

THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER NARRATIVE THROUGH A POSTPOSITIVIST  
REALIST IDENTITY THEORY  
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By

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THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER NARRATIVE THROUGH A  
POSTPOSITIVIST REALIST IDENTITY THEORY

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the Mexicans and Mexican Americans before me who have had the border cross them, who struggled through *el movimiento*, and who have worked the land, all in hopes of a better future for their own children. Because of them, the fight is over, and I am able to write this thesis in pursuit of justice. More specifically, I dedicate this thesis to the men in my life who have taken care of me and my mother who has taught me not to endure but to react.

Foolish people speak of a border of aliens and wetbacks. They put stickers on their cars which read “Native Texan.” They want the riches the land can bring them, but without loving the land or working it; they hate and fear those who do. They hope to buy their way into heaven by making life hell for those of the earth.

—Alan Pogue

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
I. LEARNING CHICANO LITERATURE DESPITE THE HIERARCHY OF EDUCATION .....	1
II. CHARACTERS IN ... <i>And the Earth Did Not Devour Him</i> IDENTIFYING WITH POSTPOSITIVIST CLAIMS .....	22
III. MOYA’S THEORY THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS .....	53
IV. ALAN POGUE’S MIGRANT FARMWORKER PHOTOGRAPHS .....	85
V. IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER NARRATIVE .....	101
WORKS CITED .....	124

# CHAPTER I

## LEARNING CHICANO LITERATURE DESPITE THE HIERARCHY OF EDUCATION

The most important part of this thesis is the literary and cultural analysis of literary works and images. By using this type of analysis as the main tool to see how one might discover and form an ethnic identity, I will elaborate on why this particular tool and this particular kind of narrative—the migrant farmworker narrative—is so vitally important to forging an ethnic identity. My reason for choosing to analyze the migrant farmworker narrative arises from personal experience and my personal disappointment upon realizing my lack of knowledge of my father’s past and of my Mexican American culture’s past. Many Mexican Americans, as well as Mexican Americans who identify themselves as Chicanos/as, have not had the migrant farmworker experience. We may not feel we are able to connect to that specific experience that is nevertheless important and integral to the existence of previous generations of Mexican Americans. Because of the lack of a connection with the migrant farmworker experience, younger generations, probably like me when I was younger, do not understand the history behind the prejudices and injustices that still plague many of us simply because of our ethnic identity. Nicolás Kanellos makes this point when he says that Mexican American culture needs to be analyzed from within in order “to bring the culture’s values to the forefront and combat the too often repeated clichés and stereotypes that even the social scientists of the last three decades have legitimized with their ‘objective,’ but too often culture-bound

methods and their dehumanizing jargon” (53). Educating young Mexican Americans about the migrant farmworker experience will achieve exactly what Kanellos is advocating. This genre of literature conveying an experience that most Mexican Americans today have not had may seem irrelevant, but I will argue the contrary. According to Moya’s postpositivist realist theoretical claims, because of our different social categories, it is apparent that there is no collective, monolithic Chicano/a experience. Even students from the same social categories will have different experiences and reactions to their experiences because of many other factors Moya mentions as part of her postpositivist realist theory of ethnic identity construction. However, the postpositivist realist idea of an ethnic identity being fluid, continually developing, and not being absolute is what makes Moya’s theory vital for analyzing Chicano/a Literature and photographic images. More students should learn from the prior experiences of their Mexican American elders so young Mexican Americans can develop an ethnic identity, which is important for students to situate themselves within the society in which they live and understand how to be successful in such a society where they are minorities. As Moya argues, the development of an ethnic identity can happen when understanding and utilizing *la facultad*, which in a basic explanation is a survival tactic employed by marginalized people to adjust to circumstances in which they feel threatened or not safe (87-88).

My point is that although the experiences of characters in Chicano/a Literature and as seen in documentary photographic images are not the same experiences as those held by every student, no piece of literature or photograph ever will be. Therefore, the fact that the migrant farmworker experience is not one that all Mexican Americans have

had does not negate the relevance of this literature. Migrant farmworker narratives as depicted in literature and photographic images are nevertheless applicable because Mexican American students can evaluate different situations and struggles similarly. Because art can sometimes imitate life, these migrant farmworkers' struggles and social categories may not be the same as those held by Mexican Americans today, but the emotions and reactions of each struggle and situation can be similar because of the bonds a culture forms for each ethnic group's identity.

A recent, personal example of this kind of ethnic identification occurred when I read the novel *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* by Bárbara Renaud González. In the novel, Lucero, the young daughter of the protagonist, works in agricultural fields to help her father. At the same time that she is doing this work, she becomes interested in dating a white boy, but she believes that he would not be able to understand her life or why she has certain obligations to her family. Lucero expresses embarrassment at the idea of introducing him to her family or letting him see where she lives. Although I have never thought I could not date a white boy or not bring him to my parents' house, I have often felt embarrassed at the thought of explaining my cultural traditions or tendencies to a white friend. Now I realize that I saw white culture as normal and that, therefore, by default, mine was abnormal. Perhaps at twelve years of age, had I read a story I could identify with culturally, I might have realized that it was acceptable for me to be different and proud of these cultural differences.

The ability of students to analyze literature and photographic images allows an understanding of how to generate more significance from the subtext of the migrant farmworker narrative than just gaining what is explicitly relayed in the story. The reader

can situate him or herself and his or her opinions in line with or in opposition to the ideas advanced in the literary work or photographic image, the underlying meanings, the author's and photographer's beliefs or background, and the arguments the literary work or photographic image advances. The ability to express opinions based on careful analysis without the teacher saying with absolute authority "wrong answer" will allow students to be more vocal and hopefully will give them the confidence to disagree with an idea originating from the mainstream. By studying this body of ethnic literature and photographic images, young Chicanos/as will gain an awareness of their social location and the social categories surrounding that location. In turn, this awareness will cultivate the process of attaining *la facultad* in order for them to situate themselves in society and understand their overall, continually changing position in current American society. Ultimately, helping young Chicanos/as arrive at a basic understanding of *la facultad* is our responsibility as educators and educated people, ensuring Chicanos or Chicanas the opportunity of finding success in a white- and male-dominated world while at the same time maintaining their ethnic cultures.

Halfway through my undergraduate degree, for instance, I realized my high school experience was not the same experience as that of most students at Texas State University-San Marcos. I finally realized why my experience was different: the institution of education, at the high school and college level, is constructed hierarchically. People such as myself—female, minority—are at the bottom, adhering to the codes of a dominant culture to which we can only partially relate. The people at the top who run these institutions—from the dominant group—make decisions for students without

always understanding why they can be detrimental to the construction of their ethnic identity and therefore of their academic identity. This has been exactly my experience.

The main reason for my interest in this research is that I used to be the uninformed and uninterested Mexican American youth addressed in this thesis, the Mexican American who could not understand the importance of her future because she did not know her past. When I say “her past,” I mean the past struggles of her people—the Mexicans who crossed the border (or who had the border cross them) to make a better life here, the Mexican Americans who were born on this side, and the Mexicans who continue to cross borders. Because I never lacked food, shelter, or any necessities, I thought I had a typical middle-class life and education. More importantly, I thought the extent of the quality of the education that I could receive was what I was taught at my high school. I never realized I could do more to further educate myself. In fact, I needed to do more to further educate myself because the public school system had failed in preparing me for a successful academic career in college.

I distinctly remember wondering, when learning about the civil rights movement, “Where were the Mexicans during this time?” I had to read about it on my own to discover the answer. Also, I was nineteen when I first read a Latin American author, Gabriel García Márquez. I was twenty before I learned that there was an entire genre of American literature written by and about people with roughly the same cultural background as myself. This is tragic, considering that I grew up in Austin, Texas, roughly 230 miles from the Mexican border. It is no wonder that at the time, I was not at all interested in most any of the canonized literature I read before I discovered Chicano/a Literature. Nothing I had read reflected any experience I had had as a Mexican American.



This is the detrimental effect of the curriculum taught at my high school, which in 2008 was 63 percent Hispanic, and at other high schools like it.

Chicanos and Chicanas like myself are being denied exposure to this genre of Chicano/a Literature that explains who we are as a people more specifically than what is otherwise prescribed in mainstream literature classes. In his article, “Chicano Literature: Fiesta of the Living,” Tomás Rivera claims that his intention for writing was not an attempt to represent the Chicano experience, but rather to focus on it as a “ritual of immortality, of awe in the face of the ‘other’” (439). Not teaching young Chicanos/as the history of the migrant farmworker experience, their educational system is keeping a part of their identity from them. These young adults mostly learn literature from what for them is the “other,” as Chicano Literature is not regarded as important by the mainstream, so young Chicanos/as are not always taught its significance. Fortunately, Rivera’s work is currently taught at high school and university levels. Unfortunately, typically only a very few Chicano/a Literature classes in college focus on various Chicano/a writers and provide Mexican American students with an opportunity to learn about their own culture and history. Few other literature courses have this as a focus.

I first learned about Rivera and his works, for instance, in an undergraduate Chicano/a Literature course at Texas State University, San Marcos. This experience was amazing because I was finally able to recognize characteristics of my own culture and identify in literature characteristics that I had never seen in print before reading Rivera’s novel. I told my dad about the stories in Rivera’s novel, and he related to me his own stories of working in the fields. In “Chicano Literature: Fiesta of the Living,” Rivera states, “I have lived its roots all my life, a life that for the most part has known no

literature to represent it” (439). Thanks to the Chicano/a writers of this period, Chicano/a Literature has existed my entire life to embody experiences representing the ethnic community to which I belong. Unfortunately, it took twenty years and one class to discover this literature.

This personal narrative of my educational experience (or the lack thereof) is intended to explain a few points: 1) how Mexican American students are being denied the opportunity to formulate an ethnic identity through their curriculum at both the high school and college level; 2) the intention behind denying other students this opportunity; 3) and the result of this denial is not a good one for all involved. I would find it hard to argue that the institution of education is not constructed hierarchically. As with most institutions that are constructed in such a manner, the dominant group is usually at the top of this hierarchy. The people on top decide the curriculum students are taught in elementary and secondary education.

Any person currently living in Texas should be familiar with the recent Texas Board of Education controversy over deciding what content is included and removed in public school textbooks. Of course, most of the people in positions of power, like members of the Texas Board of Education, are white conservatives. On the Committee on Instruction, Barbara Cargill, Ken Mercer, Terri Leo, and Geraldine Miller are all Republicans. Lawrence A. Allen, Jr. is the only Democrat and minority on this committee. The Chair, Cargill, lives in the Woodlands, which also speaks to her high socioeconomic background, and the Vice Chair, Mercer, has been an outspoken and controversial “conservative” member who also lacks any classroom or education-related experience (“SBOE Officers, Committees, and Members”). Therefore, based on this

knowledge behind the political background of the Committee on Instruction, the material in the textbooks typically has a conservative agenda. As a result, Mexican American students whose interests are not a primary concern of the typical conservative are learning to adhere to conservative viewpoints that may be in opposition to many aspects of the Mexican American student's identity and experience.

Mexican American students are, more often than not, taught the dominant group's opinions and that these opinions are correct, in their elementary and secondary education. Moreover, once they get to college, Mexican American students can be put in a position where they do not feel comfortable speaking against the dominant culture's opinions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the fall of 2007, four percent of college and university faculty were Hispanic. Not surprisingly, "about 80 percent of all faculty were White; 43 percent were White males and 36 percent were White females" ("The Digest of Education Statistics: 2009"). Also, in 2008, 63 percent of students enrolled in a degree-granting institution were white, and 12 percent were Hispanic ("The Digest of Education Statistics: 2009"). There are not only more white professors teaching, but there are also more white students in the class. Mexican American college students encounter this environment at most Texas universities and can easily see that their place in this hierarchy is not with the dominant group and therefore not on top.

The next logical question would be "why are the people on top only targeting students of the same dominant group for a Texas public school education?" The simple answer is to keep the dominant group on top and the inferior group at the bottom. The idea of withholding education from minorities to ensure their failure in society may seem

like an extreme idea; however, this is something that Anglos did very strategically and successfully in Texas during the 1920s through to the 1940s.

According to David Montejano, “Educating the Mexican also raised the danger that Mexicans might seek ‘social equality’” (191). As a result, certain questionable policies were implemented, such as keeping Mexicans from going past the sixth grade or ensuring that Mexican schools were substandard with inadequate supplies to keep the Mexican uneducated because “if farmers were to keep this labor reservoir, Mexicans had to be kept ignorant” (191-2). The mentality behind keeping Mexican Americans uneducated is the same as keeping slaves from reading: first they know how to read, and suddenly they want freedom. If you educate Mexican Americans, we will want better jobs, better pay, better everything. However, I believe it is even more complicated than that. I argue that the intention behind denying these students an opportunity to formulate an awareness of their ethnic identity (and therefore possibly also *la facultad*) is not only to keep us cleaning office buildings and fixing air conditioners, but also to marginalize us so we do not argue against dominant conservative viewpoints.

To clarify, I believe that the dominant group’s actions that keep Mexican Americans uneducated is simply an economic maneuver. I do not argue that the dominant group dislikes the inferior group and that that is the reasoning behind keeping minorities uneducated. I argue that the dominant group keeps the minority down in order to ensure economic success for the dominant group’s children. To ensure this success, the dominant group reinforces its ideas and practices as normal and, in turn, keeps the minority uneducated and marginalized.

