases, they may continue to sell at a steady pace for long periods. In an interview with the *New York Times* in 2002, Messitte explained that “[i]t’s not unusual to ship fewer than 10,000 copies and then be up to 30,000 by the 12th month” (Arnold). Works that fall into this category are almost too innumerable to mention, but would certainly include Cisneros’ novel, as well as Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima*, both of which have been described as the best-selling Chicana/o novels of all time.

While it is always desirable that more people read these works, there is also a dark side to this long tail. As Aldama writes, some publishers may pick up a work by a Latino/a author, then not look for any others because that market has been “served,” so to speak (Brown 93). Unfortunately for newer authors, this results in a

\[54\] As Martín-Rodríguez notes, critic Ellen McCracken “denounced the lack of mainstream critical and popular attention accorded to . . . *The House on Mango Street*” (129). In her 1989 article, McCracken wrote that it was “[d]ifficult to find in most libraries and bookstores” (“Sandra” 63). These words were written a full five years after the novel had first been published by Arte Público, demonstrating how long it took for the novel to “catch on” amongst a wider audience.

\[55\] In regards to the scant number of Latino/a authors picked up by large publishing firms, Aldama writes that “this is precisely how capitalism works: first by heterogenizing and then by homogenizing cultural phenomena” (Brown 93). I believe that this observation is crucial to Martín-Rodríguez’s analysis of how publishers are manipulating these works, as we will see later. It is important to note
reification of the Latino/a literature best-sellers list, something that can be evidenced at Amazon.com. Although the company notes that their list of Hispanic American bestsellers is updated hourly (“Best Sellers”), there is very little movement in the overall rankings, and older, established literature tends to dominate sales. During the last few months of 2012, Díaz’s *Oscar Wao* and *This is How You Lose Her* and Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* were almost always listed as top three sellers, while other familiar names, including Esmeralda Santiago and Julia Álvarez, completely dominated the top ten positions. Furthermore, the average age of the works on this list is 12 years-old as of this writing, while all of the works on the general “American” literature list were published within the past seven months.\(^5\) The only new Latino/a author on the Hispanic American top-30 list was Justin Torres, whose novel *We The Animals* briefly appeared on the New York Times Bestsellers list upon its release in the fall of 2011. Tying this into Aldama’s observation, because these established authors are still selling dominating sales, there may be little incentive for large publishing firms to pick-up and/or promote new authors, and the ones that are picked up may have that luck because they fit somewhere within the already-established market, or have similarities to another popular Latino/a (or Latin American) author.

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\(^5\) To look at another “ethnic” American literature, there also appears to be a much higher turnover rate on the list of African American bestsellers: of those in the top ten, seven were published just within the few months previous to July, 2012.
However, the aim of this study as a whole is not just to explore what publishers print and readers buy, but also what authors write, an interplay which Martín-Rodríguez has explored in depth in his book *Life in Search of Readers*. The author focuses on the idea that most authors likely do not put to paper whatever they feel like writing, but often keep in mind a particular audience that they are writing towards—a buying public that will purchase their works. This can be said to correspond to the “intended audience” as discussed in the González chapter, and here we also see the implication of the real literary market—an audience that these authors are writing towards and will purchase their works. According to Martín-Rodríguez, this real intended audience is of particular importance for many Chicana/o authors because of the dual market/marketa structure, and is rather easy to uncover in their works through a variety of linguistic markers. As he notes, some critics have bemoaned the loss of linguistic diversity in Chicano/a works that was prevalent in texts published during and immediately after the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but his position is that this diversity has not disappeared, but has rather become stratified between two fronts, the market, and la marketa, as he coins them. The market, which would include mainstream presses, tolerates little linguistic diversity within texts, while la marketa, consisting of “community readings, small press publications, and all kinds of locally distributed writings, still reflect[s] the linguistic diversity of earlier decades” (110). This split between these two different markets has been caused by the fact that earlier generations of

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57 It is important to note that Martín-Rodríguez’s study focuses on Chicana/o authors as a whole, while this study has limited itself primarily to the queer subset of this demographic.
Chicana/o authors did not have access to the market, meaning that they did not have to concern themselves with selling to a more mainstream audience. Thus, while outfits like Random House taking notice of these texts and providing them with wider reach has certainly brought more visibility to Chicana/o authors in general, it has also changed the nature of the texts themselves. Meanwhile, texts are limited to la marketa by critics and/or readers simply because they are not as visible or available as market-oriented texts are (110), and will probably not be incorporated into education syllabuses, such as Erlinda Gonzales-Berry’s *Paletitas de guayaba*, Juan Felipe Herrera’s *Akrílica*, or Margarita Cota-Cárdenas’s *Puppet*, three texts which Martín-Rodríguez cites (111).

As Martín-Rodríguez asserts, this is particularly evident in how the author creates dialog in their text. For example, in John Rechy’s *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gomez*, the author frequently translates dialog into English immediately after it appears in Spanish, something that Martín-Rodríguez describes as crude (118). Others, such as Islas, sometimes use English dialog, followed by “said in Spanish,” while others do use Spanish dialog, but often times, it is not necessary to understand the Spanish in order understand what is happening in the particular scene (118). In this project, we can consider all of Espinoza, González and Muñoz works as written towards the market, given that they typically eschew linguistic diversity in their writing.58 In *Still Water Saints*, while the reader is never entirely

58 It is worth noting that *Still Water Saints* was simultaneously published in Spanish as *Los santos de Agua Mansa, California*. Given the separation of language by edition, I would still make the argument
sure which language the characters are conversing in, language use is referred to at several points, including a scene in which Perla refuses to teach the young vagrant Rodrigo English because, as she insists, she never went to college and thus is not qualified (63). Given that, and Rodrigo’s detailed stories, we can assume that they speak mostly Spanish to each other.\textsuperscript{59} Use of language is never truly an issue in Muñoz’s works, but it is a factor in González’s, primarily because his texts deal with characters and persons who, most likely, perform their daily lives in Spanish. 

*Crossing Vines*, although it does not include much Spanish text, does make references to the fact that some white characters are able to speak the language (46), that nobody in one character’s particular family knew English very well (14), and that another women’s “pocho” grandsons “weren’t very popular with the crew because they spoke broken Spanish” (75), implying that everybody else converses primarily in that language. Similarly, *Butterfly Boy* also avoids the use of Spanish, but does make frequently references to the fact that the author’s first language is Spanish (12, 98) and compares Spanish and English as the young González is learning the latter (78). For a non-speaker of Spanish, there is also occasional dialog in English which may appear strange, making it rather obvious that it is a direct

\textsuperscript{59} In an interview at the end of *Still Water Saints*, Espinoza explains that he “tried to use Spanish only where the Spanish word had nuances or specificities that were difficult to translate (such as the word “botánica”), or where a character really was peppering his or her English with Spanish . . . such as when Roberto’s mother asks him “entiendes?” at the end of an otherwise English language question” (251). In the interview, Espinoza makes it rather clear that most of the characters are speaking mostly English with a few exceptions, but also notes that “[b]ecause I’m writing in English for an English-speaking audience,” he did not want to include much Spanish dialogue even in situations wherein characters might only be speaking that language. (251)
translation from colloquial Spanish. For example, at times characters end sentences in “you”—for example, “I don’t have enough money for class, you” (20). For a non-speaker of Spanish, this is a rather strange way to end a sentence, indicating that the characters are probably not speaking English, and indeed, using “tú” at the end of a sentence, whether syntactically it is needed or not, is a marker of rural Mexican Spanish.

The use of language in a given work may seem like a rather simple barrier to work through, but for Martín-Rodríguez, it signifies a much larger process that Latinos writing towards the market take part in: becoming cultural ambassadors for the culture group of which they write, and the author effectively ties this into Ángel Rama’s theory of narrative transculturation (113-4). Borrowing from others, particularly the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, Rama used this theory to explain how some writers were able to create unified visions of diverse worlds that often inhabited the same territory, such as Peruvian author José María Arguedas, part indigenous and part criollo. Regarding transculturation, Rama wrote that:
el concepto se elabora sobre una doble comprobación: por una parte registra que la cultura presente de la comunidad latinoamericana [...] está compuesta de valores idiosincráticos, los que pueden reconocerse actuando desde fechas remotas; por otra parte corrobora la energía creadora que la mueve, haciéndola muy distinta de un simple agregado de normas, comportamientos, creencias y objetos culturales [...] (34-5)

Rama, in turn, used this theory explain how an author such as Arguedas was able to write novels such as Los ríos profundos and the unfinished El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo, which combine indigenous and Western religions and languages. However, these works were also clearly written with a larger, Spanish-majority speaking market in mind, and this can be observed in the author’s personal diaries included in El zorro. Given the continuing popularity of his works, and the sheer number of scholarly studies that they have engendered, one can easily say that Arguedas was successful in articulating this indigenous world-view to the Spanish-speaking majority. Returning to Chicana/o authors, Martín-Rodríguez explains

It is important to note that Rama’s work is not without criticism; Antonio Cornejo Polar has written that “[t]ransculturation would imply, in the long run, the construction of a syncretic plane that finally incorporates, in a more or less unproblematic totality (in spite of the conflictive character of the processes), two or more languages, two or more ethnic identities, two or more aesthetic codes and historical experiences. (“Mestizaje” 117). If we consider Chicano/a literature, it would seem that Cornejo Polar’s own theory of heterogeneity, in which “discontinuous discourses are generated within heterogeneous stratifications that, in a certain way, fragment and hierarchize history” (“Mestizaje” 118) would likely be more applicable.

Although successful, Arguedas personally was tortured, and ended his own life in 1969. His final diaries, included with El zorro indicate a disillusionment particularly with the writing establishment in Latin America, including a personal dislike for Alejo Carpentier, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar and Carlos Fuentes, the first of which, he wrote, seem to view “our indigenous things to be an excellent element or [raw] material to work with” (14). The one author that Arguedas did seem to
many these authors not only act as cultural ambassadors for Chicanos towards a larger public, but also must produce texts that Chicanos themselves would read; hence, for those who write towards the *market*, he labels their intended audience a multicultural one (114). Given that, as he explains, “transcultural Chicano/a literature often includes what could be defined as an anthropological or ethnographic discourse that becomes a cultural explanation of sorts for the benefit of the distant readers” (116), they frequently employ child/young protagonists, so that readers can share as they “discover” their world. I also call this the “coming of age” novel, and there exist innumerable examples in all types of literature. If we turn to the Hispanic American best-sellers list on Amazon.com, a good deal of the novels on it come from this very tradition, and Martín-Rodríguez gives examples such as Islas’ *The Rain God* and Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*, among others. From the current study, we could consider *Butterfly Boy* as coming from this tradition as well.

**The magic realization of Latina/o literature**

What is of particular interest in Martín-Rodríguez’s study, at least in regards to *Still Water Saints*, is his examination of the use (and abuse) of magic-realism in the market, something which generally has not occurred in la marketa (136), and how Chicano/a (and Latino/a works in general) have been typecast. Because magical realism has become almost synonymous with Latin American literature in the eyes of the American public, for better or for worse, market-directed Latino/a

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have a particular affinity towards was Mexican Juan Rulfo, who Rama also studies in *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina.*
literature directed has often been linked to it by large publishing houses (137). The author seems to read this as both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because it has helped to drive sales of Latino/a works amongst a wider readership, and a curse because it has tropicalized, to use Aldama’s terminology, this very same literature, effectively linking it with the Latin American literary tradition. The effect of this is two-fold: first, it negates the very real history and novelty that Latino/a literature has, presenting it as a foreign literature—something decidedly not American (126).

The author cites frequent comparisons to Gabriel García Márquez’s Cien años de soledad both in blurbs on the back cover and in reviews as particularly insulting, given that, in some cases, it has negated an author’s own rich publishing history, such as with Ana Castillo’s So Far From God. Secondly, there is danger in doing this, as the author explains—these works directed to the market may still contain “oppositional messages and politics, and while those messages may be understandable to a Chicano/a and to an informed reader,” a non-Latino/a reader may miss these messages entirely (130), taking a given book as a “magical” vision of a tropicalized people. This magic realization of Latina/o literature occurs in three ways, according to Martín-Rodríguez: the covers of the books themselves, the blurbs found on the back of the books and other reviews, and in the production of new authors looking to be published. Here, I would like to explore how these facets apply...

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62 As Robbins explains, a similar process has also occurred with Latin American literature chosen for publication in Spain. In “Globalization, Publishing and the Marketing of Hispanic Identities,” the author explains how Alfaguara, a Spanish publisher, has numerous branch offices in Latin America that both sell to the local market, and choose books to sell in Spain, a more lucrative market. Those works that make the voyage across the Atlantic, as she writes, tend to represent Latin America as feminine, indigenous and, above all, exotic. (99)
to Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints*, particularly in comparison to the other authors of this study. To reiterate, when I use the term “magic realization,” I refer not necessarily to discursive rhetoric found within a novel, but here instead to an entire series of practices which may effectively “tropicalize” a Latino/a work in the eyes of a hypothetical reader.

**Still Water Saints as a magic realized novel**

Martín-Rodríguez frequently uses the word “commodification” when referring to this magic realization, and without entering into a long discussion of the ramifications and history of this term,63 I would like to turn to Zygmunt Bauman in regards to how this commodification has manifested itself in consumer habits. This is important because here, we are not yet treating *Still Water Saints* as a piece of literature to be appreciated as such, but instead as a *good* that is aimed at a particular audience and molded in such a way that that audience will notice it and perhaps purchase it. As Bauman writes, goods offer the “straightforward sensual job of tasty eating, pleasant smelling, soothing or enticing drinking, relaxing driving, or the joy of being surrounded with small, glittering, eye-caressing objects” (50-1). Bookstores, like any other large retailer, offer a multitude of options to the consumer, and if we extrapolate what Bauman says, we could expect that bookstores offer a type of almost euphoria to the browser—thousands of “eye-caressing” objects waiting to be bought and read. Nevertheless, as Schwartz reminds us in *The Paradox of Choice*, having so many options can also be debilitating because,

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63 Among others, a history of commodification, particularly of religion, can be found in my 2011 article “La religión como ganga: La Maja Barata de Xavier Velasco.”
as he writes, we can become “overloaded” (2). Thus, while standing-out is important in order to grab the attention of a potential customer, it is also important for producers to create a “brand” so that the consumer knows, more or less, what to expect when they purchase that product.

When browsing for a book in the bookstore, as was likely the primary way of purchasing books as envisioned by Martín-Rodríguez in his study, the usual way that a book would grab a potential reader’s attention is through its cover. While physical placement of the novel is also important, unless it is a novel by a best-selling author, it is unlikely to have a prominent enough placement that this would be the sole deciding factor whether or not a reader gives a book a second look. *Still Water Saints* certainly fits into this unknown author category—although published by Random House, Espinoza was a new author at the time of publication, and given the relative paucity of reviews found online, it likely did not receive a huge promotional push by the company. Returning to book covers, according to Martín-Rodríguez, this is the most noticeable place where this magic realization occurs—the development of certain “brand appearance” that publishers have built up and maintained over the years, conditioning consumers to expect and look for it. As Martín-Rodríguez writes, covers of these novels frequently accentuate the childish, the naïve, and the colorful, with frequent use of pastel colors, which he terms the “tacobellization” of the Latino/a image (131). In particular, he compares differences between the original edition of Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters* published by Bilingual Review/Press, and a later edition by Doubleday. As he writes, the first “is
austere, in blue, black, and gray tones, with just one image of what looks like a sheet of paper. . . By contrast, the Doubleday edition has opted for a much more colorful cover in which reproductions of Mexican lottery cards. . . are arranged around the cover . . ." which he believes implies that the book is from a Mexican author, not an American one (132).