This brings me to my third point, the result of this denial of educational opportunities. It is probable that without learning about our past and our culture through the materials we are taught in the classroom, we will fail to understand our social position within a White and male-dominated world. I have taught in the Austin Public School System, and I have seen the difference between schools on the eastside and westside of Austin, the capital of Texas. To tell Mexican American children on the eastside that they have every educational opportunity which white children on the westside have is simply not true. Mexican Americans will continue to have subpar educations, jobs, and lives if we cannot understand that our social location mandates that we work just as hard if not harder to create the same opportunities for ourselves that white children are given. The effects of such inequality can also be seen in the classroom. Imagine a student who has moved through the Texas education system and is now in a first-year English college composition class. Because this student's curriculum up to this point in his or her life has been determined and taught by the dominant group, the student has learned that the dominant group's ideas about the status quo are correct. Therefore, in a classroom comprised largely of students from the dominant group, taught by the dominant group, and with literature discussed from the dominant group's perspective, a Mexican American student can easily feel forced to subscribe to the dominant group's ideas, or a Mexican American student can choose to stay quiet.

The chance of the Mexican American student opposing the dominant group in this type of environment is not likely. In his article pertaining to communication between Latino students and "Anglo-mainstream instructors," Raul Ybarra explains the different reasons Latino college students have trouble in first-year writing classes. Ybarra says that

because students have been taught to agree with their current writing instructor and because they equate speaking out with being punished, Latino students may not trust their instructor or may not want to speak out in class (164). Ultimately, this type of educational system is teaching us, as Mexican Americans, to agree with the dominant group or to be quiet. Educating Mexican Americans with the migrant farmworker narrative will enable Mexican Americans to formulate ethnic identities and therefore possibly also *la facultad* in order to feel confident in voicing opinions in professional and public settings.

As the first Chicano literary work to serve as a threshold into my culture and my family's past, Tomás Rivera's ... *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*/... *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* naturally intrigues me. Not only did this first experience of reading Chicano/a literature increase my awareness of Chicano/a and Latino/a struggles, but while I was working on a research paper for my undergraduate Chicano Literature course, I discovered something amazing. My father had actually worked as a migrant farmworker. I knew he was born in North Dakota but had never questioned why, even though my entire family was from Austin. One day, while I was talking to him about the literature I was reading, he relayed stories to me about his experiences working in agricultural fields. I was shocked. I have always felt far removed from the labors of my ancestors who came to the U.S., yet there was my own father telling me what he had endured as a farmworker. Since I first learned about my father's migrant farmworker experience, my research on migrant farmworkers including reading narratives and poetry pertaining to the migrant farmworker experience and other related personal experiences have led me to a pertinent conclusion: using migrant farmworker literature and photographic art about farmworkers

in familiarizing Chicanos/as about their past and the past of their people can facilitate the discovery and development of their ethnic identities.

The genre of Chicano/a Literature served as a matrix from which my ethnic identity first developed – belatedly. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to analyze Chicano/a migrant farmworker narratives and related images by applying Paula Moya’s postpositivist realist theory to literature and photographic images about Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers. This analytical approach will encourage an awareness and construction of an ethnic identity for Mexican Americans in classrooms dedicated to studying rhetoric, composition, and literature. This type of theoretical and pedagogical application can present many young Mexican Americans with an opportunity, which I believe to be currently and intentionally denied them, to explore their own ethnic identities through culturally relevant literary works and photographic images. This application will also advance their literacy and analytical skills.

In *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*, Moya presents a theory of identity construction based on a postpositivist version of philosophical realism. Moya says that “identities are constructed because they are based on interpreted experience and on theories that explain the social and natural world, but they are also real because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world” (86). Moya additionally details six fundamental claims of her postpositivist realist theory of identity that can be used to analyze cultural texts:

1. The different social categories (such as gender, race, class, and sexuality) that together constitute an individual’s social location are causally related to the experiences she will have.

2. An individual's experiences will influence, but not entirely determine, the formation of her cultural identity.
3. There is an epistemic component to identity that allows for the possibility of error and of accuracy in interpreting the things that happen to us.
4. Some identities, because they can more adequately account for the social categories constituting an individual's social location, have greater epistemic value than some others that the same individual might claim.
5. Our ability to understand fundamental aspects of our world will depend on our ability to acknowledge and understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social location.
6. Oppositional struggle is fundamental to our ability to understand the world more accurately. (39-44)

Moya departs from many postmodern theorists in her postpositivist conception of objectivity, which is fluid and therefore more beneficial (14). She claims that objective knowledge is an ongoing process; therefore, objectivity is "an ideal of inquiry rather than an achieved condition" (14-5). Moya asserts that because of our biases, our ideas are fallible and are therefore open for revision upon receiving new information (15). She concludes that a postpositivist realist theory of identity is what ethnic studies scholars need because this theory is able to do what other theories of identity cannot: "It can account for the causal influence that categories of identity like race, sex, and socioeconomic status have on the formation of identity, even as it accounts for how identities can adapt to changing historical circumstances" (16-7). Because identity is



arguably an abstract, metaphysical idea, a fluid theory such as Moya's postpositivist realist theory is optimally beneficial when attaining or recognizing an identity, especially an ethnic identity represented in literary works and images featuring both Mexicans and Chicanos/as.

After establishing her ideas of a postpositivist realist theory of identity, Moya examines postmodernist theories, such as those by Judith Butler and Donna Haraway, and proves how they dismiss the work of important Chicana feminists because they say Chicanas' views are "'subjective' and therefore epistemically unreliable" (17). Moya combats this idea by establishing "the link between identity and social location as mediated through experience," and she further argues that "there is an epistemic component to identity that enables us to read the world in particular ways" (17). Moya's postpositivist realist theory also counters the work of theorists, such as the work of Norma Alarcón and Chela Sandoval. According to Moya, in Alarcón's theory of subjectivity, she fails to address the question of identity formation, "a characteristic weakness of postmodernist theories of subjectivity: they are unable to explain the persistent correlation between certain kinds of bodies and certain kinds of identities" (18). Moreover, Moya states that Sandoval's inconsistencies result from her "postmodernist-inspired epistemological denial" (18), as Sandoval is unwilling to interrogate her own concern with truth, and has an unacknowledged concept of truth by which she analyzes others' accounts of truth (83).

Because of Moya's concern for searching for truth, Moya then addresses the idea of *la facultad*, a survival skill described by Cherrie Moraga, named by Gloria Anzaldúa, and theorized by Chela Sandoval. In basic form, *la facultad* is a marginalized person's

positive awareness and ability to adjust to situations or circumstances in which she feels threatened or inferior (88). While Moya does not reject Sandoval's ideas regarding *la facultad*, Moya points out that Sandoval is making loose generalizations and not considering each person's social and economic conditions when developing *la facultad*. So what makes Sandoval's argument flawed, according to Moya, is Sandoval's theory's weakening of the connections between social location, identity, and experience (90).

In opposition to Sandoval, Moya instead "would locate [*la facultad*] at the level of quasi-self-consciousness, rather than the level of full self-consciousness" (93). Moya says it is important to consider realist points when addressing *la facultad*: people in different social locations will experience the world differently, particularly as long as the world is organized hierarchically. And because of different theory-mediated knowledge, everyone who has the same experiences will not respond to these experiences in the same way (90). These realist points show that some people are better situated than others to develop *la facultad* (91). This survival skill of using *la facultad* to critically appraise one's socio-cultural location is, according to Moya, a developing one, not one that is always already fully developed.

By considering Moya's claims about the value of a postpositivist realist theory of identity, one can see that acquiring *la facultad* seems to be the next step (after recognizing one's social location) in constructing an ethnic identity. So after gaining an awareness of Moya's six fundamental claims concerning important aspects of cultural identity recognition – a person's social location, experiences, cultural identity, interpreting experiences, the consequences of one's social location, and an oppositional struggle – *la facultad* can be successfully developed. Applying Moya's postpositivist

realist theory of identity to the migrant farmworker narrative facilitates the possibility of an individual's acquisition of *la facultad*. To demonstrate how one might acquire *la facultad*, I will analyze Tomás Rivera's novel, ... *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, Helena María Viramontes' novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, Diana García's poetry in her work, *When Living Was a Labor Camp*, and multiple photographs from *Witness for Justice: The Documentary Photographs of Alan Pogue*.

Chapter II will address Rivera's short novel by analyzing the chapters "The Lost Year," "When We Arrive," "... And the Earth Did Not Devour Him," and "Under the House" to demonstrate how Moya's postpositivist theoretical claims about *la facultad* prove how the significance of these narratives can help Mexican American students like me to arrive at an understanding of how one's social location influences the construction of one's cultural identity.

In the first chapter of Rivera's novel, "... And the Earth Did Not Devour Him," for instance, a nameless young boy is the protagonist. His father is sick from working in the fields, and the boy becomes angry because he believes that his family does not deserve living under the dire conditions of the migrant farmworker life of the early 1950s. Arguing with his mother, the boy claims that praying to God cannot help better their lives. The next day, he and his younger siblings go to work in the fields, and his little brother, like his father the day before, also becomes sick with sunstroke. The boy takes his little brother home, and again the boy becomes angry. The climax of the story occurs when the boy curses God on his walk home. As this scene develops, the boy waits and then realizes that the earth did not swallow him up and that he would continue to live despite cursing God. The boy feels at peace after this because he has gained an inner

strength that comes with knowing that defying God has left him able to forge his own destiny.

In the other chapter, “When We Arrive,” Rivera first prefaces the chapter by explaining that a truck taking people north has broken down in the middle of the night. Each paragraph thereafter represents a different person’s thoughts about the situation. By reading through these thoughts, the reader discovers that the people on the broken-down truck are all migrant farmworkers piled in the back of a truck making its way to the northern U.S. for work. The truck has broken down, and the people are waiting to find out their fate, for they are dependent on this driver and truck for work. Some are old people worrying about their spouses; some are young people caring about no one but themselves. Some people are not concerned with the truck and are thinking about something else completely.

In the end, this juxtaposition of the workers’ thoughts and their reactions to the same situation provides an opportunity for the reader to consider Moya’s theory. This chapter provides an example of how a person’s social location can affect his or her identity construction and how an experience such as this can be a reflection of the outside world. Moreover, by using Moya’s postpositivist realist claims, I show how the characters in Rivera’s novel have been realistically constructed by the author to advance a specific kind of ethnic identity that Mexican American readers can use to construct their own ethnic identity. For example, the characters in “When We Arrive” whose thoughts express extreme discontent for their destitute situations can help Mexican American students realize that there are real living people who feel the way they do. These same students can also relate to the characters and cease their own complacency.

Chapter III focuses on Viramontes' novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*. This novel, like Rivera's, centers on the migrant farmworker experience, but this time with a young female protagonist, Estrella. Her family works the fields of California as migrant farmworkers. Her mother Petra, who was abandoned by her husband, is now remarried to an older man, Perfecto. Although Perfecto provides for and supports the family, he longs to leave Petra and return to Mexico. The novel chronicles Estrella's journey into womanhood and her budding relationship with a boy, Alejo, who is also a migrant farmworker and who gets sick one day due to the pesticides scattered over the fields by crop dusters. Estrella's family tries caring for him, but he eventually has to go to a hospital. At the health clinic Estrella confronts the nurse to get back money that they had paid for Alejo's visit. At the climax of the novel, she comes to an understanding of her place in society and of the knowledge that enabled this understanding. My analysis compares Estrella's process of gaining *la facultad* to the one prescribed by Moya's theory to see how effective Viramontes' novel would be as a matrix for Chicanos/as understanding the migrant farmworking narrative.

As with the previous two chapters, in Chapter III I will also use Moya's postpositivist realist theory, in this case to analyze "Operation Wetback, 1953," "Quality Poor," "Raisins in Summer," and "The Clog of Her Body" from Diana García's *When Living Was a Labor Camp* to emphasize the different ways *la facultad* can facilitate a young Chicano/a in understanding and then forming his or her ethnic identity. Because García was born in a migrant farmworker labor camp in California, she has lived the migrant farmworker experience.

These poems serve as examples of what can result from a migrant farmwork life. They show how migrant farmworkers and their children are still in low socioeconomic situations after no longer being migrant farmworkers. For example, “Operation Wetback, 1953” refers to U.S. government legislation named Operation Wetback that sent immigrants back to Mexico. This poem begins by describing a typical day of a migrant farmworker’s wife as her husband leaves for the fields. Midway, the poem jumps to years later as the wife thinks of when she told her children that the trains took wetbacks heading south. The mother feels guilty for not saying goodbye to her husband, something presumably out of her control. The poem ends with the guilt of the wife forgetting her husband. García’s work is important because her poetic narratives about the migrant farmworker experience present this experience through a different but important literary genre, which also features aspects of Moya’s theory that are useful in understanding *la facultad*.

In Chapter IV, I will once again use Moya’s theory, this time to analyze photographs from *Witness for Justice: The Documentary Photographs of Alan Pogue*. This photographic documentary book features Mexican and Mexican American migrant farmworkers. Although these photographs are not taken by a Chicano/a, his work nevertheless contains another form of expression which Chicanos/as should examine to help them construct aspects of their identity. Without question, analyzing his photographs with Moya’s theory can be essential for young Chicanos/as understanding the migrant farmworking experience and narrative, especially of the visual aspects these photographs reveal. While, a person can read literature to understand certain conditions or situations,

the visual image created is that of the reader through his or her experiences. However, photographs provide a more realistic, concrete image to which the viewer can relate.

These photographic images serve as supplements to the other literary genres featuring the lives and experiences of Mexican American and Mexican farmworkers. The photographs will also provide an additional opportunity to apply Moya's theoretical claims to show how to construct an ethnic identity with visuals. After *reading* about the migrant farmworker story, the reader will then be able to *see* and analyze with these photographic images what the literature addresses.

Chapter V will more specifically address pedagogical approaches for teaching Chicano/a Literature, especially through the genre of the migrant farmworker narrative. This chapter therefore intends to answer the following important questions: How does being educated with various kinds of literary and photographic materials about our past help us understand who we are and how to be successful Americans as Chicanos/as? That is, how can these kinds of narratives and images enable us, as Chicanos/as, to reverse the racialized oppression often conducted against Mexican and Mexican American migrant farmworkers by the dominant group? How can literary and photographic texts ensure that Mexican American students are receiving the kind of education that more realistically reflects their ethnic heritage, as found in and through the migrant farmworking narrative?