These sorts of differences are readily evident in a work such as Castillo’s which has been published by two presses, but even in works such as those of the authors of this study, we can observe some of the same practices. Manuel Muñoz’s works tend to fit the least into this brand, perhaps with the exception of his first, *Zigzagger*, which does use a green pastel coloring, centered upon a hand holding a card with the title “Zigzagger,” which inexplicably has wings. Muñoz’s other two works, *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* and *What You See in the Dark* deviate far from this brand, particularly the latter, which seems to fit well with the tone of the book, with its black and white film-noir inspired graphics. This is perhaps not unexpected, given that this particular novel does not have the Chicano/a community as its subject and represents Muñoz’s foray into producing a general interest novel. In short, there is little that could be magic realized about this particular work, and Algonquin Press does not seem to try to force it to fit into that category. With González, we can see far more of this influence, particular in *Crossing Vines*, whose colorful graphics depict people working in the fields, and would perhaps be somewhat reminiscent of Mexican muralist Diego Rivera’s works for the informed consumer. His other two published collections of longer fiction are not as colorful,
but are distinctive in their own ways. Nevertheless, it is in *Still Water Saints* that we see the graphics that perhaps best fit this magic-realized brand: in unrealistic pastel tones, the cartoonish upper body of a woman floats in the sea, while what could be assumed to be a lily pad inhabits the lower corner. This image has almost nothing to do with the content of the book itself—the woman is certainly not the curandera Perla, who is more than 70-years-old, while the choppy sea drawn is contrary to the state of the titular water, and Agua Mansa, the location of the story, is described to be located in or near Riverside, California, not near any major body of water. The image is likely meant to evoke a saint, as the title of the novel suggests, although the woman wears no religious garb.

For Martín-Rodríguez, blurbs and reviews also become magic realized and as such, work to reinforce this brand. As noted earlier, reviewers tend to accentuate the “magical” qualities of a text, even going as far as an “obligated” reference to Gabriel García Márquez (126), and even Latino/a authors, in their blurbs found at the back of a book, may fall into this trap and they tend to use wording in reviews that they know will grab the attention of publishers and editors, and hence, be published (124). Among the authors of this study, neither the blurbs on the covers of González’s nor Muñoz’s works push the idea that they are “magical”—González’s tend to be straightforward, focusing on aspects of the works themselves, while Muñoz’s frequently evoke dark and erotic images. The blurbs on the back cover of *Still Water Saints*, on the other hand, frequently fall into this trap: Sandra Cisneros offers up the first (and most cited on websites such as Amazon), calling the novel “a
cycle of tales as perfect as the beads on a rosary. One alone is a little miracle; the whole together is capable of renewing one’s faith in new fiction” (back cover of Still Water). The review really says nothing about the content of the work itself, but does evoke the images both the rosary and a miracle, conjuring up the idea of mysticism that Martín-González cites in several reviews that he looks at. The Washington Post uses both “magic” and “faith” in its two-line blurb, while the San Francisco Chronicle believes that the novel is “enchanting” and that it “bewitches.” In terms of reviews, that of Entertainment Weekly would make it seem like Perla actually has “mystical” powers and categorizes the novel under “Fiction” and “Occult and Paranormal” (Lee). Nevertheless, the rise of internet retailing, particular Amazon, has lessened the importance of elements such as the cover and back-of-book blurbs as a way to attract readers, a change which I discuss more in depth in Chapter 4.

Reinforcing the brand

One of the worries of Martín-Rodríguez is that Chicana/o authors are being conditioned to produce the types of works that the market seems to demand, even though it is the manipulation of the publishing houses that is distorting this entity (128). In particular, how will new authors respond? One of the reasons why I have devoted an extensive amount of space to Martín-Rodríguez’s Life in Search of Readers, and examining Still Water Saints though the market/marketa prism that he has developed, is because Espinoza fits exactly into this paradigm: this is his first novel, the author is Chicano and clearly writes from and about that community. Thus, it is plausible for Espinoza’s creative writing process to tilt towards magic.
realism if he desires to be published in a major venue, and the fact that the novel was picked up by Random House might suggest that he followed this path, either subconsciously or by choice. Given the cover and blurbs on the back of the novel, it is easy to see how this might be perceived as a magical realist novel, and further elements within the novel itself only strengthen this supposition.

The novel itself has eight chapters, each of which is divided into two parts: the first of which, generally, tells some sort of story about Perla and her botánica, and the second of some member of the community who either purchases something from the store, or enters by happenstance at some point. The only chapter that does not follow this model is the very last, for reasons that will be touched upon later.

*Still Water Saints* follows a year in the life of Agua Mansa, California, and thus, chapters are titled by month and day, but instead of just dividing the work in this way, the author has organized each chapter around a particular saintly feast. For example, the first chapter is “January 6: Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord & Día de los Reyes,” while the last is “December 12: Feast of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.”

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64 In “Postmodern Continuum,” McCracken explores how Latina authors, specifically those of high art and “chica lit,” negotiate market demands. She writes that “[w]hile writers such as Julia Alvarez, Ana Castillo, Cristina García, and Denise Chávez negotiate and sometimes internalize the demands of mainstream publishers as they attempt to write works of art, chica lit writers such as [Alisa] Valdes-Rodriguez, Mary Castillo, Caridad Piñeiro, and Michele Serros aim for the widest audience possible and follow formulas for commercial success” (166). I believe that *Still Water Saints* falls somewhere in between these two realities—to a certain point, Espinoza does follow the commercially successful magical-realist brand, but also subverts it to a significant extent, as we will see later. In her essay, McCracken specifically compares the ethnic markers of Cisnero’s *Caramelo* and Valdes-Rodriguez’s *Dirty Girls Social Club*, touching upon many of the same issues that Martín-Rodríguez explores in depth, including linguistic diversity, book covers, how the authors employ empathy, and the use of ethnicity as commodity. As McCracken writes, “these novels represent two distinct forms of postmodernist Narrative” (167), seeing *Dirty Girls* as “correspond[ing] in certain ways to Jameson’s model of the literary text as a debased form of culture under late capitalism” and *Carmelo* as belonging to “the sophisticated genre of historiographic metafiction” (167).
While the attributes of these saints are most times only loosely connected to the content of the particular chapter, for a potential reader browsing the book, this structure may appear to fit the magical realist “brand.” It may even be reminiscent of the structure of Mexican author Laura Esquivel’s 1989 debut novel Como agua para chocolate, a well-known magical realist work that was also made into a movie. Esquivel’s novel contains 12 chapters, one for each month of the year, all beginning with a particular recipe. While the theme of food is not used in Still Water Saints, each chapter is labeled as the “Feast” of a particular saint, which strengthens the comparison.

Aside from the structure of the novel, the theme of religion and the mystical prevalent on the cover and the in the chapter titles is another facet that fits the “brand” of a good deal of Latino/a (and indeed Latin American) magic realist literature. If the reader has read reviews beforehand, they will know that the novel centers upon Perla, a curandera, similar to Anaya’s Bless Me Ultima, one of the most well-known Latina/o works published. Taking this further, from the very first page of the novel, Espinoza instills in the reader the idea that Perla is indeed special by assigning her supernatural powers. In the opening lines of the novel, he writes:

She could walk on water

She roamed the banks of the Santa Ana, among the long green stalks, chanting to the moon, to the gods of Night and Shadow. She rose and stepped onto the river, her footsteps gently rippling the surface. (3)
As the chapter continues, Espinoza strengthens this connection: he further writes that “[s]he summoned the spirits of the dead,” “[s]he fought the devil. Every night he came to her . . .” and finally, a few lines later, “[s]he was a bruja. A Santa. A Divina. A Medium, Prophet, and Healer” (3). After several vignettes of a number of the customers who have come into her store looking for help with a variety of issues, Espinoza closes the chapter in Perla’s house, describing how an opossum outside of her house becomes a sign that trouble is brewing. He writes: “She took another drink and closed her eyes. That animal. It was a messenger. It was letting her know. Something was out there. It was coming. She sat down and waited for it” (13). Aesthetically, a reader in search of the magical realist “brand” would certainly be led to believe that they had found it in *Still Water Saints*—the cover and title both suggest magical/mystical elements, the reviews refer to how “bewitching” the novel is, and the first chapter openly asserts that protagonist Perla fights the devil and can walk on water. To paraphrase Bauman, the novel appears to be “tasty reading” for the reader, but, as the rest of this chapter will assert, the remainder of the novel is not so soothing or enticing. What I intend to show is how, despite presenting itself as a magical realist reading experience, Espinoza, through the element of surprise, rejects the use of magic and, ultimately, moves towards creating a community focused novel in which the magical is of little importance.

**The science of surprise**

If we consider the other types of cognition looked at in this study—Theory of Mind in the case of Muñoz and sympathy/empathy with González—they may be
somewhat more difficult to explain and conceptualize, which is perhaps why they have generated a much larger body of literature than surprise. This is likely reflective of society at large; while the average person probably is unaware of ToM, even if they put it into practice in their everyday lives, and perhaps cannot articulate the difference between sympathy and empathy, surprise is something that most people likely feel they can explain with ease because we often experience it. As Meyer, Niepel et al. write, it was conceived as an original emotion by Descartes in 1649, while others see it as primary or fundamental (296), making it, arguably, as easy to explain as the concept of happiness or sadness. Thus, at first glance, the idea of surprise would seem rather simple, but the reader might be, well, surprised, that there is a substantial amount of cognitive science that has looked into difference types of surprise, and how people experience and process it. Here, I will review some of this literature, and then move towards a theory of surprise in literature and how Espinoza uses it to upset the expectations of his readers.

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65 A number of studies in surprise also come from the field of Artificial Intelligence, wherein one of the primary concerns is modeling for unexpected events. Computers have been good at predicting and handling the predictable, but may fail when presented with something they were not expecting. Ortony and Partridge, for example, cite a hypothetical drink-preparation robot that may not know how to process a glass that has been glued to the cupboard because such a surprising, highly unlikely event has not been modeled (108).

66 Although here I will not enter into studies done with fMRIs, as is now more common with cognitive-based studies, there does exist a neural basis for surprise. Michelon et al., for example, look at the neural correlates for incongruous visual information, for example, showing subjects a series of normal pictures then, suddenly, one in which the head of a wrench has been fused onto a sheep’s body (1612). What the authors find is that “[s]ignal increases were greater for incongruous versus ordinary and oddball stimuli throughout the ventral and dorsal visual pathways, and in prefrontal cortex bilaterally. Signal decreases were larger for incongruous than for ordinary stimuli bilaterally in lateral parietal regions. A subset of regions near the right frontal operculum and extending laterally responded only to, or more strongly to, infrequent incongruous pictures,” and that, ultimately, incongruous images were recalled better than congruous ones (1612). What this seems to suggest, aside from there merely being a neural basis for surprise, is that surprising events may be
As a base I will turn to Meyer, Niepel et al., whose 1991 study “An Experimental Analysis of Surprise” has often been cited in later studies in the field. As the authors explain, “[s]urprise is assumed to interrupt other ongoing processes, to direct attention to the surprising stimulus, and thus to enable the organism to respond adaptively to sudden changes in its environment” (296), which would appear to make it an evolutionary trait. For these authors, surprise “restructures” the schema of the person being surprised—what they are expecting—and results in the following processes:

(a) to anticipate and control future occurrences of the previously discrepant event (i.e. to bring it about or to prevent it); (b) to avoid the event if it turns out to be negative and uncontrollable; or (c) to ignore the event if it proves to be irrelevant with respect to further action” (297).

Meyer, Reisenzein and Schützwhol, in their 1997 article “Toward a Process Analysis of Emotions: The Case of Surprise,” tread similar ground, but better define some of their terms and instead study one particular aspect of surprise: the action-relevance check, or how relevant the surprise is in regards to ongoing events (251). What these two studies appear to have in common is that they treat surprise as a form of expectation failure. These authors define the schema as “informal,

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67 The details of the author’s particular experiment are not entirely relevant, but here, they aim to discover how much being surprised delays the interrupted action being performed, how much involuntary attention is given to the interrupter, and measure the “subjective experience of surprise” on the part of the participants of the study (297).
unarticulated theories about objects, situations, and events. To fulfill their functions, these informal theories must be at least approximately correct, which in turn requires that they are continuously monitored” (253), which necessarily implies that a schema is an expectation of a certain state or behavior, even if that behavior is unspoken. For example, Bill knows, perhaps subconsciously, that Mary always stops by his office around 10 a.m., thus this event becomes a part of his background schema. Thus, Mary not stopping by Bill’s office at that particular time one day would be a surprise because it disrupts this schema. Reisenzein would later add another facet to this theory, proposing that there exists a “cognition of unexpectedness produced by the schema-discrepancy check” (267), particularly that “the appraisal of unexpectedness involves a special-purpose, hardwired mechanism that outputs a nonpropositional signal whose intensity reflected the degree of schema-discrepancy” (267). To use our example above, Mary not stopping by Bill’s office on that particular day may not send a strong signal of surprise to Bill, but Mary stopping by, her face bloodied, likely would. For Reisenzein, this makes surprise inherently subjective—what is surprising to some may not be to others, and what encodes a particular event as surprising is unique to the schema of each person.

Ortony and Partridge, however, believe that there is much more to surprise than just expectation failure (106). These authors see surprise as coming from two distinct types of input: the deductible and the non-deductible, and that the first would fall in line with expectation failure, while only the second could be truly
labeled as surprise. For example, one may go to a French restaurant if they would like to order frog’s legs, but if the restaurant does not sell frog’s legs, this would be labeled as expectation failure because this rule—that a French restaurant typically sells frog’s legs—is usually true (an active expectation), but not always true (107). On the other hand, if a rock comes “hurtling through one’s window in five minutes” (106), this would properly be surprise because there is no reasonable expectation of that occurring—in other words, it is non-deductible. Other times, surprise occurs when beliefs are immutable. For example, there is no reason to believe that a French restaurant will serve anything but French food, thus entering such a restaurant and being given a menu solely composed of Greek entrées violates an immutable belief, and is, thus, a surprising event (107). As the authors state, surprise is typically non-deductible and may be startling, whereas expectation failure rarely is, or falls very low on such a scale (108).68

Lorini and Castelfranchi sum up the body of research into surprise by labeling two basic models: mismatch-based surprise, and astonishment, a model which would seem to follow Ortony and Partridge’s model of the deducible and the non-deductible. For these authors, the first is explained as “actively checking whether a certain event is happening,” having an expectation of the next input, and then “attempt[ing] to match the incoming data against it. If there is a mismatch (conflict) between the two representations there is surprise” (3). The authors continue by explaining that “[t]he intensity of this form of surprise is a function of

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68 The authors do provide such a scale. See 107.
the probability assigned to the expectation conflicting with the perceived fact” (3). Astonishment, meanwhile, is found in perceiving a fact, and then recognizing the sheer implausibility of it, necessarily meaning that it could not be predicted (3). Nevertheless, these authors also believe that there needs to be a more careful distinction between types of surprise, particular in terms of degree. The primary difference between mismatch-based surprise and astonishment, they assert, appears to be in degree of difficulty in assimilating the surprise occurring in the later (11). As they write, “[g]enerally in order to cope with an intense astonishment, I need a deep and large revision of my well consolidated beliefs,” which may not be the case in mismatch-based surprise (11). They also make the case that belief change because of surprise, already theorized by others such as Meyer et al., “is only triggered under certain specific preconditions” (24), one of which is that, the higher the level of surprise, the “higher the probability that the agent with revise its knowledge” (25). I will return to the idea of belief change, specifically its application to literature, later in this chapter.

**Toward a theory of surprise in literature**

One of most often cited articles examining surprise in fiction is Walter Kintsch’s “Learning From Text,” which develops a theory of cognitive interest in literature. The author proposes that “how much one knows, what expectations are generated during reading, and how a text can be organized in a coherent manner” (91) are the basis of how much interest a reader will take in a particular text, and all “point to the importance of the reader’s knowledge structure in the comprehension
process” (91). The author labels what the reader already knows as the “apperceptive mass” and explains that “relatively small deviations from expectations, misfits between the apperceptive mass and new information are interesting and provide the right conditions for learning, which is now conceived of as a correction or addition to existing knowledge structures” (93). Furthermore, although the reader should not be able to predict what they are about to read, they should be able *postdict* it, meaning that it should make sense in retrospect. For Kintsch, surprise in literature should follow exactly along this path—the author should be able to surprise the reader by providing unexpected turns in the story, but when the entirety of the literature is read, it should form an “integrated whole” (97), and since it does not “negate the knowledge structure that the reader has already formed,” it will likely be perceived as interesting (97). Thus, surprise in literature is linked to the work’s ability to entertain the reader.

Brewer and Lichtenstein follow this theory in their development of the oft-cited structural-affect theory of stories. Here, the authors attempt to develop a basic set of guidelines that predict the amount of entertainment that a hypothetical reader would derive from a story, and explain that story schema can be generally reduced to the use to surprise, suspense and curiosity in this prediction. In regards to the central focus of the current chapter, the authors explain:
A surprise event structure must contain critical expository or event information early in the event sequence. In a surprise discourse organization, the critical information from the beginning of the event structure is omitted from the discourse, without letting the reader know that it has been omitted, and then is inserted later in the discourse. We assume that the reader will be surprised when the reader reaches the point where the omitted information is revealed, and that the surprise is resolved when the reader reinterprets the underlying event sequence in light of this new information. (480)

In essence, the reader feels based upon the order of the story, and the authors further outline in detail how each element—surprise, suspense and curiosity—comes into play. Other researchers have sought to put structural-affect theory to empirical testing, such as Hoeken and von Vliet. They discovered that a story that evoked surprise also resulted in a higher level of overall appreciation of the story (285), and readers were better at answering questions afterwards, suggesting that a surprise in a story makes readers pay more attention to what comes after that event (286).

Meanwhile, Iran-Nejad has looked at the causes of interest and liking in literature, but with particular focus on how the surprise fits into the overall story and what sort of affect this has. The author found that readers found themselves interested in stories that have resolved endings, both in the case of works with medium or high-level surprises (128). Particularly interesting in her study is the
finding that readers are not interested in surprise for the sake of surprise—those stories with surprising endings that did not “resolve post-surprise incongruity” were rated lower, supporting the claim that “surprise per se does not create interest” (128). The author also found that surprise had no effect on whether or not a reader liked a story, despite the effect on interest (128), which may imply that ultimate reader “liking” judgments in literature may be based on content, style or writing or characters rather than plot structure.

In this section thus far, the studies outlined have been more classically narratological in nature, even if some have used empirical data. I have not been able to locate a substantial number of articles that have looked at surprise with the much more recent scientific-cognitive turn in mind, which I have used in the previous chapters of this study. One that is of interest in the current chapter is Tobin’s “Cognitive Bias and the Poetics of Surprise,” which turns to Theory of Mind to explain how and why we may enjoy some types of literature. Tobin asserts that stories that aim to entertain should be surprising (157), and, using the particular example of mystery novels, the critic explains that readers tend to enjoy more well-constructed works that perform a “narrative rug-pull” (157). She defines this as occurring when a work present facts in a way to make the reader believe something to be true, only to change this “truth” later in the novel. She writes that, in order for this to work, clues must be laid out throughout the work that point to the ultimate truth, but done in a way that we may overlook them, which we do because we readers tend to “align our perspectives by default with perspectives presented in a
discourse” (165). Tobin uses ToM to explain how readers may feel that they know what a particular character is thinking, and the surprise may be that the character is thinking of something entirely different. I do believe that there is a space here for the aforementioned clinical studies of surprise, particularly in that there is a mismatch between what we believe will happen, and what actually happens. When this narrative “rug-pull” occurs, the reader then goes back and reevaluates their beliefs to decide if this turn of events is narrative “fair play,” as Tobin puts it (157), or comes out of nowhere, the latter of which may lead the reader to discount the logic of the book as a whole. Although the author does not use the term “postdictability,” it seems to encapsulate what she describes here. Furthermore, this does not just apply to literature—an excellent recent example would be the final season of the television drama Lost, which effectively pulled the narrative rug out from under the viewers in the series finale. This led some viewers, those perhaps more obsessive, to go back and reevaluate the entirety of events of the series, while others judged it as narrative slight-of-hand and dismissed the series as a whole.69

This last example, although likely outside of the reach of this chapter, speaks to how I believe that Espinoza ultimately surprises his readers: by transgressing what the apparent genre of Still Water Saints would dictate that the novel should be. Nevertheless, I believe that this discussion of surprise and genre has, perhaps, more far reaching consequences than just the concept of narrative rug-pulls. Let us begin

69 Even years after the series ended, this debate still rages on, as a visit to any number of internet message boards will attest to. It seems that, for those who believe that Lost was primarily a character driven drama, satisfaction with the series finale is high, while those who saw the series as science-fiction were left cold.
with the idea of the genre, which, connecting the concept back to the earlier
discussion of surprise, could be considered as a schema—“unarticulated theories
about objects, situations, and events” (Meyer et al., “Towards” 253). In the particular
case of literature, this sort of schema would often indeed be articulated, as the sheer
number of popular and critical articles and books written about particular genres
will attest. Nevertheless, for the average reader not well versed in this type of
literature, what they know about a particular genre would typically come from first-
hand experience in what they have read, or what they have been told to expect from
said genre; in short, they likely form their own schemas of genre that act as a guide
when browsing and reading works. This idea of the schema also integrates well with
what Colm Hogan describes in *Cognitive Science, Literature and the Arts*, explored in
Chapter 1. As the author explains, humans effectively categorize and “cluster”
similar experiences and lexicons into schemas, prototypes and exempla (44). To use
the example of *Still Water Saints*, when a reader sees the title, the cover and/or
reads the reviews, it may recall other magical realist works or indeed Latina/o
works that have like-wise been magic realized in the way that Martín-Rodríguez
describes. In effect, the way that these novels have been marketed has shaped the
schema of the reader in relation to what they expect from this type of literature. 70

70Jerome Kagan also uses a schema of semantics in his study *Surprise, Uncertainty and Mental
Structures*. Here, the author asserts that the formation of a class schema depends upon the
“essentialness” of a feature, how often it is experienced, the context and the significance (43). For the
reader who seeks out magical realist works, it is could be assumed that they have already developed
a particular schema for this type of work given the reinforcement of this genre via various methods
by authors and publishers, as already discussed. For readers new to this area, I believe that the magic
realization of *Still Water Saints* is strong enough to form a new schema that they may, then, apply to
other works.
It could be argued that there would be a surprise generated within the discourse of magical realist fiction (or, by extension, any other genre of work) when events occur that go against the schema of what the reader knows from to be logical and rational in their everyday life. For example, in Isabel Allende’s first novel *Casa de los espíritus*, there is a well-known passage in which the female protagonist’s uncle Marcos, having built a “flying machine” out of crates, takes off and disappears over the mountain range. This could be said to be surprising for a reader given that it would generate a mismatch against the schema of what we know to be physically possible; specifically, we would expect his flying machine to crash shortly after take-off, or not lift off the ground at all simply because it is not possible to build an airplane out of crates. Nevertheless, I would argue that this event is only superficially surprising because it is something that the reader would expect from a novel that employs magical realism. In short, when a reader picks up this type of novel, there is an unspoken contract that they will suspend their disbelief and accept as possible whatever happens in the novel. As Aldama explains, the idea of gap-filling, which we saw as critical in Muñoz’s texts, also plays a key role here—when the author indicates that we are reading a magical realist novel, “[w]e gap-fill the same way as we would with a realist text, it’s just that the blueprint guides us to gap-fill without further ado and no explanation is given regarding events, actions, or characters that do not conform to the natural laws that govern our everyday experiences” (“Magical” 337). I would push this assertion further, specifically that the reader may highly anticipate these events and characters that do not conform to
the laws of nature, and become disappointed when they do not occur when
expected. Here, I can cite my own example of reading Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima*—
aside from enjoying the content of the novel itself, I read in anticipation of the
curandera Ultima to do something magical or curandera-like, at least according to
my schema of what a curandera is and does.

In other genres, we can also consider the example of one of American
television’s longest running dramas, *Law & Order*. Anybody who has seen the series
knows that, at some point in the episode, there will be a narrative rug-pull that
fingers the true culprit of the crime in question, typically a character that the viewer
had already became acquainted with but dismissed as culpable of the crime for
some reason or another. To return to Lorini and Castelfranchi, in this particular
example, is the viewer experiencing mismatched based surprise, or astonishment? I
would say that both are possible, but with the caveat that we fully expect this
surprise to come and eagerly await it; in short, it is predictably surprising. Thus, it
may be said that we derive enjoyment of watching *Law & Order* solely from the
surprise and the build-up to it, just as readers who consume magical realist fiction
may derive pleasure from events that occur that fall outside of their realm of
experience—they are predictably surprising. Thus, in order to examine different
types of surprise in literature, or perhaps any sort of medium that plays in well-
known genres, I would instead speak of the expected surprise, and, on the other side,
the unexpected surprise. Cognitively, an expected surprise is anticipated because the
work, in its structure or form, recalls some sort of schema from our memories that
the literature fits into, while the unexpected surprise does not because it goes against the schema that we have assigned to a given piece of literature, or any other medium. For example, the investigators catching the suspect in an episode of *Law & Order* is a predictable surprise, whereas a nuclear bomb suddenly detonating over New York City half-way through the episode would be completely unexpected because the viewer’s schema of *Law & Order* is of a crime-procedural drama, not science fiction. This event would also be quite astonishing for the viewer, not merely a mismatch with what they were expecting, and may indeed have the power to alter the genre categorization of a work if the audience is able to accept such a narrative rug-pull.

I hypothesize that we may find both mismatch and astonishment in either type of surprise, but that these types of surprises have more far-reaching consequences when they are unexpected simply because, in order to understand/interpret them, we must not only change the schema that we have developed for the given work, but also must fight against our schema of the entire

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71 It would seem that in a given genre that relies upon the “expected surprise” that the idea of surprise is rather moot because the reader knows that something of this nature will happen. Here I believe that mismatch or astonishment occurs not by the mere existence of the surprise, but rather because of its content. Tobin outlines this idea in “Cognitive Bias” where she seems to write primarily of mismatch based surprise, meaning that the character that we are led to believe committed a crime is actually innocent. This is mismatched based because, as we read, we form our own theories, even subconsciously, that may or may not be what the work actually reveals. I would further theorize that astonishment based surprise is much more difficult to achieve in literature, or in entertainment in general, because it must come from the proverbial left-field, but still adhere to the internal logic that the work has put forth. A good example of this would be the murder of protagonist Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) in the movie Psycho. Leigh was among the top billed in the movie, so her character’s murder less than half-way into the picture was a shock for audiences. Coming from director Alfred Hitchcock, audiences would certainly have expected a surprise to occur, but the murder of the protagonist, accompanied by graphic detail highly unusual for the era, could accurately be described as astonishing.
genre.\textsuperscript{72} It should be noted here that I have intentionally excluded hypothetical readers that are new to the magical realist genre, or who have no expectations whatsoever of Latino/a literature. Nevertheless, I hypothesize that they would react with the same sort of surprise to \textit{Still Water Saints} as an informed reader due to the aforementioned cover, blurbs on the back of the novel, chapter titles and first chapter. In this particular case, the introductory chapter that Espinoza has written becomes even more important—here, as noted, he makes it clear that Perla has magical powers. Thus, while reading, the hypothetical uninformed reader may form an active schema as to what they are expecting from the rest of the novel, one that will be necessarily altered as they continue reading the work. In short, Espinoza’s novel may create an entirely new schema of Latino/a literature in this particular type of reader.

\textbf{The unexpected surprises of \textit{Still Water Saints}}

As we have already seen, \textit{Still Water Saints} is a highly magic realized novel, given the cover, blurbs and independent reviews. Thus, for a potential reader considering purchasing the novel, whether online or in a bookstore, it would likely activate the cognitive schemata associated with the magical realist genre, or perhaps mysticism or the occult if the reader is not familiar with these works. This connection is strengthened in the way that Espinoza describes protagonist Perla in

\textsuperscript{72} As I will explore later in the case of \textit{Still Water Saints}, Lorini and Castelfranchi believe that the stronger the surprise is, the more likely that it will result in belief change. Thus, we may be able to consider any type of astonishment provoked in the audience as a strong indicator of belief change, whether it stems from an expected or an unexpected surprise. This would like be the case with the murder of Marion Crane in \textit{Psycho}, which, as an event, added a new dimension to what horror movies could do to their protagonists, something that filmgoers would likely take into account for future such films.
the first chapter, which we also explored earlier. Thus, given this schema, the reader would likely anticipate a number of “expected surprises” from the novel—perhaps magic, as the author alludes to in the opening, or other events that fall outside of the realm of common experience. Nevertheless, instead of offering these expected surprises, I believe that Espinoza instead delivers a series of unexpected surprises in the novel, ultimately unraveling the idea of magic and particularly that the supposed curandera Perla actually possesses some sort of otherworldly power. Here, I will review how Espinoza accomplishes this throughout the series of interconnected stories that comprise the novel.

After the first chapter characterizes Perla as a curandera who is able to perform the aforementioned otherworldly acts, the subsequent chapter quickly works to put this assertion into doubt. Here, the reader meets Rosa, a teenager who has gained a significant amount of weight and, in order to combat this, her mother has purchased a special tea from Perla’s botánica. Rosa’s sister, Blanca, is rather skeptical, but their mother asserts that Perla’s tea is working because Rosa has already lost five pounds (14). What the reader might expect at this point, given the apparent genre of the novel, is for Rosa to continue losing weight and maintain faith in Perla and her remedies, but there is an unexpected surprise—Rosa herself lays doubt onto Perla because her weight has fluctuated even while drinking the tea, and her weight loss may be more attributable to exercise than anything else. Even Perla encourages her to continue exercising—to “[d]o everything you can to keep the weight off”—but Rosa ends up rejecting Perla and the tea, leaving the store (28).
Perla insists that she will wait until Rosa is “ready” to return (28), but Rosa never does, and is supported in this decision by her new boyfriend who also casts open doubt on Perla’s powers. While this may seem a rather small piece of the unraveling of the idea that Perla is magical, it is significant because it occurs in the chapter immediately after she is built up as a woman who fights the devil and walks on water, but here cannot perform a much simpler task—helping an overweight teenager lose weight. The failure of the tea to work its magic, and Rosa’s rejection of Perla is clearly an unexpected surprise for the reader, and like events occur several times across the span of the novel.