In the conclusion to my thesis, I discuss the implications of theorizing narratives reflected through literature and photographs of Mexican American and Mexican farmworkers. I discuss what action Chicanas/os should take to further our success in American society in light of the lessons learned by analyzing literary works and photographic images. Analyzing these kinds of texts reveal how to educate younger

generations of Chicanos/as, especially those unaware of their ethnic identity as Chicanos/as. Awareness of the aspects related to this ethnic identity can help us understand our society's social structure and disadvantages and struggles that have to be endured and overcome within our society. Ultimately, the past struggles of Mexican American migrant farmworkers are important for us to understand in order to appreciate where we currently stand as Chicanos/as and why we need to strive to be more than just the stereotypes that narrow-minded members of the dominant group still cast upon us.



## CHAPTER II

### CHARACTERS IN ... *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* IDENTIFYING WITH POSTPOSITIVIST CLAIMS

This chapter begins by giving a brief history of the lives and working circumstances of Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers. I describe the terrible conditions under which migrant farmworkers live and work in order to provide insight into how and why migrant farmworkers typically have cyclical lives in which they are impoverished and uneducated. This brief history and current statistics about migrant farmworkers' lives provide a foundation from which to analyze Rivera's novel within the context of the time in which the events portrayed in the novel take place and to show the people around whom it is centered.

Next I give a background of Rivera's life and discuss the views of a few literary critics who have analyzed Rivera's works. After presenting this background information, I analyze Rivera's chapters "The Lost Year," "When We Arrive," "... And the Earth Did Not Devour Him," and "Under the House." I apply the six fundamental claims from Moya's postpositivist realist theory of identity to analyze these chapters from Rivera's novel. I first explain how the characters line up with some of Moya's claims, usually unintentionally, and I then discuss the next step in identity construction after recognizing Moya's claims in Rivera's characters, thus applying what knowledge is derived from this recognition to the real life of Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers.

The history of Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers varies from place to place throughout the United States. However, the life of migrant farmworkers everywhere is relatively the same—destitute—currently as it was when migrant farmworkers first became pertinent to North America’s agricultural economy. According to David Montejano in his comprehensive work, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, the history and fate of migrant farmworkers in Texas are both quite complex and, as far as Texas Anglos are concerned, strategic. After the Mexican American War ended in 1845, Texas Anglos established a “peace structure” by sometimes marrying into wealthy, landowning Mexican families (8). Eventually, large masses of land exchanged hands but most of the time ended up belonging to Texas Anglos. After this exchange of power and land, large cattle ranches, such as the King Ranch, hired Texas Mexicans to work on the ranches, and so both Texas Mexicans and Texas Anglos often developed a relationship dependent upon one another that more often than not was dominated by Texas Anglos.

The development of irrigation techniques and the refrigerated railcar made farming in the American southwest possible (Montejano 8). A hierarchy was already in place from the ranches, which left Anglos in charge and Mexican Americans as laborers; farming therefore developed with the same structure which existed with ranches. Over time, Mexican Americans, who started as sharecroppers and eventually were forced to become farmworkers, almost always worked under Anglo landowners. Migrant farmworkers would often have to travel to other states that paid more than Texas Anglo farmers. A migrant farmworker could make \$2.25 more daily in states such as Arkansas or Mississippi than they could make in Texas (199). However, Texas Anglo landowners

often implemented questionable practices to immobilize seasonal Mexican and Mexican American labor, such as recruiting contract laborers under false pretenses and creating vagrancy laws (203-5). So, the general conditions under which Mexican and Mexican American migrant farmworkers lived and worked were typically inhumane, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter.

World War II and the Korean War brought about many changes for Mexican Americans who felt they deserved the same rights as Anglo Americans because they had fought for the same country. Montejano says the wars “exposed Texas Mexican soldiers to a world of greater freedoms and equalities, an experience that became especially important on the return home” (270). This new sentiment among Mexican American World War II and Korean War veterans, along with the “political activism of the 1960’s and 1970’s,” provoked Mexican Americans to change the dire living and working conditions of Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers (9). Of course, a major turning point in the treatment of migrant farmworkers came in the 1960s and 1970s with grape vineyard strikes in California, prompted by the efforts of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, founders of the United Farm Workers union. These strikes empowered migrant farmworkers throughout the United States, but as Montejano says, “different agendas and energies were set off, some moderate, some militant” (284). Rodolfo Acuña, in his *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, explains the results of the California grape strikes: “Inspired by the campesino (farm worker) movement in California, farm worker activism in the Midwest increased during the second half of the 1960’s” (278). Acuña and Montejano both explain similar actions in Texas, but these strikes seemed to

be less effective and more short-lived, compared to those on the part of farmworkers in California.

Unfortunately, the U.S. government created difficulties for Mexican American migrant farmworkers during these strikes. During World War II, while Mexican Americans were away at war, agriculture businesses needed more farmworkers. In 1942, the government established the Bracero Program, which allowed Mexican nationals to come to America to work in agricultural fields. However, as W. K. Barger and Ernesto Reza state that “this system persisted long after World War II, into the 1960’s. Even though the braceros, as the Mexican workers were known, were legally not supposed to be involved in labor disputes, growers [during the 1960 and 1970s] regularly used them to replace workers on strikes” (26). The Bracero Program and its remnants are an example of the U.S. government making efforts to ensure a stable economy and to benefit the growers while at the same time exploiting Mexican and Mexican American migrant farmworkers. Although Montejano is referring to the subordination of Mexican labor when he states that “economic interests generally outweighed social principles,” many aspects of Mexican American migrant farmworker history were determined by these same economic interests (187).

To get an idea of the quality of the life which Mexican American farmworkers had to endure, one can look at Daniel Rothenburg’s *With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today* (1998). His work gives insights into the then current situation of Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers. Rothenburg portrays migrant farmworkers’ lives through the voices of migrant farmworkers, growers, coyotes, and doctors, among others—all people who are involved in migrant

farmworkers' lives. Among the many personal stories from many different people, this work has facts and commentary that support the many personal stories. Rothenburg in 1998 states that "there are 900,000 migrant farmworkers in the United States, who are accompanied by 300,000 children and 150,000 adult dependents, bringing the country's total population of migrant farmworkers and their families to over 1.3 million" (6).

Another more current source of data about migrant farmworkers is the National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH), located in Buda, Texas. In an attempt to improve migrant farmworkers' health, the NCFH provides information services and health products to migrant health centers along with information about other entities involved with migrant farmworkers. According to the NCFH, 78 percent of all farmworkers are foreign born, and 75 percent of those are from Mexico ("Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Demographics" 1).

Although many agree that the working conditions and lives of migrant farmworkers have improved, these living conditions are still substandard for a country such as the United States. The U.S. government has passed laws to recognize unions; to improve health care, schools, and housing; and to make hiring undocumented workers illegal. However, these laws are sometimes undermined or simply ignored and therefore allow for the mistreatment of migrant farmworkers. To say the least, the living and working conditions of the past were easily ten times more deplorable than they were ten years go. Many people, back then and today, still do not realize the cycle of destitution within which migrant farmworkers are often caught. Today these workers are not paid much considering the work they do, nor do they have stable year-round work. They cannot always afford a car, and they are therefore at the mercy of others for

transportation. Their housing situation can often be undesirable, unsanitary, and expensive. Migrant farmworkers' peripatetic lifestyle makes education extremely difficult, so migrant children are typically uneducated. All of these difficulties are effectively conveyed, portrayed, and visualized through fictional and non-fictional migrant farmworker narratives.

Currently, since migrant farmworkers often do not have stable work throughout the year, they have to go where they are needed, weather permitting. Working an average of 42 hours a week, at an average \$7.25 per hour, may not seem like a terrible living, but migrant farmworkers do not work all year ("Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Demographics" 2). Also, there is no guarantee of an annual salary. According to the NCFH's "Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Demographics," "30 percent of all farmworkers had total family incomes below the U.S. Government's poverty guidelines" (2). Unfortunately, increased immigration has caused farmworkers' actual wages to fall, which is compounded by a decrease in the number of employers who provide workers with transportation, housing and other assistance free of charge or at subsidized rates (Rothenberg 19). Another factor to consider about the lives of migrant farmworkers is the fact that migrant farmworkers are often not gainfully employed. Health insurance is rarely part of the work contract, and retirement pension plans are practically non-existent. In fact, as NCFH reports, "Many agricultural employers do not report the wages of farm laborers. So as a result, if they become disabled or reach retirement age, farmworkers are often unable to prove their claims for Social Security benefits" (*NCFH.org*).

Transportation for migrant farmworkers was and remains another obstacle to having better working and living conditions. As in Rivera's novel, some families paid to

stand in the back of a truck for the entire trip from the southern end of the migrant stream to the far west to California and to northwestern U.S. states, such as Washington, Oregon, Idaho, as well as to the Midwestern states. Even families who were fortunate enough to own a car had difficulties. My father said he and his father were glad that both of them could drive their own car and could therefore split the long drive between the two.

Some families only had one member who could drive, and that member would drive the entire way. Once up north, contractors would take farmworkers to and from the fields, but contractors today no longer provide transportation because of legislation regarding insurance coverage (Rothenberg 113). Now “small unlicensed operators, known as *riteros*,” take farmworkers to and from the fields, charging a few dollars a day. Ironically, *riteros* are farmworkers who save enough to purchase a vehicle (113). This solution to transportation is another example of how laws are undermined to take from the migrant farmworker’s already low income. Undocumented workers can first become dependent on a coyote to bring them across the U.S.-Mexico border, and then they are dependent on possibly another driver to take them to the northern U.S. Regardless of the migrant farmworker’s transportation situation, the majority of them in the past did not have reliable transportation, which only added to the instability of their jobs.

Living conditions for migrant farmworkers have always been terrible. Not only would farmworkers have to move constantly with the different crops that were in season, but they sometimes would have to live in poor housing provided by the growers. Montejano says that in the past, “the contract laborers . . . would not discover the actual terms of the contract and conditions of their work situation until they arrived at their destination” (204). This is a situation reiterated over and over in farmworker narratives.

Authors describe housing that varied from tents and chicken coops to shacks and community housing camps. Some did not have running water, cooking facilities, or toilet facilities inside or at all. While some employers provide housing in the form of labor camps, “in the absence of housing, farmworkers may be forced to sleep in tents, cars, ditches, or open fields, where they often lack safe drinking water, bathing or laundry facilities, and adequate sanitation” (*NCFH.org*). Currently, according to the NCFH, 50 percent of farmworkers live in housing not provided by their employer, meaning that it is an added expense for an already low-paying job (*NCFH.org*).

Migrant farmworkers’ lack of education is another obstacle that maintains their migrant farmworking lives. Because migrant farmworking families are constantly moving, the children in schools are not able to keep up with an inconsistent curriculum. The instability of constantly attending new schools also affects their learning. According to the NCFH, “on average, the highest grade completed by farmworkers is seventh grade with only 13% of farmworkers completing 12 years of schooling” (*NCFH.org*). Child labor laws regarding migrant workers only encourage children to choose work instead of school. The Fair Labor Standards Act states that 12 is the age limit for children to work in agriculture fields with exemptions possible for children 10 or 11 (*NCFH.org*). Migrant farmworking children are consequently robbed of their education and childhood because, strategically, “in agriculture, there is no limit to the number of hours a child may work, while in all other occupations, children under the age of 16 are limited to three hours of work a day when school is in session” (*NFCH.org*).

Overall, the conditions under which migrant farmworkers work have improved in recent decades. However, these conditions have not improved enough to say that migrant



farmworkers are not exploited for the sake of farmers' profit. Daniel Rothenberg summarizes their situation by saying,

The world of farmworkers reflects many aspects of contemporary American society—the social invisibility of production, the cultural and economic impact of immigration, and the widening gap between low- and high-wage workers. Despite various governmental and private initiatives, farmworkers continue to be members of America's dispossessed. (54)

The unfavorable life of a migrant farmworker described above is nevertheless better than the kind of life Tomás Rivera experienced growing up, which he depicts in his various writings. According to Julián Olivares in the "Introduction" to *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, Rivera was born in 1935, in Crystal City, Texas (13). Growing up in the 1940s and 1950s, Rivera worked as a field laborer with his parents until he could no longer balance his education and work (14). He chose to pursue an education, something not common for a field laborer during his time. Rivera eventually earned a B.S. in English Education (1958) from Southwest Texas State Teachers' College, an M.Ed. (1964) from Southwest Texas State College and a Ph.D. (1969) in Romance Literatures from the University of Oklahoma (14). He held various teaching positions during his college education and after, until his untimely death in 1984, at which point he was the Chancellor of the University of California, Riverside.

As Rivera was finishing his graduate education, the Chicano Movement started in the 1960s. Chicanos and Chicanas inspired by this movement filled the 1970s with many publications, including many examples of the migrant farmworker narrative. Rivera's . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him/ ...Y no se lo tragó la tierra* was published in 1971

when Rivera was 36 years old. It won the first Quinto Sol Prize for literature, an important literary award in the Chicano community at that time. At this point, other Chicano and Chicana writers recognized Rivera as a respected and accomplished member of their literary community.

Because he had been a field laborer for so many years, Rivera is able to capture the inhumanity and humility which these workers experienced. His novel, according to Evangelina Vigil-Piñón, “draws from the author’s personal experiences growing up in his native town of Crystal City, Texas . . . an impoverished community of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers who lived at the mercy of farm owners and agribusiness contractors” (32). Now Rivera’s literary works are in many Chicano Literature anthologies published today. Critical work on Rivera’s literary works is extensive, but I will briefly touch on only a few works.