Instead of an open rejection of her powers, in the chapter “Así Like Magic,” we see Perla, through the eyes of transvestite Azúcar, as fumbling for answers to what should be simple questions given her prowess. Azúcar has stopped by the botánica to buy a candle to light for a friend who recently died, and also picks up a rosary. Azúcar notes that she has never really believed in such things and does not know how to pray a rosary (96), so she asks Perla what will happen if she does not pray it in time. Perla’s response, instead of coming from a place of decades of experience with mystical powers, is rather uncertain and rambling: “After that it’s too late,” she says. “They stay stuck in Purgatory. Or here. Ghosts haunting houses and cemeteries. Not good for them. Not good at all” (95). Here, the reader may implement Theory of Mind with Perla because it is rather easy to see through her answer to this question. Although the reader cannot gauge the physical reaction of Perla at this moment, we can almost picture her eyes becoming wide as she
stumbles through the consequences of the delayed rosary prayers, hoping that Azúcar does not notice that she clearly does not know what she claims to, or question her further about her assertion.

A confident Perla returns in “Aftershocks,” when Nancy, who has just returned to Agua Mansa, goes to Perla to buy a remedy to help her ailing father. In this case, a negation of Perla’s powers take place much later in the novel, when, in the final chapter, Nancy comes back to the botánica and reveals that her father has since slipped into a coma (234). We see a confident Perla once again in “Taking Stock,” when Shawn buys a candle from in order to drive his roommate’s girlfriend, Daisy, away, carefully following her instructions to “carve the name of the person I’m trying to get rid of into the top of the candle” and tie a piece of cloth belonging to the girlfriend around it while it burns (153). The reader never discovers if the candle works or not, but Shawn does lose his job at the end of the chapter for running a scam at the store where he worked, implying that he is visited by some sort of karmic justice.

In our final example, the reader may be surprised to learn that Perla is not viewed as a sage by everybody in the community, but instead just as a rather annoying old woman. “Braceras” sees Perla hire Lluvia to paint a mural of the Virgin of Guadalupe on the side of her building, but instead of appreciating the knowledge and encouragement that Perla shares, Lluvia finds her rather bothersome. In the following passage, the reader may once again employ Theory of Mind to read Lluvia,
whose curt, snide answers give away her mental state. As Perla settles in to watch Lluvia paint, she says:

“I have to be careful,” she says, adjusting herself in her chair, draping a towel over her shoulders . . . “Don't you get scared? Working out in the sun?”

“No.”

She calls me hija and says she had an oil inside the shop. “It doesn’t have sunscreen, hija. But it can give you some protection.”


“Huh. Not yet. Then ten years from now you get this spot and next thing you know it's all over.” (224-5)

Although Lluvia does eventually seem to come to appreciate Perla more by the end of the chapter, it is clear that she initially sees her as an elderly woman with too much time on her hands, not a figure worthy of reverence for her sage advice and mystical powers. In total, I believe that this series of unexpected surprises slowly unravels the apparent magic of Perla by mismatching our schema of what she should be, and how other characters should treat her, given the apparent genre of the novel.

However, the most important unexpected surprises for the reader, particularly after the set up during the first chapter, may be found in the Saint-themed chapters in which we learn more about Perla’s life and her path to becoming
a curandera. In “The Feast of San Gabriel the Archangel,” the reader learns that Perla did not come to “walk on water” because of some divine calling, but rather because she was rebelling against her husband, Guillermo. On a slow, rainy day at the store, she confesses in writing:

I am ashamed of the fact that I only agreed to do this job because it would get me out of the house. Guillermo spent all those years working, leaving me alone in the afternoons. No kids. No nothing. I felt like I had no life. Like things could have turned out differently if I’d only married someone who could give me more. (67-8)

In this chapter, the reader is also given more background on the man who first opened the botánica, Señor Darío, initially believed by the people of the neighborhood to be the devil because of the things he advertised, such as tarot card reading and talking to the dead. The author later recounts how Perla first met Darío in the shop and was enthralled by him, working at his side, learning how to run the store, and the secrets to the various items he sold. When Darío left, Perla took over ownership of the shop even though she felt that she was not capable, but it did fill the void inside of her that Guillermo had a hand in creating.

This chapter is also important because it is here the reader is fully introduced to Rodrigo, a teenage boy who unexpectedly shows up at the shop and who Perla believes may be alone and on the run from immigration. Rodrigo’s fate eventually becomes the ultimate test of faith for Perla, and perhaps the key turning point in the novel for the reader and their expectations of Still Water Saints as a
magical realist work. Later in the novel, the reader learns that Rodrigo had been brought to the United States as a sex slave and was held captive and abused. In order to help him, given that Perla is a curandera, she turns to her mysticism: first, she reads a particular passage to “the audience of Buddha and Shiva statues,” but “[t]hey offered up no insights. No knowledge” (86). Short afterwards, at a loss, she hears the voice of the now-dead Darío, who tells her to “Feel it . . . All of it. Use it. This santo here for this. That yerba there for that. Don’t waste any part of it. All of it is precious and powerful. Like you, Perlita. Like you” (86).

These remedies, however, do not work—Rodrigo disappears and Perla is unable to find him, resulting in a complete crisis of faith; the narrator writes that “[s]he had teas and colored veladoras and remedios scrawled on tattered index cards. [Rodrigo] needed something else. And I didn’t have a candle for it” (205). If Still Water Saints were indeed a magical realist novel, the reader would likely receive some indication of the expected surprise—that Rodrigo has turned up, perhaps worse for wear, but alive and safe and perhaps because of Perla’s prayers and powers. However, the novel instead deals the reader a highly unexpected blow—the “badly burned” body of a young male is found on the banks of the Santa Ana River (207-8), and the only logical assumption is that is it indeed a murdered Rodrigo, given that the size and age of the body fits his description. Of all of the inhabitants of Agua Mansa that the reader meets in the novel, Rodrigo could easily be considered the most salient—his fate becomes a personal cause for Perla, and as a teenage boy caught in a poisonous web of sex-trafficking, the reader roots for him to
be saved—for Perla’s magic to work, if only this once—and ultimately, this is why his murder becomes the largest unexpected surprise of the novel.

**Surprise and belief change**

As discussed earlier, surprise is theorized to lead to belief change; in particular, “the higher the level of surprise, the higher the probability that the agent will revise its knowledge” (Lorini and Castelfranchi 25). However, here I would like to make a revision to this theory so that it is more applicable to the interpretation of narrative. In the case of an expected surprise, I theorize that the implications for belief change in fiction are rather small—we may change our beliefs about what has actually transpired in a work, such as in the many examples of literature that Tobin gives, but, so long as the work follows the conventions of a particular genre, the expected surprise is unlikely to change the cognitive schema that we have built for that particular type of work. Returning to the hypothetical episode of *Law & Order*, when the guilty party is finally revealed to be somebody the viewer had previous dismissed, their perception of the events of that particular episode may change, but, because this sort of “rug pull” happens every episode, we fully expect this to happen and as such, it is unlikely to change our perception of the genre as a whole, and indeed, if we piece together the clues of the episode, the surprise itself should have been postdictable. To clarify, I am speaking of the structure of a given episode, not necessarily the content.

It also stands to reason that if a crime is particularly astounding, even in genres that rely upon the expected surprise, it may lead to belief change in real-
world situations. In the case of Still Water Saints, given that the reader has every reason to believe that it is indeed a magical realist novel, we would thus see two types of surprises in the novel with corresponding levels of belief change. First, as the reader learns that Perla, a supposed curandera, likely does not have any magical powers or mystical connections, merely becoming a curandera because she was a bored housewife, the perception of surprise toward further events in the novel may change. Toward the end of the novel, it indeed may become rather expected that Perla’s “remedies” will not work; for example, when Nancy reveals that her father has slipped in a coma despite Perla’s remedy, it is likely not surprising for the reader. Or, that, in “Charity,” there will be no otherworldly repercussions for two young boys who steal a frequently-blessed saint from the front of Perla’s store. The impact of the final surprising event of the novel—when two young people are killed in a motorcycle accident outside of Perla’s store even after she has the mural of Guadalupe painted by Lluvia to watch over the neighborhood—is also likely muted, even though the event itself is unexpected. In short, the “unexpected surprises” of the novel soon become expected because the novel could be said to condition our schema towards this.

Clearly, when we speak of content rather than structure, and leave out the idea of surprise, fiction can and does result in belief change. This cognitive transfer between a work and real-world situation is particularly important for those who discuss violence and sexuality in fictional representations. Many sustain that watching violence on television or in movies may encourage the spectator themselves to become more violent, or have proviolent attitudes, something which Rockoff rallies against in The Rise of the Slasher Film, particularly the chapter “What Is a Slasher Film?,” but which Funk et al. do find support for in younger people. On the other hand, for those who are not prone to committing violent acts, violence on television, movies or in literature may make the spectator/audience more cautious and/or fearful in their everyday lives with the expectation that the same sorts of events could happen to them. I also discussed this idea in Chapter 1 in regards to representations of homosexuals on television likely resulting in stronger acceptance of them in general society.
Nevertheless, for a novel like *Still Water Saints*, the larger implications come from the unexpected surprise it offers in terms of the genre as a whole—the unraveling of the “mystique” that is the hallmark of virtually all magical realist works. As a body of work, Espinoza’s novel is a mismatch with what many readers may perceive this genre to be, and it may well lead to a reevaluation of magic realized novels in future readings. As such, the novel may manage to shift our schema of this genre, assuming that the reader is not disappointed that the work does not offer them the “tasty reading” that they are expecting, thus dismissing it entirely.

Indeed, the belief change involved with this unexpected surprise likely goes to what is at the heart of a good deal of Latina/o literature. As many have noted, one of the hallmarks this literature is its intense focus on the importance of family and community, instead of treating its protagonists as lone actors. Kanellos sees the struggle between individualism and family as recurring themes in Latino/a immigrant works, as can be seen not only in well-known works like *The House of Mango Street* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, but also the works of Rigoberto González, already looked at here. Interestingly, the works of Manuel Muñoz do not seem to focus too much on the importance of family or community, instead portraying a series of isolated characters who find themselves in that circumstance for one reason or another. If we read, for instance, *What You See In the Dark* and *Crossing Vines* in tandem, aside from the obvious differences in tone and style, in the first we see four female characters who become increasingly isolated
from the world as the novel progresses, while the second focuses on the importance of creating a community in order to survive life in the grape fields. Even in Butterfly Boy, which portrays author González as feeling largely isolated, the reader is still aware that there is an intense pull for the author towards his family and community.

To return to Kanellos, he also sees this literature as exploring the pull of “materialism versus idealism and spirituality” (31), and I believe that if we look at these two ideas in tandem, we arrive at the heart of what Still Water Saints truly attempts to accomplish as its narrative goal. Even if Perla does not have the magic powers that the reader would initially assume that she does, for those in the community, she is a touchstone—for them, she really does “walk on water,” and this is evidenced in multiple vignettes across the span of the novel. Even though Perla’s remedy for Nancy’s father does not work, she still returns to the botánica in the final chapter and at the end of the novel to purchase a candle for a vigil. When Perla apologizes that her previous remedy failed, Nancy “looked down at the ground and shook her head. ‘It was too late by then. But you did all that you could. Thank you’” (234). Even though Perla does not have magical powers, and her remedies and candles are likely more wishful thinking than panaceas, Nancy still believes in her because it gives her something to hold onto. In the same chapter, after the motorcycle crash kills the two young people, community members gather at the botánica to share their grief and buy candles to light for the dead.

One of the overarching themes of Still Water Saints is the idea that Agua Mansa is a post-industrial urban area in decline, socially and economically,
something furthered by the frequent descriptions of the decrepit strip mall where the botánica sits, next to a 99 cent store that is replaced by a tattoo parlor mid-way through the novel. As the modern world rapidly changes around her, Perla feels herself becoming increasingly irrelevant, and confesses that her greatest fear is being forgotten and that what she does not matter (67). What the novel demonstrates is that, although Agua Mansa (and by extension, innumerous other communities across the United States) has changed greatly, people like Perla still have relevance and importance in that they bind the community together, a community that is not only just Latino/a at this point, but highly multicultural. When Perla goes to church during her crisis of faith, Father Madrid tells her: “Your store, it’s important . . . It’s good for the community,” and the reader sees this reflected across the novel, even if she lacks the mystical powers that the reader would expect. In the final chapter of the novel, this point is driven further via a series of vignettes of people stopping by the shop. Even after her magic has been discredited in the eyes of the reader, Perla manages to calm down the mother of one those killed in the motorcycle accident by giving her a rosary and telling her: “I can walk on water. The dead . . . Spirits and Saints. They talk to me. I just have to listen” (239). Later, the narrator writes: “Angela stopped crying and wiped her tears away as she held the rosary” (239). Thus, even though Perla does not have “powers,” the

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74 One of the features that stands out Still Water Saints is the intensely multicultural world that is Agua Mansa. For example, the owner of the 99 cent store is Asian, the Donut shop is owned by Indians, Shawn, who buys the candle to be rid of Daisy, is Caucasian, and Nancy’s husband is African-American, among others. Interestingly, those characters who seem to hold the most faith in Perla and the botánica are Latino/a, and female in particular.
belief that she does is a force that is beneficial to the community and its inhabitants. At this point, it is likely obvious to the reader that this is Perla’s true importance, and it could even be said to be postdictable, given what the novel has already related.

The point that Kanellos makes about materialism versus idealism and spirituality also strongly comes into play in novel; the people of the community generally maintain their faith in Perla despite the fact that the botánica is clearly a commercial enterprise. In the first chapter, where Perla’s “powers” are established, Espinoza also details how Perla cleans her store before closing shop, particularly that she takes “inventory in her binder—nотing that the candles were low, what packets of incense sticks had sold, what herbs and teas she was missing—and set the list next to the phone. I’ll place an order first thing tomorrow morning” (10). This commercial aspect may come as an unexpected surprise for the reader—although we know that these items must come from somewhere, they are not typically associated, at least so blatantly, with commercialism. Thus, although Perla and her store may represent idealism and spirituality for her customers, and perhaps the readers as well, there is a material base which underlies this, further strengthening the argument that her function as a community touchstone is her true importance in the novel, a point which Delgadillo also asserts (613).

Conclusion: A return to magical realism

The conclusion that Still Water Saints is really about the power of community and the people who hold them together in a rapidly changing world is
not unique to this chapter—in fact, reader reviews frequently assert that this exactly what they enjoyed about the novel. Mandolin, a user on goodreads.com commented that the novel made him/her “nostalgic for my botánica days and curse the fact that there is nowhere around here where one can buy a 7-day candle,” while another wrote that “[t]his story was like a web, with the old woman in the middle . . . Each character is a crucial part of that web, part of a creation that is a world unto itself, a small drop of water in which I see everyone I’ve ever known reflected” (Deborah). Interestingly, few of the reviewers mentioned the implied powers of Perla in the novel, which may indicate that many readers are able to look past the magic realization of the novel, a facet pushed by the publisher in the front cover and blurbs, reviews, and the author himself in the first chapter.