In *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview* (1980), Juan Bruce-Novoa documents interviews with fourteen prominent Chicano authors, Rivera among them. In this interview Rivera talks about his background, when he first started writing, and what books he read when he was younger. The interviewer asks about language and the role it plays in Rivera’s life and his writing. Rivera talks about the first time he read *With a Pistol in His Hand* by Américo Paredes and whether or not Rivera’s own writing is political. This interview, conducted and published while Rivera was still alive, provides insight into the author’s thoughts and opinions regarding his own work, the Chicano Movement, and the then current state of Chicanos.

A critical book written in Spanish by Salvador Rodríguez del Pino is *La novela Chicana escrita en Español: Cinco autores comprometidos* (1982), which includes a

chapter written about Rivera's literary work. The author says that the fact that Rivera won the first Quinto Sol award is important in the history of Chicano/a Literature because with this novel began a contemporary generation of Chicano/a writers after the Chicano Movement (9). The author continues by saying that Rivera's novel is important because it was originally written in Spanish, and there were four novels before *Tierra* that were considered in the same body of contemporary literature, but they were written in English and with a technique that was characteristic of Anglo-American writings (9). This book by del Pino is important literary criticism written in Spanish, which, as pointed out earlier, is the original language in which Rivera wrote ... *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*.

Published in 1985, shortly after Rivera's death, is a commemorative journal comprised of critical essays about Rivera titled *International Studies in Honor of Tomás Rivera*. Edited by Julián Olivares, this journal has essays by well-known Latino authors such as Nicolás Kanellos, Luis Leal, Tey Diana Rebolledo, and Rolando Hinojosa-Smith. The topics of their critical essays cover literary criticism, tributes, memories, and general Chicano Literature essays. This journal proves that Rivera had an immeasurable impact on the Chicano literary community, enough for prominent names to compile a commemorative journal.

Another book published to honor his memory is *Tomás Rivera (1935-1984): The Man and His Work*. This book contains photos of Rivera, essays and speeches he wrote, and even correspondence with other scholars. There are also pictures drawn of him, and essays and poems written in memory of him. The book highlights Rivera's professional life with his impressive, updated Curriculum Vitae. This work is definitely a celebration of Rivera's life.

Ramón Saldívar analyzes many Chicano texts in *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, and Rivera's novel is included in this important critique of Chicano Literature. Published in the late 1980s, *Chicano Narrative* experiments with analyzing influential Chicano texts by using then established poststructuralist literary theories. The chapter on Rivera's literary work begins by stating that "*Tierra* represents the first milestone in Mexican American literary history after the turbulent events of the 1960s and sets itself explicitly within the political and social contexts of the post-World War II agricultural worker's life" (74). . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* was also one of the first novels to portray the migrant farmworker experience. Rivera simply put on paper the stories of these workers' complex lives.

Héctor Calderón has a chapter in *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* titled "The Novel and the Community of Readers: Rereading Tomás Rivera's . . . *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*." In this chapter, Calderón addresses the generic label "novel" and what this label means in Western Literature. He discusses the way Rivera's novel has been analyzed traditionally under this generic label, and Calderón attempts to demonstrate that it "should be read as a reinvention of the formal and ideological possibilities of the novel to represent a Third World Chicano culture" (101). Calderón compares Rivera's novel to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, both innovative in their times. In this chapter, he states that Rivera's novel is not only special because it was the first one printed by Quinto Sol, but also because "the book parallels the Chicano movement of the late sixties and early seventies through its reassessment of traditional culture, its historical self-consciousness, and, specially, through its developing sense of group solidarity" (102). Departing from previous Rivera critics, Calderón claims

that the structure of the novel demands more from the reader. As a result, “the reader is forced to evoke traditional norms and examine them critically. These strategies are also ideological in the sense that Chicano readers are made aware of the structural and conceptual limits of their own class and cultural situation” (107).

The last critical work I will mention here is *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, edited by Julián Olivares. This book consists of everything Rivera published while living and posthumously, in Spanish and translated. It includes . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* in English and in its original Spanish form, along with Rivera’s other works of short fiction, *The Harvest*. Also part of this compilation is *The Searchers: Collected Poetry*, and critical essays. Pages from Rivera’s manuscript for what would have been his next novel are also included. Olivares provides a great introduction that encompasses Rivera’s personal background, the significance of his work, and his lasting influence on the Chicano/a literary canon.

The previously mentioned publications are only a small fraction of the extensive research and criticism concerning Rivera’s works. In addition, I would argue that because this particular novel of Rivera’s is so complex, most scholarship tends to address the same surface issues and common themes and tend not to go deeper in their analysis of Rivera’s novel.

Rivera was an innovator and a pioneer in the Chicano Literature movement, and he had a great impact on the Chicano literary community throughout his life. He continues to be an inspiration to Chicanos/as even after his untimely death. High schools and universities teach his writings, so he and his literary works are now celebrated through and beyond the higher education he advocated for Mexican Americans.

Additionally, Texas State University-San Marcos, has a Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award which is presented with a cash prize to writers and illustrators each year. Rivera and the legacy he left behind have inspired many and have changed aspects of Chicano/a culture and life, including my own, for the better.

I first read Rivera's . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* five years ago in 2005. I was 20 years old. Even after reading more literary works in Chicano/a Literature, I still attribute my awareness of my social location as a Chicana to this novel and author. Through a careful analysis of Rivera's works, it is likewise possible for students to also begin recognizing their own social location. Moya's postpositivist realist theory of identity claims that a person's social location affects the experiences he/she will have and that these experiences in turn influence his/her social identity. She also says that a person's experience will be interpreted partially in reference to his/her self-conception (87). I apply Moya's postpositivist theoretical identity claims to the characters in Rivera's chapters from his novel in order to help arrive at an understanding of a Chicano/a ethnic identity and ultimately of an understanding of *la facultad* and how it works. Although Rivera has a boy protagonist as the central character throughout his novel, "the experience of the book is finally a general one" (Grajeda 72), which means that females may also be able to identify with the central character.

The first chapter presented in Rivera's novel, "The Lost Year," begins with a boy protagonist who has apparently lost a year. The boy remembers that his thinking about the events of the past year always begins like a dream within a dream, with him not quite sure of what his reality is. He would hear someone call his name and would turn back in a circle to see who was calling him. He then realizes he is calling himself, and he is back at

the beginning where the lost year began. As the opening chapter, this chapter seems odd, and it is quite complex. In his critical article about Rivera's novel, Ralph Grajeda says that in this chapter, "Rivera uses the language of the dream—or at least a language suggestive of a deeper reality than what is ordinarily accepted as objective fact—to suggest the sense of psychological and social disorientation in which the hero lives" (73). I agree with the first half of Grajeda's statement. However, I think the purpose of this deeper reality is not to suggest disorientation, but instead a higher consciousness. This chapter reflects the boy's discovery of a deeper reality than he had previously accepted.

The chapter begins with perhaps a feeling of confusion because the boy has apparently lost track of the events of the past year. However, the chapter quickly moves forward to explain and examine the boy's situation: "It almost always began with a dream in which he would suddenly awaken and then realize that he was really asleep. Then he wouldn't know whether what he was thinking had happened or not" (Rivera 83). This is the first part of his deeper recognition of his reality and is signified by the word "realize." The boy believes himself to be in a dream state and then wakes up. Upon waking, he comes to a new level of consciousness by discovering that he is asleep. The boy recognizes that what he has believed to be true is not, and he further recognizes that what he once thought to be reality may not be real. When applied to this part of the chapter, Moya's first and fourth claims of her postpositivist realist theory of identity are evident. The boy's social location as an ethnic minority has created his unquestioned beliefs and idea of reality. Also, his identity as an ethnic minority has greater epistemic value than

other aspects of his identity, such as sexuality, in this case. He has been taught to accept what is put before him, and when this idea is shattered, he tries to make sense of it.<sup>1</sup>

After Rivera's boy protagonist realizes that his idea of reality may not be real, the situation he finds himself in continues to be examined, perhaps to figure out how he has failed to realize what is real. As the novel's narrator states, "It always began when he would hear someone calling him by his name but when he turned his head to see who was calling, he would make a complete turn and there he would end up—in the same place" (Rivera 83). The boy claims that someone else is calling him, so that someone else is keeping him in the same place. Here, the reader discovers that the cyclical nature of the boy's experience keeps him from questioning what he believes to be true or real.<sup>2</sup>

The boy comes to yet another realization about his life during the past year, but this realization, as described in the novel's opening chapter by the narrator, only happened once: "One time he stopped at mid-turn and fear suddenly set in. He realized that he had called himself. And thus the lost year began" (Rivera 83). The boy discovers that his believing in this cyclical experience and the fact that he never questioned what he believed to be true or real are both his fault. These realizations are what make him

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<sup>1</sup> I also have had a similar experience. For example, once I started graduate school, I discovered that everything I had believed to be true and real was not. I had believed I was an average middle-class student. However, my peers were all middle-class white students, and differences in education and lifestyle were apparent. I soon discovered that my education was subpar. My reality at the time led me to believe that I had the same opportunities as anyone else. I eventually found my beliefs and reality about my social location to be false and not real. My identity as a minority partially determined the difference in education and became more important than other aspects of my identity. This reality was true for many of the white students. However, because I was a minority, I did not question the truth of anything I was told about my social location.

<sup>2</sup> In a similar fashion, upon coming to a realization of my own social location, I blamed being minority for my inequality to my peers in education and opportunity. However, a more accurate interpretation would have been to consider my social location as a whole. Not only am I a minority, but I am also female and Catholic. These three aspects of my identity have taught me to be submissive and unquestioning. I can therefore arrive at a more accurate interpretation of my reality by stating that my inequality to my peers is a result of my social location, not the result of only one aspect of the identity that I claim—minority.



fearful. While he is trying to blame his ignorance or inability to recognize a higher level of consciousness on other factors, he finds that it is his own fault that he has trouble seeing the events of his past year clearly.

Moya's second and fifth claims are applicable here. In her second claim, she says a person's experiences will influence but not determine a person's cultural identity, and in her fifth claim, she says that our ability to understand aspects of our world depends on our ability to acknowledge the political, economic, social, and epistemic consequences of our social location. The boy is fearful because he, for the first time, realizes that he has to take responsibility for himself. If the boy never forces himself to question his beliefs or reality, it is likely no one else will. Moya's second claim can be applied here to explain that the boy's experience will influence his cultural identity but not determine it. The boy has discovered that his beliefs about his reality may not be all that he thinks they are because as a minority, he has been taught to be accepting and submissive of the circumstances in his world. The boy therefore could continue to have the same false beliefs and ideas of his reality, or he could take what he has discovered and change his response to his experiences to better form his cultural identity and his understanding of his world. Regardless of his choice, his ability to understand the results of what has been, unbeknownst to him, engrained in him will depend on his ability to understand the circumstances and consequences of his social location.

Just as the boy discovers that he is responsible for understanding his place and becomes fearful, I did the same. I realized that I was responsible for furthering my education and for ensuring myself the same opportunities as others. Helping the boy overcome his fear is his awareness that he is not alone; he comes to realize that he is a

member of a community of others, especially his family. I, too, would come to this same type of realization, because while I do hold personal responsibility for my actions, I act with the support of others who hold the same social location that I do as a female minority. I cannot expect the same opportunities as my white peers, but I can work harder. I was fearful the first time I realized that I would have to work harder than my white peers to meet the same requirements. Through the experience of matriculating through graduate school, I was able to better understand how my social location, as a member of an ethnic community, influences my identity and in turn allows for me to better understand certain aspects of our world, for example, like how the institution of education is often constructed to deprive minorities of a complete education.

Overall, the theme of coming to an important realization and discovery about one's social location resonates in this first chapter, "The Lost Year," from Rivera's novel. In his analysis of Rivera's novel, Santiago Daydí-Tolson explains this theme through Rivera's word choice by saying, "the repetition of the expression *dares cuenta* three times in a text of only twenty lines stresses the function of intellectual awakening to a new understanding of the personal, and consequently collective, circumstance" (144). If read in this manner, this chapter should allow students the opportunity to see Moya's claims applied to real life situations and should allow them to compare these situations to those of the boy in the novel. Students should be able to see how this identity theory is relevant and applicable to help explaining aspects of their everyday life.

Next, the chapter titled "When We Arrive" further challenges the reader to infer a great deal of information about the novel's characters and allows the reader to contemplate different reactions to relatively the same situation. First, there is a preface to

this chapter which explains the situation at hand: A truck with many people standing up in the back breaks down in the predawn early morning. After this introductory preface, the subsequent paragraphs are thoughts from different people regarding the situation at hand. Each paragraph represents the common situation from a different person's perspective; however, Rivera does not always explicitly say whether the person speaking is a male or female, young or old, and no one is named. Reading through these different perspectives, one can see how it becomes evident that this truck was taking migrant farmworkers to the northern United States to work in agricultural fields. It is early morning, and the workers are waiting for the sun to rise. Rivera, strategically, does not make it clear what they are waiting for exactly, but the reader can assume daybreak or for a mechanic to fix their truck, which has broken down. Regardless, the workers are waiting for change in the situation at hand.

The different perspectives from the various characters in this chapter provide insight into the thoughts and feelings of the migrant farmworkers, and one perspective even comes from the truck driver. Each perspective represents a different person, each with a different social location (sex, race, socioeconomic status) and a different reaction to the circumstance of their truck breaking down. The different perspectives convey various feelings. As Grajeda states, "there is the anticipation of the experienced. . . . And there is the radical resolve of youth, to escape altogether the rat-trap of the disposed" (79). In the end, this juxtaposition of thoughts and reactions to the same situation is an opportunity for the reader to consider Moya's theoretical claims. This analysis will show an example of how a person's social location can affect his or her identity construction and how an experience can be a reflection of the outward world.

The first excerpt from this chapter says,

Fuckin' life, this goddamn fuckin' life! . . . We're nothing but a bunch of stupid, goddamn asses! . . . This is the last time I go through this, standing up all the way like a goddamn animal. As soon as we get there I'm headed for Minneapolis. Somehow I'll find me something to do where I don't have to work like a fuckin' mule. . . . One of these days they'll fuckin' pay for this. Sonofabitch! I'll be goddamn for being such a fuckin' pendejo!

(Rivera 144)

As one of the most negative perspectives in this story, the reader has a clear understanding of the discontent this man feels for his situation. The reader can assume this person is a male, simply because a woman would not likely be traveling north alone to work in the fields and certainly would not think of leaving for a large city alone. This man's thoughts represent an opportunity to apply Moya's theory. Although irate, his man is able to understand the consequences of his social location and therefore some fundamental aspects of his world. He proves this by recognizing several points: 1) his situation is inhumane, 2) the people in charge are taking advantage of the farmworkers, 3) he chooses to be in this situation, 4) there are other options.

His use of profanity and obscenity conveys the contempt he feels for being in his social location. His implied tone, as reflected through punctuation and cursing, also conveys his dissatisfaction with his situation. The man compares his circumstances to that of an animal and compares the work he does to the work of an animal. Moreover, simply comparing himself to an animal and calling himself an ass proves that he is aware of the unfair treatment of this job situation. Acknowledging his own inhumane treatment

proves that he can recognize his blatant mistreatment, even when he has been taught it is justified. Although he is angry, his blame is not so harsh. He claims “they’ll” pay for this, yet it is unclear to the reader about who he means when he says *they*. However, given common binaries, one can assume he means the people who put him in this situation, the dominant group. Regardless, in saying this statement, the man is placing the blame elsewhere and is acknowledging that a hierarchy is in place which locates him at the bottom. Both of these acknowledgements provide evidence of his ability to recognize the social, political, and economic effects of his social location.

Also, by saying that he will not do this again, he is suggesting that he will not allow himself to be trapped in this kind of situation again, that it is a choice to be in his situation, not a favorable choice. By saying that he will not be in this kind of situation again, he clearly is suggesting an alternative. The reader can assume that he does not have a family depending on him, so he really does not have to work there. Oddly though, after blaming the assumed dominant group, he blames himself by calling himself a “pendejo,” equivalent to dumbass. He first blames the people who allow such animalistic treatment of humans, but he then blames himself for allowing himself to be treated as an animal is treated. He also knows that there is work out there where he will not be treated so inhumanely. This is evident in his proposal to find another job where he does not have to work like an animal. This man’s ability to see his disposition as a choice, recognizing that he has options and even entertaining those options, proves that he understands the economic and epistemic consequences of his social location.

Such a perspective is a good example for students to consider when evaluating their own understanding of the various circumstances and consequences of our social

location. Initially, readers might think that this man merely seems like an irate, irrational man. However, upon further examination, the reader comes to find that the man understands his situation only too well. This perspective allows readers to be angry about their own social location if they find a significant, logical reason to be, but it further explains that they need to understand more fully why they are mad. For example, a female reader whose parents are undocumented immigrants can be angry about the new law in Arizona (HB1070) because it adversely affects people like her parents. This law allows state and local law enforcement to arrest anyone who cannot show papers proving their legal residency. Unless the reader understands the driving force and the ignorant reasoning underlying such laws, the reader will just be angry. But if the reader more fully understands the political and economic consequences of her social location, she can better understand the world around her and will be better able to act decisively to contest such laws.

The second excerpt I've chosen to analyze from this chapter states, "What a great view of the stars from here! . . . The silence of the morning twilight makes everything look like it's made of satin. . . . If only it could stay like early dawn, then nobody would complain. I'm going to keep my eyes on the stars till the last one disappears" (Rivera 144-5). Literary critics, including Evangelina Vigil-Piñón, say that these are the boy protagonist's thoughts (33). As the boy's thoughts, I find this to be a unique paragraph in the chapter because it conveys the boy's happiness even when in an adverse situation. His positive paragraph is strategically juxtaposed with the negative ones. Every viewpoint mentioned in this chapter thus far has been negative, but according to Grajeda, "Rivera's work, after all, is not a simple, descriptive book of protest, but an artistically important

book of discovery” (73). This particular perspective embodies the idea of this novel promoting discovery, not protest.

Moya’s second claim that experiences will influence but not determine the formation of one’s cultural identity is applicable here. First of all, the boy is extremely optimistic. His tone and language reinforce his optimism. He is in a bad situation and is the only person not dwelling on his negative experience. Instead, he is admiring nature. He refers to the celestial view during that early morning as “great” with an exclamation point punctuating the end of the sentence. The silence makes the day *look* desirable, “like satin.” The next sentence is in the second conditional tense, which expresses an unrealistic wish. No matter how improbable it seems, he still wants better conditions for everyone. The last line offers the ultimate positive ending. He is going to keep looking up until there is nothing great left to see. While other workers in the truck are complaining and unhappy, this boy is not allowing his experience to negatively affect his identity formation.

This type of reaction could be compared to other migrant farmworkers’ stories. For example, my father worked in the fields, but one summer after getting a job at HEB, he never went back to working in the fields, although his family did. Now, when he talks about working in the fields, he is not angry or bitter. He speaks about his experiences as a migrant farmworker very matter-of-factly. Instead of dwelling on the awful situations he was in, he simply found another job that ensured that he would never return to the fields. He, like the boy in this chapter, did not dwell on the negativity; instead, he looked ahead to the future. Perhaps a readers who have experienced negative situations, such as poverty or physical abuse, could see that these experiences do not have to determine their

cultural identity. They can of course react to the experience in a negative way, or they can instead take what knowledge has developed from this experience to better understand their place in the world.

Next, in the title chapter of the novel, “. . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him,” the same young boy is the protagonist. He and his family are farmworkers, and the boy does not agree with their dismal farmworker living and working conditions. He is angry because his father gets sick from working in the fields. In addition, his aunt and uncle recently caught tuberculosis, and his aunt died, leaving her children orphaned. The boy asks his mother, “How come we’re like this, like we’re buried alive? . . . And everyday we work and work. For What?” (Rivera 109). The mother responds with a fatalist response about God, saying that He will take care of them. While the mother believes their fate is already determined, the boy does not. The boy’s discontent for his family’s situation proves that he already understands the consequences of his social location. He knows that the way they live and are treated is not fair. In his statement he emphasizes that *we’re* buried alive and *we* work. He already recognizes binaries by establishing *we* in opposition to *they*, who ostensibly do not work under the same conditions.

The next day he takes his younger siblings to work in the fields. He tells them to stop working and rest if the heat is too much. The boy thinks to himself, “If only it’d stay just a bit cloudy like this morning, then nobody would complain” (Rivera 110). This is another example of the boy using the second conditional tense to convey optimism. The boy wishes for an unrealistic situation, but he does it with the others in mind. Even through this terrible experience, the boy still considers his siblings’ comfort first, which is remarkable.



Still, his younger brother also eventually gets sick from sunstroke. The young boy is extremely furious when taking his younger brother home, and suddenly curses God. Then, as the narrator states, “Upon doing this he felt that fear instilled in him by the years and by his parents. For a second he saw the earth opening up to devour him. Then he felt his footsteps against the earth, compact, more solid than ever. Then his anger swelled up again and he vented it by cursing God” (Rivera 111). The boy is using an oppositional struggle to better understand the world. In this case, the boy’s opposition is with God. He is scared to even say that God may not exist. This view is clearly going against the work of his religion and his parents. But when the boy curses God and nothing bad happens to him, he feels free from the Catholic part of his identity.

In this case, one could apply Moya’s fourth claim here. The Catholic part of the boy’s ethnic identity has great epistemic value because it can in part account for the boy’s social location. The Catholic part of his identity instills the fear of questioning anything concerning Catholicism and therefore reinforces submissive attitudes. This attitude can partially account for at least this family’s socio-economic status. Instead of questioning the terrible conditions of their job, the mom simply relies on the will of God to take care of them. However, the ability to adapt to new information is one aspect of the postpositivist realist theory. This is exactly what the boy does. The next day the boy felt different. Even the day was brighter: “There were clouds in the sky and for the first time he felt capable of doing and undoing anything he pleased” (Rivera 112). After learning that his imposed religious beliefs had no consequence, he chose to reevaluate that part of his identity and the knowledge acquired from it, too. According to Grajeda, it is quite amazing that despite “recognizing the emptiness of the heavens he does not fall into the

despair of the existential anti-hero who finds himself in the midst of a meaningless and absurd universe (78). Instead, the boy felt able to do anything he pleased. While this significant aspect of his identity influences his social location, he is able to revise this part of his identity, and he in turn better understands the consequences of his social location and his world.

The last chapter of Rivera's novel, "Under the House," brings the cycle of the boy's life to a complete circle. Grajeda says that in this chapter, "the collective voice of the community is predominant, but now it speaks explicitly to, and through, the central character" (79-80). The final chapter begins with the boy under a house. He did not go to school because the teacher would spank him for not knowing the English words and because he felt like hiding. Even though fleas are biting him, he feels secure between the ground and the house. While this seems like a small amount of information from the text so far, using Moya's postpositivist realist claims about identity construction can bring a wealth of information to the forefront. When evaluating this situation, it is clear that the boy has two options: going to school and getting spanked, or hiding under a house. Next, the boy makes a decision based on the options available to him. With the alternative option of being spanked by the teacher, the boy clearly chooses to avoid school and hides under the house.

The boy's recognition of his options proves that he knows that not everyone is in his situation. He is able to make the connection that not knowing the words is bad and is just cause for physical abuse. While the boy may not make the connection that he is ultimately being abused because he is a minority, he understands that people who do know the words do not get spanked. Making this connection allows the boy to realize that

his social location is different from others' and that therefore his experience is too, even if he does not yet know exactly what his social location is.

Recognizing his social location brings him to the realization that he has a choice, and this allows him to evaluate his choices. His options, along with the option he chooses, provide him insight into why, and because there is an epistemic component to identity, he can be accurate or err in interpreting his experiences. Rather than being spanked for not knowing the words, he hides under a house. The fact that the boy has to choose between being abused or being cramped and bitten by fleas under a house puts his social location into perspective.

Then the boy says, "*It's not bad here. I could come here every day*" (Rivera 148). This passage raises an interesting point. The boy describes a tight, itchy, undesirable situation, which he has been in for hours, and then he says that it is not bad. His situation is not good, but it is better than the alternative. The boy has to choose between two bad things. The knowledge the boy has gained thus far about school and punishment allows him to look at two bad situations and find the lesser one acceptable. The boy even says that he feels safe between the earth and the house.

Next, the boy's inner monologue in this final chapter of Rivera's novel begins with a story his father told him. From this point on, the chapter is one continuous, stream-of-consciousness paragraph for three pages. This long paragraph includes references to all of the other stories in the novel, including the ones previously analyzed. The reference to ". . . And the Earth Did Not Devour Him" reads, "*What worried him the most was that it was raining too much and the crop was getting ruined. That was the only thing he was sad about. He wasn't even sad when they had to operate on his wife because she had*

*cancer, much less when we told him about my Viejo. . .*” (150). This excerpt refers to the boss of the family in that chapter. The boss did not care that the boy’s father got sick; the boss only cared about making money, even more than his own wife’s health. This passage seems to be from the mother’s point of view because she refers to her “viejo.”

The mother’s response supports Moya’s fifth claim because the mother’s lack of understanding the social, political, economic, or epistemic consequences of her social location hinders her ability to understand certain aspects of her world. For example, she does not understand that her husband’s social location as a migrant farmworker makes him only important to the boss as labor. The economic consequence of her husband’s social location makes his value equivalent to anything else that produces revenue for the boss—animals, machines, or crops. Therefore, if the wife were to understand the boss as the businessman that he is, she would not be so surprised that the boss does not care if her husband gets sick. She would understand that the boss is only concerned with making money, to the detriment of anyone or anything.

Finally, toward the end of the final chapter, the boy says he wants to see all of the people together and to hug them all. The boy also concludes by thinking, “*That’s what I needed to do, hide, so that I could come to understand a lot of things*” (151). In reliving the year, the boy sees things he did not see before. The recognition of the meaning of the past year’s events allows him to understand his social location, and as Rivera implies, do something about it.

After some children find the boy underneath the house and begin to throw rocks at him, he finally comes out and simply walks away. As the boy walks away, a woman ironically makes a comment about his acting in a strange manner, but “He immediately

felt happy. . . . He had made a discovery. To discover and rediscover and piece things together. This to this, that to that, all with all” (152). This point brings the reader back to the beginning of the chapter. The boy’s decision to hide under the house in the beginning of the chapter made him aware of his social location. Also, by reminiscing while under the house, he comes to a better understanding of how to function with this newfound knowledge. Referring to the last part of this chapter, Francisco Lomelí says, “the fact that the boy learns of this through personal experience and finally joins the pieces together symbolizes his enlightenment about his condition and his readiness to initiate action. Having gained a sense of his people, his coming out from under the house becomes a step toward affirmation and promotion of his culture” (35). Hector Calderón makes the same connection that my analysis hopes to make: “This ending fragment in the novel is a strong self-referential moment through which the individual Chicano reader can be made aware of his or her own cultural experience represented through the voices of many nameless characters” (105-6).

Ensuring that readers are able to relate to the text and identify with the different characters’ postpositivist identity constructions is important. But what occurs after a student relates and identifies? In reference to “When We Arrive,” Julián Olivares says, “the awareness of the workers’ collective exploitation and victimization is qualified by their silence. Each is only speaking to him or herself” (21). It is not enough for readers simply to acknowledge Moya’s postpositivist realist claims; they must also be able to apply their better understanding of the outside world to their lives. This is where *la facultad* is important. Returning once more to my personal experience of being in graduate school, I now recognize the effects of my social location: that some identities

are more important than others and that my social location influences my identity but does not determine it.