Nevertheless, for myself as a critic, the most interesting facet of this novel is not the ultimate message of the power of community, but instead how author Espinoza, through the use of surprise, effectively breaks down the borders of the apparent genre of the novel, perhaps shifting the reader’s schema of similar Latino/a literature in the process. This consistent and unrelenting discrediting of Perla’s magic in the novel is why the final paragraph of the novel may come as another surprise to the reader, as it did in my initial reading of the story. Here, Espinoza returns to a magical realist bent: as the community gathers around the motorcycle accident scene, the narrator relates:
Perla and Angela added their candles to the rest, and the light from the veladoras grew. A yellow light rose up from the ground where they were clustered. It burst out in thick beams, shooting up to the sky, curving around the edges of buildings and houses and bending between tree branches and power lines, before it found its way back down. It descended upon them, and Perla watched as, one by one, they each shone bright, wiser and forever changed, stronger now. (240)

While this is certainly a beautiful piece of narrative to end the novel, it may come as one surprise too many for the reader, as it did for myself. This scene is certainly not predictable, hence it being surprising for the reader, and is only postdictable if we discount much of what the novel has already related after the first chapter. It could be read, as it was by some in my advanced Latino/a literature course, as a symbol of the power of community. Or, perhaps, it may elicit a groan as it did for others in that same course, as the author unnecessarily returns to the magical realist trope to tie the loose ends together, effectively unwinding many of the narrative surprises of the novel and the impact that it may have in transforming some audience perceptions of Latina/o magical realist literature.
Chapter 4: Repositioning Gay Chicano Literature (and its readers)

In the introduction to this project I used the example of how my Afro-Latina Canadian friend found solace in the writings of Third-World feminist authors, Chicanas included. As I wrote, they looked like her and mostly loved like her, speaking to a community-like inclusivity that no doubt has been a beacon to untold numbers of readers. Nevertheless, as we also saw in the introduction, gay Chicano authors, and gay Latinos in general, have not formed the same type of strong literary identity or community that their Chicana/Latina counterparts have, and have suffered some strong criticism because of it, notably from Cherríe Moraga. More recently, gay Latino authors themselves have also taken note of this discrepancy. In the 2010 anthology *Camino del sol: Fifteen Years of Latina and Latino Writing*, editor Rigoberto González wrote that, in comparison to the feminists, “[g]ay Chicano/Latino writers, unfortunately, have made only minor strides towards establishing such a community. The out-of-the-closet role models with prominence and staying power have been few and spread out over the decades” (11). Here, he lists well-known names such as John Rechy, Arturo Islas, Francisco X. Alarcón, Michael Nava, Jaime Manrique, Rane Arroyo and Miguel Algarín as belonging to the established generation. He also takes space to name a newer group of artists,
including both Manuel Muñoz and Alex Espinoza, writing that they “offer a critical mass approaching a gay Chicano/Latino community, perhaps even a movement, though it has yet to become formally organized” (12). Perhaps due to modesty, González does not include himself in the list of the next generation, although he could easily be considered the most prolific gay Latino writer of his age, having published an autobiography, two queer-themed adolescent novels, two collections of poetry, two children’s books, two short story collections and a novel, with two further titles to be released in 2013. This would be an impressive list for any author at the end of his career, but is especially so considering that González only published his first title in 1999.

In the 2011 short-story collection *From Macho to Mariposa: New Gay Latino Fiction*, editor Charles Rice-González recounts a similar problem regarding the lack of community amongst gay Latino authors. He writes that 1999 saw a rush of collections of these authors, including those from Manrique (*Bésame Mucho*), Cortez (*Virgins, Guerrillas, and Locas: Gay Latinos Writing about Love*), and Erasmo Guerra (*Latin Lovers: True Stories of Latin Men in Love*), but a large gap opened until the publication of the poetry collection *Mariposas: A Modern Anthology of Queer Latino Poetry* in 2008. As Rice-González recalls, when he approached Manrique about putting together a new collection, he responded that the only authors in it would be himself, Rice-González, and Rigoberto González (VIII). Rice-González and Charlie Vázquez did go on to edit the collection, which includes works from more established or well-known authors such as Rigoberto González and Lawrence La
Fountain-Stokes (Uñas pintadas azul), but also a number of new authors such as Justin Torres (who has since published the best-seller We the Animals) who represent, as Rice-González writes, Latinidades such as “Chicano/Xiqan@, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Chilean and Brazilian” (X). Given that the collection was released in August 2011, it remains to be seen if it will spark a new interest in forming a literary community that gay Chicanos/Latinos have previously lacked, or if it will represent a mere island in another 12-year wait for further such collections.

An often overlooked work that I believe comes closest to setting the foundation for this idea of a gay Latino literary community is found in Manrique’s 1999 collection of essays Eminent Maricones. Apart from telling his own story, here, the Colombian-American author reconstructs pieces of the lives of Federico García Lorca, Manuel Puig and Reinaldo Arenas, the latter two of which he personally knew as their paths crossed in New York City in the 1980s. As Manrique asserts in the final pages of the work:

> [i]n their works these writers . . . not only spoke for the oppression of the marginal but had the *cojones* that many heterosexual writers lacked. And thus I arrived at the true meaning of *Eminent Maricones* — *locas, patos, jotos* — who achieved true eminence by the courageous audacity of their examples. . . . Because maricones, as the lives depicted in this book attest, can be the fiercest people. (113-14)
In many ways, I would consider this work to be a siren call to gay Latinos much in the same way that *This Bridge* was to lesbians of color. Pérez writes that Manrique reclaims the normally derogatory term “maricón,” seeing it as instead something to be embraced “as a badge of courage” (143), which is reminiscent of how Anzaldúa, for example, wears the similarly derogatory term “dyke” proudly, saying that the terms queer and lesbian do not adequately describe who she is (“To(o) Queer” 264). Unfortunately, the impact of *Eminent Maricones* appears to have been muted—only a handful of academic studies have examined it, and it has not been referenced in more recent gay Latino works outside of Pérez. Scholars have picked up the slack in other areas, however, and in the formation of this literary identity, we must also acknowledge the works of scholars such as Frederick Luis Aldama, David William Foster, among others, and Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier-Martínez’s recent anthology *Gay Latino Studies*.

Returning to the example of my Afro-Latina, what have the aforementioned works meant to real readers—gay Chicanos and Latinos who look for role models, or at least to see their lives reflected on the printed page? As we have seen, Moraga in particular has been extremely critical of the earlier generation of authors, particularly for not representing queer Latino subjectivities in their writing. In a 2000 interview with Weatherston, she explains that:
[at] every place that I have ever taught, young gay men of color have come to me and said, “If it hadn’t been for black lesbians, if it hadn’t been for Chicana lesbians, I wouldn’t know how to understand being queer.” So what is it? Lesbians of color are making space for these young men—man-haters that we are supposed to be—ironically, we’re making space for these young men. (70)

Moraga goes on to explain that she has more faith in the younger generation of queer men of color who “hold the promise of leadership for the next generation. But unlike the Chicano counterparts of my generation, they are using feminism” (70). In the introduction I used Warner’s term counterpublic to describe the Chicana feminist movement—they served not only as an opposing voice to a male dominated Chicano public, but also to the White feminist movement. In this interview, Moraga seems to suggest that newer generations of queer men of color are now taking part in the Third World Feminist counterpublic, and that is giving them the voice that they previously lacked. While this may be true, the goal of this final chapter is to side-step the issue of traditional publics and counterpublic altogether—moving from how authors make sense of their own works and form community, to how readers may make sense of works to, finally, how readers form community. Even though gay Chicanos and Latinos have not formally coalesced into a strong literary community, have readers formed this community their own terms? In years past, this may have been a very difficult question to answer, given the scope of the audience and the difficulties in collecting such information. However, the increasing
importance of the internet in the world of book retailing can offer new insights into how readers make community, moving the conversation from one based in a traditional, physical counterpublic, to cyberpublics and cybercommunities.

Publics, counterpublics, cyberpublics and cybercommunities

In order to begin this discussion, I will return to its roots: Jürgen Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere. In his 1962 study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas articulated his conceptualization of this entity by tracing its evolution from 18th century Europe to contemporary times. As Habermas explains, the public is envisioned as primarily the arena of the bourgeoisie, a place where rational, private people were free “to come together as a public” (27). In the context of 18th Century Europe, Habermas pointed to the existence of coffee houses in England and salons in France as locations where these people would meet as equals (32-3), a process critical to the formation of participatory democracy (Dahlgren 318). The other side of his conceptualization, the private, represents individuals who chose to take part in the public sphere, each having their own particular wants and desires that they attempt to fulfill there. According to Little, Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere recalls Aristotle’s concept of community, which, generally speaking, was good polity and association. He notes that “the polis was the arena in which commonly agreed constitutional arrangements defined an area where higher virtues would be the foundational principles” (9), in which, presumably, the so-called higher virtues would include concepts such as religion, political thought, and so on. Membership
within the polis gave opportunities for “fruitful cooperation,” but this same membership was always contingent and potentially transitory (9-10). However, unlike the public sphere as imagined by Habermas, Aristotle’s *polis* was highly exclusionary; as Little explains, Aristotle viewed the polis as the exclusive domain of men because women and slaves were not capable of acquiring “reason and accompanying intellectual and moral values” (10). In contrast, Habermas explains that:

… [h]owever exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a clique, for it always understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who—insofar as they were propertied and educated—as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion. (37)

Nevertheless, we could also consider this original conceptualization of the public sphere as consisting of somewhat of homogenous body (mostly male, bourgeois) acting as a homogenizing agent—“a process of mutual deliberation about what counts as equal and common in [the actor’s] perspectives, experiences, needs, and problems” (Johnson 2). Perhaps as a consequence of this homogeneity, Habermas’ theorization has been criticized on a number of flanks, particularly by feminists, for assuming that any private person was able to take part. Fraser sees the public sphere as having a “number of significant exclusions” (113), including females, who
did not have a political voice, and the lower classes (114), and chides Habermas for failing to consider alternative public spheres, in including civil society associations, some of which were female-only (115). Habermas saw the purity of this early public sphere as deformed by 19th century media, which distorted “rational communication and contribute[d] to ideological misinterpretation and political powerlessness among the public” (Dahlgren 319). More recently, as Dahlgren notes, this tension between media and how it manipulates the public sphere has proven fruitful for discussion (322), and much of this has rested on the idea of universality. As Dahlgren writes, “[i]f the media are a dominant feature of the public sphere, they must be technically, economically, culturally, and linguistically within reach of society’s members; any a priori exclusions of any segment of the population collide with democracy’s claim to universalism” (322). But here we must question the idea of universality, particularly when it has been noted that mass media tends to exert itself as a homogenizing agent, a process which Dávila explores in *Latinos Inc.* in terms of Latinos and Latinidad.

Colm Hogan has spoken specifically to this idea of homogenizing and hierarchizing identities, and the cognitive roots behind it in his *Understanding Nationalism*. Using a basis similar that that discussed here in Chapter 1, the author outlines two primary types of identities—the practical and the categorical—and describes how we use these to relate to others and to societal structures. The practical identity, as Colm Hogan explains it, “is someone’s entire set of representational and procedural structures, most importantly insofar as these
enable his or her interaction with others” (27). The author uses the example of asking for directions which, although it may seem simple, entails a complex system that is reliant upon mutual understanding—shared language, what one is likely to notice while driving, etc. (27). In contrast, categorical identity “is any group membership that I take to be definitive of who I am. It is the way that I locate myself socially—as American, Irish, Catholic, or whatever” (29). The author explains that “our lexical entry (i.e., our semantic memory) for a given term is likely to include, not only a prototype, but some set of norms forming an ideal, or paradigm as well” (48). For example, when we think of the term Canadian, we have some sort of prototype of a Canadian that comes to mind, and even within the nation, this exerts itself as ideal qualities that one should hold as an American citizen—“[t]he ideal American may cherish freedom,” for example (48). This idea of a prototype seems to track well with Warner’s conceptualization of the public in Publics and Counterpublics. He explains that “[t]o address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one’s disposal certain media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology” (10).

Although very few likely fit precisely within these largely homogenized paradigms, Colm Hogan effectively explains how we process deviations by hierarchizing categorical identities based upon their salience, functionality, opposability, durability and affectivity.75 The early Chicano movement, for example, could be seen

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75 See 58-123 for an in-depth discussion of these terms.
as holding Chicanoness as salient above other identities,\textsuperscript{76} minimizing the importance of gender and sexuality. In contrast, the Chicana feminists perhaps felt that gender and sexuality were as salient as ethnicity, which explains the rise of their movement. Of course, this is difficult to quantify because many Chicana feminists feel excluded from Euro-American feminism, meaning that, on some level, ethnicity in its broadest sense (being a minority) becomes more salient than gender and sexuality. Colm Hogan accounts for these intricacies in identity hierarchization, explaining that certain identities will become more salient in certain situations (\textit{Understanding} 55). In the example of the Chicana feminists, perhaps when confronted with the heterosexist Chicano movement their sexuality and gender became salient categories, but within the ethnocentric Euro-American feminist movement, their ethnicity rose to the fore. Generally, Warner classifies these movements as counterpublics, and we may consider these to be comprised of those who have salient identities falling too far outside of the societal prototype to be entirely visible in the public, or visible in ways that those closer to the prototype would be. For Warner, the possibilities of public speech by gays and lesbians are distorted by the “closet”—not being open about one’s sexuality acts as protection, but is “riddled with fear and shame.” Meanwhile being open “is never the same as being publically known as heterosexual; the latter always goes without saying and

\textsuperscript{76} While we could generally consider this to be true of the academic side of the Chicano movement—those who attended conferences and wrote manifestos—we likely see a tension with the blue collar faction of the movement who, under Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, reached out to other workers and unions to emphasize the salience of these working-class roots and create a broader societal appeal.
troubles nothing, whereas [homosexuality] echoes of pathologized visibility” (52).

Of course, identity is fluid, and how those closer to the norm react to and treat those further from the norm is fluid as well, something which I explored in Chapter 1 in media and literary representations of queers and undocumented migrants—both salient identities, although for differing reasons.

If we turn to the idea of cyberpublics, we may find space where these salient identities—those outside of the limits of the societal norm—may be expressed more freely and without consequence. The concept of the cyberpublic is simple—according to Nayar, it is “literally ‘navigable space,’ and the term gestures at both territory and direction . . . [it] is the product of social interactions and relations, generating its own forms of identity and politics, and [is] embedded in local, historical, and global cultures/contexts” (136). The author continues that “[cyber-public space is the augmentation of existing public spaces and an extension into another realm of the communities, sites of political action, and agency that exist in the real public sphere” (137). In fact, I would go further than Nayar to describe the cyberpublic, at least in some sense, as the closest incarnation yet to Habermas’ original conceptualization of the public sphere. Instead of people gathering in Salons and cafés as Habermas originally envisioned, people gather on the Internet on millions of different websites that mostly strive to uphold the ideal of free exchange of information. The criticisms of Habermas’ public sphere are also reduced online: anybody can participate freely and openly, regardless of age, race, gender, or any number of categories because anonymity in the face of other users is normally
implicit, and one is able to locate groups that share ones views and tastes—in effect, joining cybercommunities.\textsuperscript{77} To use a recent example, a visit to any number of U.S. based message boards in the lead-up to the 2012 Presidential Elections in the United States evidenced an open and vigorous political debate over the two major candidates, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, the sort of exchange between ordinary voters that would have been much more difficult to achieve in years past.\textsuperscript{78}

The Internet has been particularly useful for political aims as a way to connect with others and work to organize outside of the cyberworld. One of the most prominent early examples of this is the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, whose 1994 revolt Ronfeldt et al. have called the first postmodern revolution (113). Although Froeling has noted that there is no evidence of a direct presence of the Zapatistas themselves online (302), Cleaver writes that supporters of the Zapatistas created an online support network to spread news of their cause and plight all over.

\textsuperscript{77}Two limiting factors to this would be the political and the economic. In the political, North Korea, for example, restricts internet access to a few, while China blocks websites and blogs that contain criticisms of the central government, although some users find ways around that. For more in depth discussion, see “Mr Kim” from The Economist. In terms of economics, although there is typically free-flow of information online, access to the Internet is not free. Nevertheless, in 2012 the International Telecommunications Union estimated that users per 100 habitants grew from 29.4 in 2001 to 73.8 in 2011 in the developed world, and from 2.8 to 26.3 in the developing world, more than doubling between 2007 and 2011 alone (“Internet Users”). Extrapolating these statistics, there were 2.4 billion internet users in 2011. Thus, while access remains a problem in the developing world, it is increasingly less so.

\textsuperscript{78}The dark side of the Internet is also found here; because people can take on any identity they wish and are not identifiable with their real persona on most websites, they often feel free to write things that they may not otherwise express. As Livingstone writes, “[o]ffline, conduct between people, whether strangers or acquaintances, is socially regulated by behavior norms and accepted sanctions. While not suggesting that social conventions are absent online, they are more flexible and more easily circumvented without sanction” (361). For example, Floatingsheep.org, a collective of university professors and students, for example, has mapped out racists tweets after the election of Barack Obama (Zook).
the world, which some have credited for the Mexican government’s relatively muted response—the eyes of the cyberpublic were watching, and taking real world action offline (Gilbreth and Otero 19, Froeling 296, 301, Collier and Collier 247). A more recently example is the Arab Spring which overthrew dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen in 2011 and 2012—a 90% of respondents in a 2011 survey of Egyptians and Tunisians indicated that they “were using Facebook to organize protests or spread awareness about them” (Huang). Here I paint a rather rosy view of the internet with good reason, but just as the original public sphere was distorted by the media in the 19th century, the cyberpublic sphere is also prone to such manipulation. Prominently this includes the advertisements that support most websites, and perhaps more insidiously, “astroturfing,” where posters are paid, usually for political or promotional means, to present certain views online, whether on message boards, blogs, or entirely new websites.

Nevertheless, just as with disfavored political groups, the Internet has also been a beacon for disfavored and/or disadvantaged minorities, who have used it to find the support of others like them, and to organize themselves politically. Here I am specifically speaking to queer communities, although there are many other

He writes: “[The] audiences included Usenet newsgroups, PeaceNet conferences, and Internet lists whose members were already concerned with Mexico social and political life, humanitarian groupings concern with human rights generally, networks of indigenous peoples and those sympathetic to them, those political regions of cyberspace which seemed likely to have member sympathetic to grass-roots revolt in general and networks of feminists would respond with solidarity to the rape of indigenous women by Mexican soldiers and to the EZLN to ‘Women’s Revolutionary Law’ drafted by women, for women, within and against a traditionally patriarchal society. Again and again, friendly and receptive readers spontaneously re-posted the messages in new places while sometimes translating the Spanish documents into English and other languages. In this way, the words of the Zapatistas and messages of their communities have been diffused from a few gateways through much of cyberspace.” (83)
examples of ethnic minorities connecting and organizing online.80 The example of queers online is very different from most other minorities given the nature of incidence of homosexuality itself. Karen Wickre, former director of computer group Digital Queers, told The Advocate magazine in 1996 that “[t]he Internet is a place where individuals can find information that they might be afraid to try to find in some other way” (Gallagher 36), which has obvious implications for queer youth who might be unsure about their identities. Whereas before, queers may have faced persecution for seeking out such information, the Internet affords them the opportunity to find information, and importantly, affirmation from others in cybercommunities who have been in their position at some point in their lives.81

And although there have been great strides within the past decade in the developed world towards gay acceptance, the Internet still plays an extremely important role, particular for queers in nations with strict laws and/or social mores regarding homosexuality. Westmoreland Bouchard, for example, looks at how young homosexuals in Morocco almost exclusively find their queer related material online (79), while Martin explores the impact of the Internet in the lives of Chinese lesbians. Thus, while these queers may find themselves as a counterpublic at best and openly persecuted at worst in their daily lives, the Internet has offered an opportunity to take part in a cyberpublic and its resulting cybercommunities that

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80 Dyson, for example, looks at the role of the Indigenous on the Internet, seeing both problem areas but also a space for reaffirmation of indigenous identity, a reconnecting of the indigenous diaspora, and the evolution of political activism.

81 A perfect example of this is found in the “It gets better” videos posted to YouTube. Started by advice columnist Dan Savage in 2010 in reaction to a spate of queer teenage suicides, these videos feature queer adults, including many celebrities, talking about how they faced similar problems and, as the project title would suggest, “it got better.”
have opened up a world previously unavailable. Nevertheless, here again we confront the issue of salience of identity—while the idea of queers worldwide connecting and forming this cybercommunity is romantic, Martin’s study of Chinese lesbians in particular speaks to its limits in terms of barriers of practical identity (language), and hierarchy of salience of other identities, such as Chinese and lesbian.

**Cyberpublics and traditional media**

Aside from giving disfavored groups a place to unite around their salient identities, the Internet has also vastly transformed many areas of the traditional media, but, with the possible exception of the music industry, nowhere has this change been more amply felt than in the world of the printed word. Setting aside the case of newspapers and magazines, which are struggling to survive in the face of the public increasingly going online for up-to-the-minute articles and current events, the publishing industry and book retailing are now in the midst of charting a new path in a hostile marketplace. My arrival at the works of González, Muñoz and Espinoza is a great example of how the Internet has changed how the public may find and purchase books. Given that these authors are not as well-known as the established names in Latina/o Literature such as Sandra Cisneros and Junot Díaz,

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82 An interesting question here, but one beyond the scope of the current investigation, is whether there are counterpublics amongst the cyberpublic—countercyberpublics. My preliminary answer would be no, that the formation of a counterpublic is not necessary in the cyberpublic because the internet has afforded space to virtually everybody from every viewpoint and position in life. There are indeed differing cyberpublics, perhaps divided into interests or lifestyles, but, in accordance with “net neutrality,” one viewpoint should not take precedence over another, or be promoted or given preference by Internet Service Providers or governmental laws. This means that, if one’s views are not welcome on a particular message board, they may easily find another that does allow them to post freely. Indeed, this would mean that members of the cyberpublic can use the Internet to organize their real-world counterpublic, as happened during the Arab Spring. However, I would also argue that countercyberpublics do exist in nations where internet restrictions imposed by the government, such as China. See Note 76.
before, I may have stumbled upon them by chance in a library or a bookstore, or discovered them through word of mouth, or books reviews, etc. When I originally set out to do this project in 2011, before it was close to its current form, I googled "Gay Chicano Authors," and, after moving past the major names (Rechy, Islas et al.), more digging eventually led me to both González and Muñoz, with Espinoza coming later. After this, I was able to visit their websites, and read a few pages of their works on Google Books, which has catalogued millions of volumes. I ultimately purchased copies of their works from Amazon.com, where there was a wide selection, depending on if I desired hard cover, soft cover, Kindle edition, or a used copy. Needless to say, searching for and purchasing books on the Internet is a complete different process than doing so in a brick-and-mortar bookstore. These changes have led to the death of many local bookstores, and are considered a large factor in the 2011 bankruptcy and liquidation of Borders, which had been the second-largest chain in the United States after Barnes & Noble.

As my own example demonstrates, the Internet has offered unprecedented opportunities to both readers and authors. For readers, even those who identify with counterpublics such as that of the Chicana feminists, they are now able to find books that suit exactly their tastes, instead of the limited selections that bookstores carry. Likewise for authors, they are able to sell books to those who they previously might not have been able to reach. Many of these works, particularly the ones published by university and smaller presses (such as González's) are not likely carried by large bookstores, and even if they are, they are not carried for long
periods of time, especially if they do not sell well. On Amazon, however, aside from works that they promote on their website, it is a much more reader-focused process—almost everything is available through a simple search, most books are rarely "out of stock/print" (or even if they are, surely somebody is selling a used copy—also listed on Amazon), and if one absolutely needs a copy right away, many books are now available for immediate download to an e-reader, which is how I obtained Still Water Saints. In short, online book retailers, Amazon in particular, have brought consumers closer to the authors that they may want to read, and authors closer to the readers that they previously may not have had access to. The reason that I have focused on the role of Amazon here and not, for example, libraries or other book retailers, is that the website also offers researchers unprecedented opportunities to see how readers are transforming into cybercommunities with other like-minded consumers. Thus, we may be able to approximate an answer to the original question of this chapter—if readers indeed do form literary communities even if authors, gay Chicanos in this case, have not.

**Cybercommunities and Amazon.com**

What is impressive about Amazon is the sheer number of consumer driven features that the website promotes. In Figure 1, for example, we see “Frequently

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83 Other online book retailers do offer some of the same features that Amazon does, particularly the listing of other works under "Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought." Barnesandnoble.com entitles it "Customers Who Bought This Also Bought," and Powell’s Books offers "Other books you may like," while Abebooks.com uses the same title as Amazon. Ghandi in Mexico offers "Otros clientes compararon" (Other customers bought), while Gibert Joseph in France lists titles under “Également recommandé par Gibert Joseph” (Also recommended by Gibert Joseph). As I note further along in this chapter, I ultimately decided to exclude data from this category because results were inconclusive in many cases, perhaps due to the low sales volume of many of these works. What does appear to be
Bought Together” and “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought,” both of which serve to drive consumers to purchase other works, and perhaps discover authors that they had not previously considered and/or known about. While the ultimate goal for Amazon is to sell more books, something that Chris Anderson of Wired magazine has termed the “long tail,” these features also offer keen insights into how readers make communities amongst themselves by organizing authors of interest. Other features, which are not of interest here partly because they are located toward the bottom of the web page, include suggestions from other readers about those searching for “Rigoberto González” products, and a search for similar items by category, in this case, Hispanic and Latino Biographies and Memoirs, and Gay and Lesbian Biographies and Memoirs, among several others. In Figure 2, we see another feature that is directed by the cyberpublic—“Customers Also Bought Items By,” followed by a list of 16 authors. There are several other features which I have not mentioned here, including sales rankings, publication information, and, importantly, reader reviews. A 2006 study by Chevalier and Mayzlin indicates that

unique to Amazon is the feature “Customers Also Bought Items By,” which is where my primary interest lies in order to discern how readers are connecting authors.

According to Anderson, a few popular products still account for a large number of overall sales on Amazon, but sales of more obscure items, or books that Amazon carries but Barnes and Noble stores do not, in their aggregate, rival the few at the top. As Anderson explains: “The average Barnes & Noble carries 130,000 titles. Yet more than half of Amazon’s book sales come from outside its top 130,000 titles. Consider the implication: If the Amazon statistics are any guide, the market for books that are not even sold in the average bookstore is larger than the market for those that are.” Recommendations, Anderson writes, serve to drive demand “down the long-tail.” Using the example of subscription music service Rhapsody.com, a user who clicks on Britney Spears, pop superstar, is recommended Pink, a pop-rock musician, who has never reached Spears’ level of fame. From Pink’s page there is a recommendation for a 1980s ska band The Selecter, so “[i]n three clocks, Rhapsody may have enticed a Britney Spears fan to try an album that can hardly be found in record stores” (Anderson). We may be able to see some of the same types of connections among Espinoza, González and Muñoz, with Muñoz in particular acting as the driving agent.
Figure 1. Truncated screenshot of Amazon.com page for Rigoberto González's *Butterfly Boy* (20 Jan., 2013)
readers frequently do take these into account when deciding to purchase a book,\textsuperscript{85} and, while I refer to them in parts of this study, I do not take them in account in this chapter. My primary interest lies in the categories of “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought” and “Customers Also Bought Items By”—I do not explore how readers arrive at the decision of purchasing a work or not, but rather how they may arrive at the book on the website, and what sorts of cybercommunities can be discerned from this movement. I have chosen to exclusively examine Amazon

\textsuperscript{85} In their study of over 1600 titles, the authors find that customer reviews tend to be positive on both Amazon and Barnes and Noble’s websites, but are more detailed at Amazon (354). Interestingly, they also note that “the relatively rare one-star reviews carry a lot of weight with consumers,” and attribute this to the possibility that consumers believe that five-star reviews may come from authors themselves looking to hype their works, while a one-star review would be more likely to come from somebody who has read the book (349-50). Personally speaking, when purchasing consumer products on Amazon, I tend to give far more weight to one-star reviews so as to have an indication of potential problems with the product in question, as opposed to five-star reviews, which tend to be almost gushing and not very informative.
because it is the largest book retailer in the United States, and offers a wealth of data not found anywhere else.

Before I enter into how I collected and used data from Amazon, it is important to explain what it does and does not do. Although I have entered into this discussion by using the term *cybercommunity*, any connections between these gay Chicano authors are not a reader formed cybercommunity in the sense that a message board or an online book club would be. To my knowledge, online readers have not yet formally discussed or contextualized these authors together on any sort of measurable scale. What I do suggest, however, is these reader-based connections between Espinoza, González, Muñoz, and other gay Chicano authors are not mere coincidences, and I will explain why later in this chapter.

**Methodology**

I tracked the titles found in “Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought” (henceforth referred to as List of Books, or LoB, to avoid confusion) and the authors in “Customers Also Bought Items By” (List of Authors, or LoA) between August and December 2012. I performed 16 data collections from both categories, meaning that I arrived at 112 instances of book titles, and 256 instances of author names over that span. Although I only collected seven data points for LoB during each week, Amazon lists dozens of such entries. However, I limited this to the first seven because that was the precise number that appeared on the first page—in order to access the rest, readers must click through the list. I go on the assumption that most customers will not do that, given is it easy to overlook the fact that the list is indeed
longer than seven titles. Mid-way through the period of data collection, Amazon removed the feature LoA from the bottom of each book page, although it remained on the author’s homepage, as seen in Figure 2.