Once Mexican American college students understand more about their own ethnic identity, they should understand more about the outside world. Through an identity-based discovery and alteration, students can come to realize the reason they sometimes have more difficulty than their peers in first-year college composition classes: Many universities are often run by the dominant group, taught by the dominant group, and designed for the dominant group. In this case, because of the realization that some universities more easily serve students from the dominant group, Mexican American students may have to work harder to ensure their own academic success. *La facultad* is their acknowledgement of what they have to do to be successful in a male- and white-dominated world.<sup>3</sup>

Ralph Grajeda states that Tomás Rivera's . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* "traces not only the 'Chicano' and the 'farmworker' contours of his characters' lives, but the universally human as well" (76). The ability of Rivera to write a novel which everyone can relate to, yet which still personalizes individual struggles is what makes this novel ideal for readers to analyze by using Moya's postpositivist realist identity theory. After analyzing the literature and identifying Moya's claims, the next step to constructing the identity formation of readers is by actually using the newfound realizations of the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in a Southwestern Literature class, my White, male professor attempted to claim that Southwestern Literature was only comprised of literature by white males. All of our assigned novels, save one, were written by white males. When my professor assigned our first paper, I used one of our assigned texts from class and two other Southwestern novels as my texts to write about for my assigned paper. This was my attempt to fulfill the requirements of the male- and white-dominated class and to be successful while also using literature that pertained to my issues as a minority. Understanding that this professor did not design this course to encompass all Southwest Literature allowed me to creatively fulfill the assignment requirements successfully without compromising my interests or succumbing to the traditional canonical literature taught by such professors. In short, I was able to write about minority issues in literature which would not have been otherwise addressed.

world to strategically be more successful in it, which is also a process known as using *la facultad*.

## CHAPTER III

### MOYA'S THEORY THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

This chapter focuses on feminist issues Chicanas have faced in the past and continue to face today. I first address the traditional place of Chicanas in their own culture and then discuss the place of Chicanas within the Chicano movement and within the feminist movement. Chicanas' needs were not met within either group, and they therefore began to recognize that Chicanas had different equality issues than those of Chicanos and White women. Next, I explain how Chicanas found their voices through writing. Lastly, I discuss Chicanas' current position within the literary canon and academia. The next part of this chapter addresses Helena María Viramontes' novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*. I argue that Viramontes' symbol of the barn, reinforced by Steinbeck's portrait of the barn in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is used to chronicle Estrella's recognition of her social location, through an act of resistance which eventually brings her, as the novel's protagonist, to discover her sexuality. I parallel Estrella's journey with Moya's postpositivist realist identity claims to use her as a model so Latinas can understand *la facultad*.

Lastly, I discuss Diana García's collection of poetry, *When Living Was a Labor Camp*. I will analyze "Operation Wetback, 1953," "Quality Poor," "Raisins in Summer," and "The Clog of Her Body," focusing on the feminist struggles portrayed in each piece. As examples of the effects the life of a migrant farmworker had on women, these poems



provide parallels to Moya's realist identity claims. García's poetry will prove to be a tool for recognizing a female's social location.

Mexican culture historically has had an interesting place for women who are expected to be obedient, silent, and enduring, while also strong and selfless. We should serve men and God also. We are expected to hold the family together while under direction of a man. In her introduction to *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature*, Deborah Madsen mentions the story of Doña Marina, more commonly known as La Malinche, as representing the beginning of Chicana history. In reference to Octavio Paz's discussion of la chingada in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Madsen says, "La Malinche in this interpretation is seen as the origin of macho violence and Chicana passivity" (8). This is one example of using history, specifically a historical figure, to reinforce a woman's place in Mexican culture. Discussing the tendency of Mexican culture to praise and romanticize motherhood but discourage sexuality, Madsen claims, "there is confusion between the cultural imperative to be strong yet also submissive, to be rebellious yet also conformist; the culture sends mixed messages" (25).

The Chicano movement created difficulties to the dynamic of this relationship between man and woman in Mexican American culture. While Chicanos and Chicanas were fighting for equality in U.S. society, the men were still placing women a step below the men. For example, in his comprehensive article, "Community, Patriarchy and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality," Ramón Gutiérrez says, "within the Chicano student movement, women were denied leadership roles and were asked to perform only the most traditional stereotypic roles—cleaning up, making coffee, executing the orders men gave, and servicing their needs" (47). At first,

Chicanas fulfilled their expected duties and worked behind the scenes because supporting Chicanos was synonymous with supporting the Chicano movement. In addition, the women were of course selfless and wanted to do what was best for their people. In *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerrilleras: Essays on Chicana/Latina Literature and Criticism*, Tey Rebolledo explains an initial compliance, saying, “they [the women] realized that their men were also oppressed by the dominant powers in the United States. . . . Thus they did not feel, at the beginning of the feminist movement, that their cause could be separated from that of their men, or from their families” (96).

However, eventually Chicanas were not satisfied with their place in the struggle and realized that they had their own issues to which men could not relate. Chicanas began to demand equality and began to free themselves from the cultural ideas that had previously kept them silent. Unfortunately, this was seen as not supporting the Chicano movement as a whole, and therefore, “men responded to the assault on their privileges by resorting to crass name calling, labeling Chicana feminists as ‘malinchistas,’ traitors who were influenced by ideas foreign to their community—namely bourgeois feminist ideology” (Gutiérrez 50). Of course, by not submitting to the men’s demands, the Chicana is automatically situated against them. While trying to gain equality as Chicanos/as, maintaining patriarchal cultural norms caused Chicanos and Chicanas to disagree because equality still only meant equality for men. This situation left Chicanas feeling detached from their people because “although machismo was always recognized, the Chicano movement made the lack of concern over women’s interests even more evident” (Rebolledo 97).

Chicanas found their concerns not only dismissed by Chicanos but also by other women promoting the feminist movement, White women in particular. White women did not have the same issues as Chicanas, and therefore White women dismissed many Chicana issues. Chicanas attempted to find a movement that demanded equality for them, as Chicanas and as females, but could only relate to one another. As Madsen comments, “white feminists and macho Chicanos provide poor alternatives for women laboring under a triple burden of sexism, racism, and economic deprivation” (19). Chicanas thus found themselves oppressed three times in ways that neither Chicanos nor White women could relate.

Eventually, Chicanas found their voices through different mediums, one of which was through writing. Madsen says that the beginning of the Chicano literary movement was dominated by males, and this fact can account for the “antimachismo tone and feminist voice of later Chicana writing” (11). Chicanas were able to put on paper, and publish, ideas and thoughts unfathomable not long before the Chicano movement started. Chicanas were not satisfied with being the quiet, obedient victims anymore. An interesting realization for Chicanas concerned sexuality: “Unlike Chicanos who took their sex/gender privileges for granted, Chicanas, as victims of those privileges, realized that an essential part of their literary birthing had to include an exploration of their sexuality” (Gutiérrez 55). Chicanas located independent identities that were conveyed through their newfound ability to vocalize what had previously been only internal. Rebolledo summarizes these accomplishments by saying, “Chicana writers have made themselves the heroines of their own stories and the subjects of their own narrations. They have

seized their voices where before there was silence, and they have become the voice of authority over what they know” (144).

Because the Chicano movement focused on male migrant farmworkers and their struggles, Chicano literature that was published during this time also had the same focus. *Pilgrims in Aztlán* and . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* are just two examples. Madsen explains the result of male-focused literature: “Thus, the particular issues affecting women who live under the same conditions of exploitation went unacknowledged” (10). As Chicanas began to publish their work, a few common themes were addressed. Discussing Chicana literature, Rebolledo says that many of the early published Chicanas wrote about journeys of discovery, and “these journeys have been searches toward understanding what it means to be a woman, Mexicana, Chicana, Americana, in male-dominated societies” (153). As women were finding their outspoken voices through writing and publishing, they were also discovering their social locations. Another common issue addressed in the literature was the repression and dominance Chicanas felt through the three ways they claimed to be oppressed. However, Madsen says Chicana feminists had a clear goal in mind: “More than the cultural imperialism of the United States of Mexico or Latin America, it is the imperialism of the male-dominated, patriarchal, misogynistic Chicano culture that Chicana feminists such as Gloria Analdúa seek to break down” (24).

Today, Chicanas are relatively well-published, tenured professors and are teaching feminist Chicana literature to university students. Rebolledo testifies to the progress of published Chicanas:

In terms of a growing literature we have made enormous strides in the last few years. And, indeed, some of our writers have even made it into the totally male-centered *New York Review of Books* (at least two) as well as the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, and Sandra Cisneros is no longer “Sandra Who?” (as was reported in one Texas newspaper). (27)

Rebolledo is right; we have made much progress. However, this progress has not been made without sacrifice and struggle. Moreover, we still continue to work hard just to be heard and seen. Mainstream White academics still confirm stories of other mainstream White academics, of Chicanos and men of other backgrounds, nullifying a Chicana’s success for various unfounded reasons. Our work is sufficient but not comparable.

Rebolledo explains a Chicana’s struggle of working at the university level: “First there is an internalized stereotype on the part of the university that women of color are unable to be professionals. This comes about when those who have been in control feel threatened and undermined along with the notion that an ‘affirmative action’ hire is not as good as everyone else” (30).

Because she lived through the Chicano movement, Helena María Viramontes knows firsthand about the feminist struggles previously described in the fields and in academia. She was a migrant farmworker, so undoubtedly many Chicanos/as can relate to her work. Viramontes was born in East Los Angeles in 1954. She came from a large family of ten brothers and sisters. Her strict, traditional Mexican father took the family to “California’s Central Valley to pick grapes every summer” (“You Carry the Border with You” 79). Viramontes earned her B.A. in English Literature from Immaculate Heart College (1975) and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of California-

Irvine (1994). She currently teaches at Cornell University. Her first book-length publication is *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985); she then published her first novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). Her latest novel, *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2007), was started before *Jesus* but was not completed until after *Jesus* (Viramontes, “You Carry the Border With You,” 80-81). Viramontes also co-edited, with María Herrera-Sobek, one of the first literary and critical anthologies of Chicana Literature, *Chicana Creativity and Criticism: Charting New Frontiers in American Literature* (1987). In her chapter from *Gente Decente*, “Media Reportage as ‘History-in-the Making’: Two Short Stories by Helena María Viramontes,” Leticia Garza-Falcón speaks to Viramontes’ effectiveness in presenting a different view of history: “Viramontes responds to a recurring of the rhetoric of a dominative history into the later twentieth century by dramatizing the complexity of contemporary issues such as immigration and neighborhood violence” (199). In reference to Viramontes’ short story “The Cariboo Café,” Garza Falcón says that through literature Viramontes is able to challenge the stereotypical ideas that create history and prove these ideas to be flawed.

Viramontes’ novel, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, centers on a young female protagonist, Estrella, and her migrant farmworker experience. Her family works in the agricultural fields in California as migrant farmworkers. Her mother Petra is married to an older man, Perfecto, and Estrella helps her mother’s husband in many ways because she is the oldest and because her mother is pregnant. Although Perfecto supports the family, he longs to return to Mexico. The novel chronicles Estrella’s journey into womanhood and her budding relationship with a boy, Alejo, who is also a migrant farmworker. When he gets sick from the pesticides scattered over the fields by crop-

dusters, Estrella's family cares for him, but he eventually has to get professional medical treatment. At the health clinic they take Alejo to, Estrella confronts the nurse to get back the money they paid for Alejo's doctor's visit. At the climax of the novel, Estrella comes to an understanding of her place in society and of the knowledge that enabled this critical understanding.

*Under the Feet of Jesus* is Viramontes's first published novel and is therefore inevitably compared to other novels that may appear similar. Madsen says, like Anaya and Rivera, Viramontes uses a coming of age story to show an "awareness of cruel social injustice" (20). However, Madsen points out that Viramontes's novel, "which reads at first like a Chicana *Grapes of Wrath*," differs because it "describes the coming of age of an adolescent itinerant farmworker who, significantly, is a girl" (20). Madsen is not the only theorist to compare *Under the Feet of Jesus* to John Steinbeck's classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Viramontes's novel is also the focus of Paula Moya's last chapter of *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*. In this chapter, Moya clearly distinguishes the two novels. She says that while they both deal with the lives of migrant farmworkers, Viramontes' novel differs from Steinbeck's in two ways: 1) Viramontes addresses Mexican-origin farmworkers, and 2) her "variable character bound focalization" does not explicitly help guide the reader to the political message she puts forth (191). In other words, Steinbeck's narrative strategy of short inner-chapters intends to guide readers to political interpretations of the events taking place in his novel. On the other hand, Viramontes makes her reader work harder to understand each character's contribution in creating the "social world represented in the text" (191). While these are simply two examples of comparisons drawn to Steinbeck's classic novel,

I mention them because in reading both texts, the last barn scene in *The Grapes of Wrath* can be used to reinforce Viramontes' symbol of the barn in her own novel.

Published in 1939, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck was not the instant classic we currently know it to be. Because of its overt political message, its unfavorable portrayal of "Okies," and the dismal depiction of migrant farmworkers' lives, some critics did not receive Steinbeck's novel positively at first. Some people thought he was over-exaggerating the migrant farmworkers' situation, and religious advocates found it obscene. However, other critics positively praised the novel. For example, Charles Angoff, in his 1939 review, placed Steinbeck in the same category as Hawthorne and Melville, and claimed, "The book has all the earmarks of something momentous, monumental and memorable" (34). Steinbeck would eventually win the Nobel Prize for literature in large part because of this novel. In his introduction to *Critical Essays on Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*, John Ditsky comments on Steinbeck's award: "Seldom have a prize-winning author's public achievements so differed from the assessments of many of his critics than on the occasion of Steinbeck's reception of the Nobel Prize in 1962" (8). Regardless of whether the public liked it or not, Steinbeck's novel undoubtedly affected society then and now by chronicling the struggle of a generation and a people during the Great Depression.