In order to analyze these data points, I ran across several problems that I attempted to resolve logically. The first, and perhaps most salient issue, was found in how to weight the data points. For example, looking at LoA in Figure 2, we see Sandra Cisneros and Helena María Viramontes occupying the first two spots, with Audre Lorde and Todd Parr listed last. Amazon does not offer access to the algorithms that it uses to determine these rankings, so I assume that they are based upon actual sales figures.86 I feel comfortable in making this assumption because the names at the top of the list tended to be static, while there was much more movement toward the bottom. Because I collected this data only for four months far

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Points Assigned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sandra Cisneros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Helena María Viramontes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tomás Rivera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Manuel Muñoz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eduardo C. Corral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Junot Díaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>poet. Gary Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Alicia Gaspar de Alba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Weighting of data

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86 Authors in particular have been keen to discern how these algorithms work, but much of it is educated guess work. Author Robertson, in a blog post from 2012, believes that three “lists” determine sales, which include data on actual sales, free downloads, and “borrowers” of books (a Kindle feature), all heavily weighted to the previous 30 days. Nevertheless, the same day that the author posted this break down, Amazon appeared to have changed its algorithms once again, which he describes in detail. (Robertson)
removed from the initial release dates of these titles, I lack the longitudinal certainty that would be preferable here, and moreover necessary to solidify the assumption that rankings are based on sales. The second problem occurred in deciding how to weight the data points so that Sandra Cisneros, being at the top of González’s list, would count more strongly than Todd Parr, a weighting also necessary to perform in LoB. I also needed to balance this with the number of times across the 16 data collections that each name appeared. Thus, in the weighting, I assigned each position a value opposite of its ranking, as demonstrated in Figure 3. To be clear, I weighted all positions—giving Cisneros, in this case, a weighting of 16, and Todd Parr a 1. After the data collection period, I tallied the “Points Assigned” across all 16 collection points in order to arrive at a final ranking. I then used these weightings of all authors that appeared over the span of the collection period to produce bar graphs that demonstrated possible relationships.

There a couple of potential criticisms of this methodology that I would also like to address. Keen, for example, warns that marketplace data should be treated carefully because “one can never know for sure if a person who purchases a text, for education or for pleasure, actually takes the step of becoming one of its real readers” (34). In short, we cannot know with certainty if those who are buying particular books are reading them, if those reading them are students forced to buy them for class, or if they are given away as gifts. In the Amazon rankings above, students buying them for class could skew connections towards other texts that lack context, or somebody may buy a copy of *Butterfly Boy* for a friend who reads such
autobiographies, but the buyer may typically purchase something else altogether different. While these are certainly valid concerns, I believe that considering data in the aggregate, the way in which Amazon presents these lists, should minimize any potential impact of these unexpected customers. Also, if we scrutinize the names of the authors and the list of books themselves, there are few surprising connections—González, for example, is connected mainly to other Latina/o and children’s authors, as well as poets, the areas in which he has primarily published.

I debated exactly how to present this data because, as I noted, figures are imprecise as I do not have access to exact sales figures. Ultimately, I decided to use bar graphs instead of other formats I toyed with, including the tag cloud, because they offer the simplest way to present the data, and provide an easy way to interpret relationships. I decided not to include numerical figures on the y-axis of the graph—in short, because I can only approximate the importance of each author given that I lack precise sales data, exclusion of data labels delimits this presentation to approximate relationships. The last line on each graphs represent what could be called a “perfect” relationship—that the particular author appeared atop of the LoA during each data collection point. Although this did not occur, Cisneros came closest in the case of Muñoz.

**How readers organize authors**

Before answering the question of gay Chicano cybercommunities, I would like to make some general observations about the connections found between authors. Author-specific graphs can be seen in Figures 4, 5, and 6.
Latina/o solidarity: Espinoza, González and Muñoz all seem to be strongly connected to other Latina/o authors, be they Chicana/o or other. The non-Latino/a names that appear mostly tend to be found very far down their respective lists, suggesting ethnicity as a salient identity category for consumers of these works. Nevertheless, there are a few notable exceptions. In González, we can see names such as Audre Lorde, Leslea Newman, James Baldwin, and Edwidge Danticat and in a position of secondary to lower weighting. The connections to these authors would appear to be due to links in the LoB section of Butterfly Boy—González best-selling work during the period that I tracked these statistics—and not surprising given that all four are queer identified authors. González has also published a substantial amount of poetry, which may account for the connection to poet Gary Jackson. In Muñoz, the most significant non-Latino author is Jhumpa Lahiri, winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 2000 for Interpreter of the Maladies. The only connection that I could find between the two authors was that both have been nominated for the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award, with Lahiri winning in 2008 for Unaccustomed Earth. Muñoz was nominated in 2007 for Faith Healer, but did not win. In Alex Espinoza, we see prominent connections to Cormac McCarthy and scholar Charles M. Tatum, whose work Chicano Popular Culture spent a number of months (at least) as the top LoB selection for Still Water Saints. It is worth noting that it may be more difficult to ferret out relationship for Espinoza because he has
only published one book at the time of this study.

- **Best-sellers set the agenda:** Espinoza, González and Muñoz tend to be connected almost exclusively to Latina/o authors, and a few of the authors that connect strongest to both González and Muñoz are top sellers in their field. These include Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, and Junot Díaz, all three of whom appear high on Amazon’s Hispanic American Best-Sellers list. As I noted in Chapter 4, the top authors on this list tend to remain static—Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* and Díaz’s *Oscar Wao* and *This is How You Lose Her* occupied the top
three positions during everyone but three of the 16 data collection points,\(^\text{87}\) while other mainstays in the top ten included Julia Álvarez’s *In The Time of The Butterflies* and *How The García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Torres’ *We The Animals*, Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek*, Esmeralda Santiago’s *Conquistadora*, Héctor Tobar’s *The Barbarian Nurseries*, and Jennifer Chiaverini’s *Sonoma Rose*. Viramontes’ *Under the Feet of Jesus* ranked in the top 20 on seven occasions. It is possible that González and Muñoz are connected to these top selling authors by virtue of them simply dominating the sales rankings, suggesting that those who read González and Muñoz are more avid consumers of Latina/o literature and not necessarily the general public. Although I have not collected longitudinal data for Cisneros and Díaz, a scan of their pages reveals a strong connection to other Latina/o authors, but also to a number of other well-known writers, such as Toni Morrison, Ernest Hemmingway, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Alice Munro, among others. Simply put, the top Latina/o authors appear to have gone further “mainstream,” particularly Díaz, than lesser known writers such as those studied here. As already noted, it is more difficult to interpret the data for Alex Espinoza given that he has only published one novel, although his connected writers seems to skew more towards those in the lower upper tier of Latina/o authors, including Denise Chávez, Luis

\(^{87}\) Before the release of Díaz’s *This Is How* during the second data collection point, Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of The Butterflies* typically ranked third, while Torres’ *We The Animals* ranked second during the last collection point.
Alberto Urrea, and Arturo Islas.

- **Theme and setting matters:** Viramontes ranked very highly in both González and Muñoz, driven by the strength of her novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*. The novel, centered upon farm workers in California, shares thematic similarities with González’s works, particularly *Crossing Vines, Butterfly Boy* and some of the stories of *Men Without Bliss*, while sharing a similar setting to Muñoz’s first two collections of short stories. Likewise, Tomás Rivera was weighed second overall in González’s list, perhaps not surprising given that both Ilan Stavans and Rudolfo Anaya’s
reviews on the back cover of Crossing Vines compare the book to Rivera’s …y no se lo tragó la tierra, while the aforementioned Butterfly and Men cover similar ground.

- **Cross cultural queer connections:** Connections to other gay Latina/o authors appears to be secondary to best-selling Latina/o writers in general. Outside of Cisneros, Viramontes, García and Díaz, Muñoz is next most connected to Rigoberto González, and then, in lesser importance, Arturo Islas, Daniel Alarcón, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba. González appears to be far more connected with queer writers in general, including Latinos Gloria Anzaldúa, Manuel Muñoz, Charles Rice González, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and non-Latinos such as James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Edwidge Danticat, Jennifer Lynn Baszile, and Leslea Newman. This cross-cultural queer connection may occur because of the number of González’s books that have been queer focused, including Butterfly, which strongly connects to memoirs such as Brother I’m Dying (Danticat) and The Black Girl Next Door (Baszile).
  
As noted earlier, Butterfly tended to be González’s best-selling work during the entire data collection period, thus is can be assumed that the authors in the LoB connected to that work heavily skewed his overall statistics. While Muñoz’s first two works contain significant queer content, it does not appear that the cyberpublic has classified him as strongly as a queer author as they have González, whose stories have also appeared in gay literary anthologies such as From Macho to Mariposa, among others. Given the almost complete lack of such content in Espinoza’s Still Water Saints, it is perhaps unsurprising that few connections to other gay authors
outside of Muñoz and Islas. While it is rather easy to ascertain that both González and Muñoz are gay given the content of their works and simple internet searches, it is much more difficult in the case of Espinoza, who does not have a large web presence and whose sexuality is only mentioned in two works that I have so far encountered: González’s anthology *Camino del Sol* and Tongson’s *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. In sum, these findings would suggest that queer as a salient identity category is somewhat less important than ethnicity for Amazon readers of Espinoza, González and Muñoz.

- **Authors matter, not works:** Although I did collect data on the LoB feature, I have decided not to present it here because the results are far less conclusive and
prone to several unforeseen problems. Prominently, these lists are much more difficult to quantify and represent given that they change even within the same work, based upon whether one considers the hardcover, softcover, or Kindle edition. I also came to view the LoB feature as self-reinforcing; given that it is located prominently on the page of each particular book, there is a chance that readers will more highly consider purchasing those works already on the list. Finally, these connections are likely less reliable to examine because they are essentially micro data. Given that none of the books that I examine in this dissertation could be considered to have a high sales volume, data that compromises an author’s works in aggregate (LoA) is likely far more stable and indicative of overall consumer trends.

A reader based cybercommunity of gay Chicano authors?

Finally, to return to the original intent of this chapter, I will look at how readers have specifically connected gay Chicano authors, and if these connections might be substantial enough to be considered a cybercommunity. As we saw in the previous section, Muñoz and González in particular do have substantial connections to other queer authors, both Latina/o and otherwise. Here, I would like to divide the canon of gay Chicano authors into what I will call the first generation, including

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88 To note, the top three weighted books for the works looked at in this study are: Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints: Chicano Visions: American Painters on the Verge* (Cheech Marin), *Taco Testimony* (Denise Chávez), and *People of Paper* (Salvador Plascencia). González’s *Crossing Vines: ...y no se lo tragó la tierra* (Rivera), *Faith Healer* (Muñoz), *Let it Rain Coffee* (Angie Cruz); *Butterfly Boy: White Like Me* (Tim Wise), *The Names* (N. Scott Momaday), *The Black Girl Next Door* (Jennifer Lynn Baszile). Munoz’s *Zigzagger: Faith Healer* (Muñoz), *The Rain God* (Islas), *Dirty Girls Social Club* (Alisa Valdes-Rodríguez); *Faith Healer: Zigzagger* (Muñoz), *War By Candlelight* (Daniel Alarcón), *Under The Feet of Jesus* (Viramontes); *What You See in the Dark: Faith Healer, Zigzagger, and Bordering Fires* (Cristina García). Given this data, and as suggested in Chapter 2, it appears that Muñoz has achieved at least a degree of repeat business.
names such as Rechy, Islas, Alarcón, Rodriguez and Nava, and the second generation, perhaps most prominently including both González and Muñoz. Although I have not collected longitudinal data on the first generation of these authors, scanning their LoA reveals few connections.\textsuperscript{89} Islas, for example, is connected to Muñoz and Rodriguez, although not strongly, Rodriguez to Islas, while Alarcón and Nava are not connected to any other gay Chicano author. Nevertheless, all of these authors do have substantial connections to other Chicana/o authors—Nava: Gaspar de Alba, Oscar “Zeta” Acosta, and Manuel Ramos, Islas: Viramontes, Emma Pérez, Ana Castillo, Luis Valdez, among many others, Rodriguez: Cisneros, Rivera, Islas, Anaya and José Antonio Villarreal, Rechy: Viramontes, and Acosta, and Alarcón: Pat Mora, Juan Felipe Herrera, and Azaldúa, among others. This suggests that the cyberpublic has not yet formed a community out of this first generation, mostly viewing them as Chicano authors not connected with their queer brothers.

If we compare this to the results of prominent Chicana feminist authors, the results could be considered disappointing. Moraga, for example, connects with Anzaldúa, Lorde, AnaLouise Keating, Cisneros, Castillo, Emma Pérez, among others, Anzaldúa with Lorde, Moraga, Cisneros, and Daisy Hernandez, etc., and Gaspar de Alba with Moraga and Cisneros. These relationships are much more difficult to ascertain with an author such as Cisneros, mostly likely due to being a consistent best-seller and having strong connections with other such writers. Given the comparison between the two groups, we must question whether this lack of

\textsuperscript{89} This data was collected on January 21, 2013. As this is an ongoing project, I continue to collect this data, but currently on a much broader range of authors.
connections between the first generation of gay Chicano authors is the fault of the readers, or the authors themselves. Given their history, it is logical that the readers have made so many connections between the Chicana feminists because the authors themselves forged these through collaborations such as the aforementioned *This Bridge Called My Back*. I would also stand to reason that the readers have not connected the first generation of gay Chicano authors because, as Moraga has noted, they did not push for this sort of community and common identity.

Nevertheless, it is in the second generation of these authors that we begin to see the seeding of a cybercommunity. While these authors have not collaborated together up to this point, Muñoz is the most heavily weighted author for Espinoza and third for González, while González figures fifth overall on Muñoz’s list. During the final data collection point, González also made an appearance on Espinoza’s list, albeit in the final position. Espinoza did not figure on the lists of either Muñoz or González, although this may change as he continues to publish. Unfortunately, this nascent community has not extended to include the first generation of authors. While Islas does appear among both Muñoz and Espinoza’s connections, other names such as Rechy, Alarcón, Rodriguez and Nava are notably absent. Thus, to summarize, it does appear that readers have made community out of the second generation of these gay Chicano authors, although not one as strongly focused as the Chicana feminists, either through what they have created or how customers have organized them on Amazon. Given the strength of these connections, I do not believe

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90 Indeed, the List of Books for *This Bridge* includes others works by Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Moraga, all contributors to the collection, among others.
them to be mere coincidence—it would seem that readers are connecting these authors offline in some way that is not currently visible to myself as a researcher. For example, just as I found Espinoza, González and Muñoz through a search for “gay Chicano authors,” perhaps other readers have as well, suggesting that there is a reader interest in contextualizing these authors. Without doubt, this is an avenue for further exploration in future projects.

Given that Espinoza, González and Muñoz only began publishing within the past decade, it will be interesting to see where this nascent community goes in the future, and 2013 looks to hold a number of interesting developments. As discussed earlier, González has briefly written about the formations of this type of community in the introduction to Camino del Sol, and will release further related titles in 2013, Autobiography of My Hungers, and, interestingly, Red-Inked Retablos. According to its description on Amazon, this book promises to “combine accounts from González’s personal life with reflections on writers who have influenced him. The collection offers an in-depth meditation on the development of gay Chicano literature and the responsibilities of the Chicana/o writer” (“Red-Inked”). Espinoza also released his second novel in March of 2013, The Five Acts of Diego León, a historical work set in the movie industry with much more overt queer content, including a gay protagonist. Thematically, the book shares some commonalities with Muñoz’s What You See in the Dark, which is also historically set in the world of the film industry, so it will be interesting to see if the cyberpublic connects the two works to further strengthen bonds between the authors. We may also see further cross-queer
connections, such as in the anthology *From Macho to Mariposa*, which was discussed earlier.