The last barn scene in *The Grapes of Wrath*, though, is strange. The Joad family moved across the country for lack of work and ended up in California. Following a series of unfortunate events, the Joad family becomes stranded on a boxcar after heavy rains cause heavy flooding. They cannot leave because Rose of Sharon is in labor. After she delivers a stillborn child, the family decides to leave. They find a dry barn in which they



discover an old man dying of starvation and his son. The novel ends with everyone leaving the barn and with Rose of Sharon nursing the dying man from her breast. The last line leaves the reader with an image of her smiling “mysteriously” (Steinbeck 578).

In his essay “The Ending of *The Grapes of Wrath*: A Further Commentary,” John Ditsky refers to Rose of Sharon’s odd smile by saying, “because she is wiser than before, her idea of fulfillment has been altered forever” (122). Before Rose of Sharon’s husband left her and before she delivered a stillborn baby, she imagined a happy life with a house, husband, and child. However, the possibility of this life slowly disappeared. Although she could not fulfill her maternal duties to bring life to her own child, she was able to cultivate life elsewhere. She therefore dramatically altered her idea of fulfillment because she realized that she could still fulfill her maternal duties in other ways. This event allows Rose of Sharon to mature in her sexuality and her idea of motherhood because she comes to a new level of consciousness. This event also provides a closer view of Steinbeck’s overall theme of emphasizing social action to ensure that all people are cared for and treated fairly.

While Rose of Sharon’s action is selfless, it is also quite unorthodox and can easily make readers uncomfortable. In defense of the claim that Steinbeck’s novel is obscene, Ditsky says, “what ensues is an almost philosophically justified use of sexual powers: right use of the body’s intimate reproductive faculties to promote Life itself” (118). Ditsky is right. Rose of Sharon is simply using her biological abilities to perform her purpose. However, the object of the action is not typical, and that is what makes this scene so odd. Moreover, the idea that this is not perverse or inappropriate because it is a biological function is contradicted when Ma asks everyone to leave the barn. Although it

is natural, Rose of Sharon nursing is not something the children or men should see. Her action still parallels the typical actions of animals that occur in a barn. The closing scene of the barn in the *Grapes of Wrath* brings us to the opening and ending scene in *Under the Feet of Jesus*.

Before drawing conclusions about the two novels, I will address the significance of sexual discovery for Chicanas in literature and in their culture. As previously noted, our Mexican culture presents Chicanas with mixed messages about sexuality.

Motherhood is an accomplishment, but sexuality is dangerous. This implies that Chicanas should only engage in sexual acts in order to procreate. During the Chicano movement, Chicanas realized this unspoken restriction, and many early Chicanas therefore wrote about sex and sexuality as a form of liberation. As Madsen explains, "It is because of the identification of femininity with the carnal that in patriarchal Chicano culture women must be protected from their own sexuality, protected from themselves. . . . And so sexuality becomes the most potent means of expressing rebellion against the strictures of Chicano patriarchy" (25).

In her essay, "Marks of the Chicana Corpus: An Intervention in the Universality Debate," Viramontes discusses her household growing up. Viramontes and her six sisters had three rules set by their father: No phone calls, no dating, and lights out at nine. She explains, "these were the rules set before us to protect the virgins and thus our own virginity [which] my father believed needed to be protected" (5). Viramontes says her father was simply doing what he believed to be a father's obligation: "to keep his daughters chaste and honorable long enough for our husbands to take over the control" (6). Because her father's perception of safety was different in this country, Viramontes

said, “our safety, became closely tied to chastity. Thus, chastity became a valuable currency for success in this country” (7). Although Viramontes’ father was doing what he thought best, he was also reinforcing the cultural idea that women are no more than bodies. Repressing our sexuality and keeping us from knowing the power of our sexuality therefore both work to maintain our safety and our submissive position within our culture. As Viramontes elaborates, “because of our femaleness, we were inherently in danger of being devoured by our sexuality. He thought that the force of our sexuality was so mighty he had to protect us from ourselves” (7). Her father’s notion of protecting his daughters from their own sexuality parallels with that of another writer.

In an interview, Viramontes claims to have gotten the idea of the barn from Erlinda Gonzales-Berry’s *Paletitas de Guayaba*. In this memoir, Gonzales-Berry says her father did not allow the girls to go into the family’s barn. Viramontes wondered about the reason behind this. After thinking about it, she concluded that the father did not want the girls in the barn because of all the natural yet animalistic things that take place in a barn—sex, birth, and death. Then Viramontes asked herself, ““Okay, why does he have to protect her from her own sexuality?”” (“You Carry the Border with You” 80). She claims that this is what brought her to the beginning of *Under the Feet of Jesus*. The novel begins with Estrella’s first sight of the barn as her family’s station wagon arrives to their bungalow. It is possible that Viramontes’ exposure to the barn in Steinbeck’s novel and the significance of the barn in Gonzales-Berry’s memoir brought Viramontes to use the barn as a symbol for Estrella’s sexuality. These inferred connections allowed her to bookend the novel with the barn to bring Estrella’s consciousness full circle.

At the beginning of *Under the Feet of Jesus*, one reads, “Had they been heading for the barn all along? Estrella didn’t know. The barn had burst through a clearing of trees and the cratered roof reminded her of the full moon” (3). Assuming, for this analysis, that the barn represents Estrella’s understanding of herself as a sexual being and of her own sexuality, this beginning to the novel informs the reader of Estrella’s initial inquiry of the matter. She seems to wonder if this experience would inevitably bring her to discover her sexuality. The barn/her sexuality suddenly made itself present. Viramontes’ use of positive language reinforces the barn/her sexuality as a necessary thing. She could simply have said that Estrella saw the barn, but instead, it bursts through nature. The barn could have reminded Estrella of many different objects. Moreover, it could have reminded her of just a moon, but she chose a full moon—beautiful imperfection.

Later in the novel, Perfecto and Estrella discuss the barn. He wants Estrella to help him tear the barn down for extra money. However, Estrella knows she personally will not get any of the money: “It’s not fair, Estrella said. Except for the dress she’d pulled over her work clothes, she resembled a young man, standing in the barn’s shadow” (74). She later asks Perfecto why it must be torn down, and he lies by saying that someone had died there. She does not believe him and continues to prod him. He tries to convince her that it is none of her business and that people do not go into the barn for a good reason. Eventually, she simply refuses to help him, so he leaves (75-6). Two important points are made in this scene: 1) Estrella is beginning to realize that she is a female, and her lifestyle does not reflect it. 2) Perfecto is trying to protect Estrella from the barn and all that it signifies.

As the only one physically able to help Perfecto free of charge, Estrella is obligated to do manual labor, such as tearing down a barn, typically a task only reserved for men. Even Estrella's physical appearance resembles that of a young man, with only a dress put over her work clothes. Estrella realizes that her gender norms are being challenged because she is having to fulfill a man's duties. The visual image provided of Estrella standing in the shadow of the barn allows the reader to imagine the stress Estrella feels by knowing that her sexuality is overshadowing her, while at the same time not being allowed to express it. Also, by not explaining why the barn must be torn down, Perfecto is arguably keeping Estrella from knowing all that happens in a barn. He is trying to protect her from knowing more about the sexual and natural occurrences in the barn, and he is concerned with destroying it before she can know more. Estrella is realizing that her lack of knowledge about the barn/her sexuality is keeping her in a boy's position and is restricting her ability to become a woman.

Estrella's understanding of her sexuality progresses after she enters the barn. At this point in the novel, Estrella and Alejo are having a conversation about tar oil. Alejo then kisses the palm of Estrella's hand in a very sensual manner. After she leaves Alejo, Estrella runs to the barn and, once inside, watches her hand glow in the sunlight. Because she heard animals in the barn, "she realized she was not alone," but after looking around, she saw no one else inside (90). Estrella becomes fascinated by a chain in the middle of the barn that hangs from the roof. She tugs on it to test its sturdiness, and, "As she bent to pick up her hat, Estrella noticed her hands. Once filled with light, her palms were now tainted with brick red dust" (90). Her innocent interaction with Alejo seems to be Estrella's first physical encounter with a boy, which is also conveyed through her jubilant

attitude on the way to the barn. Again, Viramontes' language is suggestive here. Estrella is first scared when she *realized* she was not alone. The use of the word *realized* implies that she knew she really was not alone. In other words, although she did not see any one, the implication that she is not alone suggests her new consciousness of her sexuality. The newness of Estrella's awareness is evident in the comparison of her palms before and after she touched the chain. Before her palms were light, but after this first interaction with Alejo, her palms take on a negative characteristic of being "tainted" red. While she enjoyed her interaction with Alejo, it has been culturally engrained in her that this type of interaction is not a good thing.

The climax of the novel does not involve the barn, but it represents an important step in seeing Estrella's sexual discovery. Her family takes Alejo to a clinic and are charged ten dollars for the nurse to simply tell them that he needs to be taken to a hospital. All Perfecto has is \$9.07, and they pay that. Estrella is pleading to be allowed to barter in some way instead of paying money, but the nurse is unresponsive. Estrella goes to the car, gets a crowbar, and returns, demanding their money back from the woman. Estrella counts out \$9.07 to take back because the woman is too busy crying.

As the climax of the novel, Estrella comes to realize the injustice of being charged for the clinic visit and, in turn, the injustice of their situation as a whole. Although throughout the novel the symbolism of the barn parallels Estrella's sexual awareness, it is this incident at the clinic that causes the realization of her social location. When she gets the money back, Estrella says, "The money felt wet and ugly and sweaty like the swamp between her legs" (150). Her newfound authority is uncomfortable, even undesirable, just as her newfound sexuality. Just as the money is described negatively—wet, ugly, and

sweaty—so is her vagina referred to as a swamp. Although Estrella has come to an important threshold for discovering her social location and, therefore, her sexuality, she is still uncomfortable with these new realizations. In addition, as Madsen comments, “The new sense of empowerment Estrella experiences through violence is in contradiction to her earlier sense of herself as passive, marginal, someone to whom events happen” (21). Estrella is no longer a passive person.

The novel ends with Estrella returning to the barn and climbing up the chain. As she starts, she thinks, “There was no turning back now” (173). This implies that she has come to an understanding that cannot change. After climbing the chain, she gets off on the loft, opens the trapdoor, and climbs out onto the roof. This progression upward parallels her sexual discovery which will finally liberate her at the end: “No longer did she feel her blouse damp with sweat. No longer did she stumble blindly. She had to trust the soles of her feet, her hands, the shovel of her back, and the pounding bells of her heart” (175). Estrella is now secure in her body.

In an interview about this novel, Viramontes says, among other things, that the barn represents

. . . how incredibly powerful we women can become. No wonder that throughout all these generations, sexuality has been so suppressed in us, that has been derailed, that has been distorted because it is so powerful. Then you are fucking ready to face the world. There is no stopping you. To me, that was her [Estrella]. By the end, the barn gave her that power. (Kevane and Heredia 150)

Viramontes confirms that through Estrella's realization of her social location and its effect on her identity, she is able to discover her sexuality, which only reinforces her empowerment. Estrella's discovery journey is chronicled through the barn, from her first sight of it to her eventual climb to the top of it.

Estrella's story proves Moya's claim that some identities are more important than others. The fact that Estrella is female hinders her realization of her social location. As a female, she is kept unaware of the barn/her sexuality which keeps her submissive in every other part of her life. Also, Moya's claim that a better understanding of the world affects an understanding of the social, political, epistemic, and economic implications of her identity can be applied here. Estrella comes to understand her social location at the clinic, which makes her better able to understand her world. She understands her family's unfair treatment by the people at the clinic, which also reflected the family's unfair treatment by the dominant group. In understanding that she has to oppose the restrictions placed on her by society in order to survive, she comes to realize the power of her sexuality. Estrella is a model of how applying these claims can help a reader understand his/her social location and possibly *la facultad*.

Viramontes' novel uses Estrella's coming of age story to explain the "social and cultural forces" that cause migrant farmworkers to perpetuate their bleak lives. However as Rebolledo says, "these childhood explorations are not nostalgic; rather they are basic to finding out who and what we [as Chicanas] are today" (93). Viramontes uses Estrella's liberation to provide a realistic model of how people need to work together to effect change. As Madsen elaborates, "the value of community is represented as real and precious, though tenuous and fragile in this narrative. The importance of women, not only



as the source of support and nurture but also as agents in their own histories and the unfolding history of *la raza*, is emphasized by Viramontes” (20-21). Viramontes confirms this view, saying, ““I want readers to be active participants, make them realize that they are bystanders in the end looking and accepting what is going on with their silence”” (“Praying for Knowledge” 146). Viramontes’ commitment to making her readers work to promote social change through their awareness of their social circumstance is what makes her novel an ideal target for the application of Moya’s postpositivist realist theory of identity.

While Viramontes focuses on Estrella’s awareness of her sexuality as a matrix for *la facultad*, Diana García’s work, *When Living Was a Labor Camp*, examines the hardships of female migrant farmworkers, among other migrant and Mexican American struggles. Born in a migrant farmworker camp in 1950, García is from California’s San Joaquin Valley. Around the time she started school, her family moved from the labor camp to Merced, California. In grade school, García was placed in a “junior first” grade (between kindergarten and first grade). Her parents then decided her household would become English-only (García, “Valley Language” 54-5). After sixteen years of taking college courses, she received her B.A. in English (1989) and, later, an M.F.A. (1993), both from San Diego State University. García is now a professor at California State University, Monterey Bay. Her book of poetry, *When Living Was a Labor Camp* (2001), won the American Book Award in 2001. She has also published an amazing essay, titled “Valley Language” in *Placing the Academy: Essays on Landscape, Work and Identity* (2007), which discusses her personal educational experience and her connection to the land in the San Joaquin Valley.