**Conclusion: Mapping the future**

I have decided to focus solely upon the role of Amazon.com in this chapter because it has revolutionized the book market. As we have seen, it has allowed disparate readers to connect with each other and form cybercommunities in ways that would have been difficult, if not impossible, before. Importantly, particularly for authors like Rigoberto González, it has also helped to make books far more accessible, regardless of the size of publishing houses. Before, a book such as *Crossing Vines*, published by the University of Oklahoma Press, would have likely been impossible to find in a local Barnes & Noble, but it is now readily available for purchase and shipment on Amazon. Glenn Fleishman, who was employed as a catalog manager at Amazon.com when it was building its business in the late 1990s, worked to get smaller publishing outfits to give the retailer more information about their titles to display on the website to help them compete with the larger companies. He recounts:
The attitude that I wanted to convey was that we are going to help you sell more of your books. The way we’re going to do that is by giving you equal placement. Amazon gives books the same level of placement, whether you’re HarperCollins or a self-published author that sells one copy of one title once a month.” (Spector 136)91

Amazon has also given researchers a wealth of information that they previously readily lacked—a Hispanic American Best-Sellers list, and the author connections that were discussed over the previous pages.

However, an often overlooked change that Amazon has also recently initiated is giving space to self-published authors and, much to the dismay of publishing firms, publishing their own titles under the banner Amazon Crossing. This may be a boon to new authors of more explicitly queer works, helping them to become published. In an interview with Torres, Islas recounted the difficulty that he had in publishing *The Rain God* in the 1980s, and how, in its original form as *Día de los muertos/Day of the Dead*, it was rejected by publishers for not having “characters they could identify with” (69). Aldama specifies this rejection further, writing that the novel that even resulted from this process, *Rain*, was “greatly trimmed of its

91 There has been much recent debate whether or not Amazon.com is a boon or a drag of smaller outfits. Lynn Mitchell, owner and operator of British Linen Press, wrote in a 2011 blog for The Guardian newspaper that she lost more than £2 ($3.20 U.S.) for every book sold through Amazon.com, thanks to Amazon’s 60% take on her sales, and £2.50 shipping to Amazon.com for order fulfillment (Mitchell). In direct response to that posting, on the same blog Kate Nash, director of Myrmidon, responded that Amazon.com represents money “direct to our bank account,” noting that there were very few returns through the website, unlike in traditional bookstores. She also writes that consumers increasingly look to Amazon.com first not only because “of the fast (and often free) delivery service, and the lower prices, but because of the opportunity Amazon offers to be able to browse and, increasingly, feel part of a community. Amazon’s clever marketing and algorithms, which recommend books to buyers based on their purchasing history, is unmatched.” (Nash)
original Chicano caló and its queer characterization” (Brown 112). This example speaks to the difficulty that Latina/o authors, and specifically those who are gay, may encounter in becoming published, but new opportunities have opened. The anthology From Macho to Mariposa, for example contains a number of authors who have not been published before, and should they chose to continue publishing, they have a world of options that Islas did not have nearly 30-years ago. Amazon’s “CreateSpace,” for example, prints user-submitted books on demand, requiring no up-front investment for the company or the author. They also offer Kindle DirectPublish, which promises, according to the website, up to a 70% royalty. However, this is not unproblematic. During a recent search for Alex Espinoza, a book titled “The Dream Within and Other Stories” and published in 2008, popped up rather unexpectedly. It was not until looking at a reader review that I discovered that the author of this book is not the writer of Still Water Saints:

Buyer beware: this book of stories is not by the author of Still Water Saints, as I had expected. This is instead a work by an entirely different individual, and published by a vanity press. The writing is, to say the least, not the quality I had anticipated. (Lopez II)

Although this is an extreme case of two authors sharing the same name, the review does point out problems—the quality of these self-published books varies greatly, and they may suffer from lack of editing and/or polishing that readers have come to expect from works published at major firms. Amazon has also launched its own publishing imprints—AmazonEncore, AmazonCrossing, Montlake Romance, Thomas
Mercer, 47North, and New Harvest. AmazonCrossing is dedicated to publishing foreign-language translations, and in 2011, released three works by Puerto Rican author Giannina Braschi—YO-YO BOING!, United States of Banana, and Empire Dreams. It remains to be seen if these avenues will prove fruitful for authors in general, or even if new authors will be able to use them to publish, if readers will seriously consider their works. For Latina/o and gay Chicano authors in particular, this may create a situation where it is easier to become published, but far more difficult to stand out from the crowd. As I noted in Chapter 3, the Hispanic American Best-Sellers list on Amazon is reified in a way that is not true of, for example, the general book market or the African American list—established names such as Sandra Cisneros, Junot Díaz and Julia Alvarez dominate the top rankings, many times with books that are more than a decade old.

This is where the idea of the “long tail” becomes ever more important. Given that consumers seem to be forming a cybercommunity of the second generation of gay Chicano authors, new authors will perhaps have the opportunity to see demand sent “down the long tail” by using their success to ensure that readers interested in

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92 As Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg notes in an October 2012 article in the Wall Street Journal, Amazon’s foray into directed publishing has not yet been a wild success. The books that it has published have been boycotted by Amazon’s largest competitor, Barnes & Noble, while one smaller book seller said that “I don’t want to become a showroom for Amazon.” The books that it has picked up apparently do sell well in digital versions, but are have not made inroads when it comes to physical copies. According to Trachtenberg, Amazon was able to sign a number of large names in the publishing world, including Deepak Chopra, but that has slowed, presumably due to author worries about book availability. Streitfeld agrees with Trachtenberg’s assessment, writing that “Amazon has little ability to move physical copies of its own books,” and sees a potential future where a physically edition of a book might “become the reward for a successful electronic publication.” Streitfeld also notes that Amazon is not just acquiring established authors—according to the information that Amazon gave him, about half of the manuscripts “now in production” are from agents, which, according to the author, “means an equal number are from writers flogging their own material.”
these materials know that they exist. Much of this, however, will depend on how readers continue to organize these cybercommunities. Perhaps initiatives from the authors themselves, such as the aforementioned *Red-Inked Retablos* from González, will solidify these communities and connections, finally forming the strong literary identity and community that they have been criticized for lacking.
Conclusion: Charting Their Own Course

Gay Chicano authors, perhaps not unlike Chicana/o and Latina/o authors in general, have made great strides in the past few decades in terms of entering the market and solidifying expressions of their subjectivities. If we remember that one of the first gay Chicano novels, Rechy’s City of Night, was not accepted into the Chicano literary canon until almost two decades after he became active as a writer, this progress is particularly impressive. Since then, a number of other gay Chicano authors have worked their way into the literary market, including Francisco X. Alarcón, Arturo Islas, Michael Nava and Richard Rodriguez. This early generation alone produced a variety of works that entered into disparate areas of the market, including the more explicitly sexual (Rechy), the political (Rodriguez), and even the crime genre, as we see in Nava’s Henry Rios series of novels. The newer generation, including Alex Espinoza, Rigoberto González and Manuel Muñoz—particularly the latter two—have further added to this diversity, and along the way have been far more open about their sexuality than many of those in that earlier generation. As I noted in the Chapter 4, González may be the most prolific gay Latino author yet, producing books for children and adolescents, two autobiographies, collections of short stories, poetry, in addition to his recent meditation on gay Chicano literature.
Red Inked Retablos. Muñoz has also produced two explicitly queer-themed story collections, Zigzagger and Faith Healer, while his most recent What You See left behind categories of queer and Latino to reach toward a more general-interest reading public. And while Alex Espinoza’s Still Water Saints almost entirely lacked queer content, his most recent The Five Acts of Diego Leon does feature a gay protagonist.

All of these authors have been generally successful in reaching a reading public, and we see evidence of this in online discussions that focus on their works, and the fact that they continue to publish. Of course, most authors write because they feel that they have something important to say, but they also want to be read, and must sell in order to continue to be published. Thus, what this study has attempted to do is mostly sidestep the issue of politics and focus instead on the author-reader relationship, and specifically how these authors create rich storyworlds that draw the reader into their works. This relationship, however, is not a one-way street that is directed only by the author—how the reader interacts with a given text is perhaps even more important because they purchase these works, and may go on to purchase other texts if they author “grabs” them in the right way. I ultimately titled this project “Selling a Feeling” because that is, in essence, what all authors do, even in texts where this intention does not seem immediate. To demonstrate this, I recall teaching Clarice Lispector’s A hora da estrela in a recent class. As I explained in Chapter 2, the narrator Rodrigo, who speaks directly to the reader throughout the text, promises that that the novel will be devastatingly cold in

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in examining the life of protagonist Macabéa. For the most part, Rodrigo does not disappoint. Macabéa is almost entirely without any redeeming qualities—she is unattractive and rarely bathes, constantly coughs, asks rather stupid questions, pays attention only to the most insignificant things, and has no family or friends that care about her. Nevertheless, in spite of all of her faults and Rodrigo’s slant in narration, students in my class did end up caring deeply about her, reacting with disgust when her boyfriend cheats on her, and becoming saddened when she is struck by a car and dies at the end of the novel. I believe that this example speaks perfectly to how readers become involved in texts and attached to characters, even if, in this extreme example, the author (and narrator) dare them not to. In this case, Lispector sells the feeling of desperation and detachment, and ultimately how human life has value no matter how seemingly worthless, and my students readily bought it.

The recent cognitive turn in literary studies has opened up a plethora of ways that we can examine how readers may make sense of texts, like my students did with A hora da estrela, using cues that authors have carefully placed in their works. After consideration of the primary texts themselves, and observations I made while teaching selections of the works explored in these chapters, I have focused on three aspects of cognition in particular: empathy and sympathy, theory of mind, and surprise. I combined these with the tools of narratology to effectively read how these authors have created storyworlds that both engross their readers and perhaps force them to think beyond the pages immediately in front of them.
In Chapter 1, I looked at how González employs empathy and sympathy to construct affective planes that connect characters to readers. In *Crossing Vines*, I consider how the author gives sympathetic/empathetic portrayals to a number of seemingly oppositional characters across the work, which may force readers to reconsider treating the characters as mere agricultural workers without agency. Indeed, I believe that González constructs these characters as real (fictional) entities that face a myriad of real-world problems not necessarily connected to their work status. This may, in turn, force the reader to step back and feel empathy for them as human beings, rather than a distanced sympathy that can be patronizing in nature.

In the autobiographical *Butterfly Boy*, I examined how the author constructs empathetic portrayals of both the author and his father, who seems to have difficulty in accepting González’s sexuality. This cross-empathy may work to bring diverse readerships to a greater understanding of their own lives—queer children can see their parent’s and/or relatives’ point of view, while the latter group can feel how difficult it is to come to terms with one’s sexuality. In both cases, how González constructs this sympathy and empathy becomes inherently political in nature, which I also discuss.

In Chapter 2, I considered how Muñoz constructs two types of salient narrators across his works: the vague and the emotive. In the first, the narrator leaves gaps in the story are not filled by the conclusion, which may lead the reader to reevaluate the story in a search for meaning. Often times, the reader may discover that these gaps in information are explicitly tied to the subject of homosexuality—
that characters do not talk about homosexuality somehow makes it less real, at least to them. The emotive narrator is not necessarily tied to the subject of homosexuality, but is often more salient to the reader than the vague. They are at times judgmental and/or jealous, and direct these strong emotions directly onto the reader. I believe that the consequence of employing these two types of salient narrators is to first pull the reader into the story, and subsequently push them out because of lack of closure, or even a feeling of being affronted by the storyteller. The reader may then be compelled to reevaluate the story itself, and mind read the true intentions of the narrator through the employment of Theory of Mind.

Chapter 3 stepped back from narratology and instead looked at the cognitive science behind surprise, and how Espinoza’s *Still Water Saints* positions itself in the field of Latina/o literature. Here I explored the typification of Latino/a literature in the marketplace, many times through covers, reviews, marketing, and other avenues, and how it has become tied with the genre of magical realism, for better or for worse. Rather than being constructed as a magical realist novel, I instead posited that *Still Water Saints* is a magic realized novel that uses certain markers to position itself in the market. Given the cover, reviews, and the first chapter of the novel itself, a reader would likely believe that they would be treated to a magical-realist reading experience in *Still Water Saints*, even though the novel is anything but. I explored how Espinoza systematically discredits the notion that protagonist-curandera Perla has any sort of otherworldly power at all, which may indeed come as a surprise for the reader due to the aforementioned magical realist markers of the novel. I linked
the cognitive science of surprise to the possibility of belief change, and how *Still Water Saints* may be capable of altering some reader perceptions of what Latina/o literature is.

Nevertheless, these cognitive and narratological applications are not specific to Espinoza, González and Muñoz—one could perform the same type of study with any author or any work. González, for example, does not use empathy and sympathy in his works because he is gay, but rather because he is an author that wants to connect with readers and sell books. Instead, I have chosen to pursue this line of study to move the conversation about these authors away from how they make community and sense of their own works. As I discussed in the Introduction, even considering the wide variety of works they have created, gay Chicano authors in general have not had the same reach as their Chicana feminist counterparts. The earlier generation of these authors, including Islas, Rechy, et al. did not coalesce into a community in the same way that Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and others did in works like *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*. These collaborations served to form those all-important links that gave both authors and readers a sense of belonging and shared identity—in essence, a literary community. As I also noted, gay Chicano authors have been strongly criticized for not coming together, particularly by Moraga herself in her essay "Queer Aztlán," and her interview with Weatherston that I cited in Chapter 4. While Moraga’s criticisms were directed toward the earlier generation of authors—specifically Islas and Rodriguez—even more than 20 years after “Queer Aztlán,” gay Chicano, and gay
Latino authors in general, have still not formally coalesced into this idea of community. Collections such as *From Machos to Mariposas* and *Bésame Mucho* may very well represent a beginning, although the impact that they have had remains to be seen. Instead of merely reiterating that they have not made sense of their own works and formed this community, I decided to look to how readers may make sense of their works, and finally, to how readers make community. In Chapter 4, I specifically explored the role of Amazon.com and how we can use features such as “Customers Also Bought Items By” to examine buying patterns and discern how readers are connecting these authors. Despite no collections that have formally bridged works by Espinoza, González and Muñoz, it does appear that readers are considering these authors within some context of their shared sexuality and Chicano roots in a way that they still do not appear to for the earlier generation. Another interesting facet is found in how readers appear to have pulled Islas into this community, at least during the period that I collected data. Unfortunately, the rest of the earlier generation remain outsiders to this nascent reader-formed cybercommunity, and furthermore, are rarely connected to each other.

To return to the criticism of gay Chicano authors, it is pertinent to question the fairness in faulting them for not following in the footsteps of their Chicana counterparts. As I discussed in the Introduction, Viego has pointed out that it may be problematic to automatically assume alliances between queer Chicanos male and female because they have been sexualized in distinct ways. I also highlighted how feminist Chicana discourse was able to enter the academy using avenues that may
not have been open to their male counterparts. In regards to the more recent
generation, in her interview with Weatherston, Moraga recounts how younger
queer men of color are using feminism to express their queer subjectivity. While the
work that Moraga and her generation have accomplished is staggering and not to be
diminished in any way, we also should consider that they have become somewhat of
a hegemonic discourse in their own right. Despite the faults of the earlier
generation, gay Chicanos authors should be allowed to chart their own course to
community—one that does not necessarily need to be tied to Chicana feminism. And
I believe that the currently generation, particularly in the case of Rigoberto
González, is accomplishing just that in a way that the earlier generation never did,
with the help of readers who seem keen to discover and make meaning of what they
have written.
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