García claims Ana Castillo, Pat Mora, Denise Chavez, and Sandra Cisneros as her “literary godmothers” (“Valley Language” 60). Although influenced by the women of the Chicana feminist movement, García did not publish until later. Her work is anthologized but not extensively written about critically. However, the impact of her poetry, her craft of minimal yet expressive words, and her mission as a professor undoubtedly has affected the literary community, the academic community, and most importantly, her students. Because García was born in a migrant farmworker labor camp, she has lived the migrant farmworker experience, and she gives a beautiful voice to coming from an adverse situation. In *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerrillas: Essays on Chicana/Latina Literature and Criticism*, Tey Rebolledo comments on García’s ability to affect her various readers: “Diana García likewise takes us through the movement, the Vietnam War, and the history of women trying to find meaning and to survive” (157).

García’s *When Living Was a Labor Camp* consists of six sections: “An Orchard of Figs in the Fall,” “When Living Was a Labor Camp Called Montgomery,” “Serpentine Voices,” “Breasting the Rogue,” “It’s Not about Race,” and “Gleanings.” García says the idea for the title poem came while listening to her family members talk about growing up in migrant labor camps. She says that these stories stayed with her while teaching children whose second language was Spanish and whose third language was English. García speaks to the universality of displaced migrants’ struggles when saying these children could have been the children in labor camps. She continues saying that the first two sections, “An Orchard of Figs in the Fall” and “When Living Was a Labor Camp Called Montgomery,” “give voice to all those experiences” (xiv). The next two sections, “Serpentine Voices” and “Breasting the Rogue,” are written in response to French

feminist writer Helene Cixous's direction to "'write the body'" and in response to "marianismo, a devotion to the Virgin Mary that precludes any untoward behavior on the part of women" (xiv).

Understanding the incredibly unfair situation of Latina women, García writes about "the lives of women who made their way out of the camps, women whose histories left them ill-suited to succeed in the cities" (xiv). She confronts Latina women's struggles concerning sexuality, life in poverty, and motherhood. Prefacing the explanation of the next section, "It's Not about Race," García tells how her grandmother always felt sorry for García because her skin was so dark and that she therefore would never be beautiful. García then explains that this section "confronts the traumas of being different" (xiv). The last section, "Gleanings," she says, "acknowledges how life comes to us in the small details that remain when the major upheavals subside" (xiv). Fittingly, this last section focuses on García's perception of the San Joaquin Valley and other parts of California. She suggests that the one constant that even a displaced migrant can hold is the land he or she knows.

My analysis of "Operation Wetback, 1953," "Quality Poor," "Raisins in Summer," and "The Clog of Her Body" will first highlight the struggles that Latina women face in various parts of their lives. An application of Moya's theory in García's poems will emphasize the different ways a young Latina's understanding of her social location can facilitate her in forming her ethnic identity through *la facultad*. Although my analysis of García's poetry is feminist-centered, the previous explanation of the various sections reinforces her ability to share emotions of a common experience among women sharing the same experience. Even though there is not one collective migrant farmworker

experience, her poetry presents what was shared among them: “years of hard hot days, cold foggy nights. Dreams of buying a house someday” (Introduction xii). Hardship and hope are themes throughout, which a reader can relate to because of the rhetorical strength of her poetic expression.

The first poem, “Operation Wetback, 1953,” alludes to the U.S. government’s attempted legal remedy to an economic recession: blaming undocumented immigrants for “taking” jobs which Americans will not do and deporting undocumented immigrants. This displacement of blame is extremely relevant today, as it is again the U.S. government’s response to our current economic recession. “Operation Wetback, 1953” refers to one occasion when U.S. legislation, named Operation Wetback, sent Mexican immigrants, including Mexican Americans who are U.S. citizens, to Mexico. This poem begins describing a typical day of a migrant farmworker’s wife as her husband leaves to work in the fields. The poem describes the daughter cleaning a diaper. Then the wife, on the floor and presumably cleaning, says,

you barely notice as your husband strokes  
your belly. *Mijo*, he croons, prophetic plea,  
then squeezes your nalgas as if to gauge  
for ripeness. (5-8)

At first glance, this stanza seems sexist, reinforcing the stereotypical positions of males and females in a Mexican relationship. The woman is physically below the man, cleaning. As he is leaving for work, he is clearly hoping for their next child to be a boy, and he affectionately, yet some would say degradingly, squeezes her butt. There is nothing to suggest any spousal abuse in their relationship, but his actions nevertheless

reinforce the stereotypical sexual norms of a stereotypical Mexican relationship. The woman then describes her husband leaving and the truck taking men to work.

The poem jumps to years later as the wife thinks of when she told her children that the trains took wetbacks south. She recalls the things she *did* tell her children; however, the guilty mother is plagued by what she *did not* tell her children:

You never tell your children  
what you can't forget: how you failed to squeeze back,  
failed to wave good-bye, failed to taunt him  
with viejo sinvergüenza. (17-20)

This stanza sadly conveys the mother's guilt for not responding to any of her husband's loving gestures. She did not physically respond by waving or touching him back; she did not verbally respond by teasing him, calling him a shameless man. At this point in the poem, the reader realizes that the seemingly sexist tendencies of her husband are all she has left to remember of him. And because they were tendencies of love, she feels guilty for not reciprocating them. Most importantly, this poem addresses the hardships faced by migrant farmworker women. Even ones in happy marriages could be left to provide for themselves and their children because of various intervening circumstances, such as legislation enacting deportation like Operation Wetback.

The next three poems focus more on the situations in which migrant farmworker women find themselves, even after leaving the migrant farmworker life, because of their culture and history. In "Quality Poor," the narrator explains that women who have jobs still struggle immensely. She begins, "You can't be poor to live in the blue roofs. / Only quality low-income here, the top 10% / of the poor..." (1-3). The blue roofs allude to an

apartment complex. The narrator sarcastically explains that the people who live here are not poor but simply low-income, what most would call the working-poor. However, the fact that these people cannot buy a house but can rent an apartment places them in a category which the first few lines explain—the richest of the poor. The narrator then describes the ironic economic circumstances of the people who live in these apartments:

The account executive  
 who picks up her boss's son's birthday cake  
 during her lunch hour and hopes he'll settle  
 his bill; the hospital's bilingual stenographer  
 who can't afford her medical benefit premiums;  
 the executive assistant at the welfare office  
 who qualifies for food stamps to make ends meet. (4-10)

Here the reader gets a better idea of exactly whom the narrator is referring to.

By establishing the image of the working-poor as female, the narrator gives voice to the struggles of women who work hard to provide for their families. Each woman mentioned has a legitimate job—account executive, bilingual stenographer, executive assistant—with a title that leaves others believing that these are great, important jobs. The irony is that even though these women are truly important, the world around them does not treat them so. Each woman, while employed, still does not make enough money to have any luxuries or benefits. Providing real-life examples of women who live in the blue-roofed apartments allows the reader to relate to and understand the hard economic circumstances of these women. Everyone knows women of color who, despite working hard and being a good mother, continue to live a meager, unrewarding life.

The next stanza has a clever play on words with the word “manage” by saying management is what the women want. At first the reader might assume the women want a management position within their jobs. However, the solution is much simpler than that. The poem claims the women want the ability to manage through balanced checkbooks that would provide “a little extra at the end of the month,” balanced lives not “scrubbing toilets at 2 A.M.,” and balanced kids who “never tear the window screens” (12-17). This stanza brings to life the results of the unfair treatment that these women face. Because they are not paid much, they must work more, and they are not often home; therefore, their children can become unruly. The stability these women desire is not much to ask in return for their hard work.

Another play on the word “manage” ends the poem: “Instead we endure, reduced to being / managed because we stand in line for aid” (18-19). With grace, the women surrender to the unfairness of their world. The narrator says that instead of getting what they want, what they deserve, these women instead have to endure their situations. The strategic use of the word “manage” alludes to the lack of control these women have in their own lives. Instead of being able to manage their own lives, their lives are managed for them. These women’s lives are controlled to the point that they must stand in a line to get food, money, and help. This last line serves as presenting the stark realization that these women are attempting to better their own situations, but the world around them continues to control their lives and to leave them in precarious economic situations.

In García’s next poem, “Raisins in the Summer,” she discusses the complicated situation that women are left in as a result of their culture and past. The poem begins “Friday before payday we haul the kids / to one apartment...” (1-2). The beginning

describes a group of women getting together at their apartment complex to feed their kids and then sending the kids off to play. After the kids leave, the narrator describes the different women gathered: Yolanda, “whose husband left her, pregnant / with their third child, for anything blonde / or redheaded, nothing brunette” (14-16), and Sonia, who “usually wore her black with greenish purple / above her eye or on her cheek and once / on her left breast” (24-26). These two women are some of the women whose unfortunate situations are revealed.

After reading these women’s terrible predicaments concerning the men in their lives, the poem nevertheless portrays a community of women who seem find happiness together:

We push back  
the table cloth, then kill a half gallon  
of cheap burgundy. That’s what you do  
on Friday nights, too broke to go out,  
asses stuck to cheap vinyl seats. We paint  
our toenails Raisins in Summer and joke  
about the date who met our kids, then vanished. (26-32)

This section of the poem presents a collective, optimistic tone. The narrator says very matter of factly that drinking cheap wine and painting nails on a Friday night is what these women do. The fact that the women can joke about a man who left them because of their kids provides insight into how these women cope with their drab lives and the terrible men in their lives.



The second half of the poem begins with the next Friday, payday. The narrator says that after the women get paid, “after we hear the latest from our kids’ fathers / on why their checks are late” (34-35), and after the women pay their bills, they go grocery shopping. She describes the cheap food these women purchase, such as hamburger helper, ground beef textured with gristle, tuna, potatoes, beans, and rice (39-46). The poem cleverly concludes with, “Once again we’ll shelve / who we once were, who we might / have been, alongside our unmet desires” (46-48). Referring to the fathers’ lack of support reinforces the negative role of men in these women’s lives. The husbands beat them or leave them pregnant, dates leave after meeting the children, and the children’s fathers provide little, if anything, for their own children.

The women portrayed in this poem have no men to rely on, only the community of other women who are in similar situations. The last line of this poem parallels the cheap groceries to the women. A tone of defeat and acceptance is constant throughout the poem as well as in this last line. She suggests that these women had to put aside who they were, who they could have been, and the things they wanted because the men in their lives did not keep the commitments they made to these women. Now these women are left to take what little money they have to provide a life for their children, and as a result, these women are left poor, single mothers. However, the constant reinforcement of this being a common experience allows for communal support from the other women. Even the last line reiterates *we* as the subject. All of the women are discontent and mistreated, just in different ways.

The last poem discussed here, “The Clog of Her Body,” addresses women’s sexual objectification by males. The poem begins with a woman in stirrups at the

gynecologist's office. The poem quickly reflects back to when this woman was young. In contemplating the youth of her body and her boyfriend's compliments, the woman also says, "Your mother warned / Keep your panties on, mija. I won't be responsible / if you take your panties off" (10-12). This advice from her mother marks the beginning of this woman's responsibility and her awareness of her own sexuality. However, the woman did not listen to her mother, and the next stanza refers to the first time the woman was pregnant. She comments on the physical consequences of pregnancy, stretch marks. The narrator says she went to Easter Mass pregnant and wearing a minidress with red leather heels. Her friend's dad offers her a ride in his car. The narrator then says, "Remember how he looked you over like a box / of nuts and chews, your belly out to there..." (23-24). She goes on to accept the ride, and although it is unclear what takes place between the two, the way he objectifies her is evident. Even while she is pregnant, this man does not see her as a woman fulfilling her biological possibilities; he only sees her as fulfilling her sexual duties.

The poem then presumably refers to her second pregnancy: "When you had your daughter, the boss pressed / against you in the copy room" (35-36). The narrator describes her boss as an educated, white man with a job but with no profession. She continues to relay the incident:

When he accidentally touched your milk-hard breasts,  
told you they were the largest sweat glands  
on the human body, you thought of offering him  
a peek, unsnapping your shirt, removing the now-soaked  
yellowed nursing pad that reeked of soured cream. (40-44)

This time she is more graphic in describing how the man physically violates her, again only seeing her as flesh and ignoring her biological functions as a mother. The narrator's explanation of this incident suggests an attitude of acceptance. The woman excuses her boss's actions by saying he "accidentally" touched her breasts when it is clear this was not an accident. She also thought of submitting to his advances or at least giving him a peek. As her boss, he is in a position of power over her, so her submissive response is probably a result of realizing her inability to do anything in a situation such as this one.

After this incident, she returns home to her assuming husband or boyfriend. Although she says he rubs her back where it hurts, he also wants more: "When Ronnie ran his hand up your thigh, / kneaded for awhile the softest part, then moved / toward the fold, you cried, *No, my stitches*" (50-52). The poem continues by saying that he wished she had told him encouragingly to proceed. Because the woman is lactating and has stitches, it is clear that she recently gave birth. Yet again, this man does not care that this woman's vagina is literally torn and healing; he still wants to have sex with her and attempts to.

The poem ends sadly with the woman saying,

So when your doctor says it's all worn out  
and you need a hysterectomy, listen to his hum  
as he spreads you wide. Note his rising heat,  
his lust for meat, as he marvels at your moist  
pink walls. And when he clips you with his speculum,  
don't be shy. Stick your cervix out to there  
before you spur him in his sides. (55-61)

After all of her years of giving, sexually and as a mother, the physical feature that defines her as a woman must be removed. Even as she prepares to be stripped of her femininity, the doctor is portrayed as inevitably viewing her body carnally.

The entire poem is a recollection of events up to this point with the woman at the gynecologist's office. As described throughout the poem and her life, this woman has repeatedly been objectified by men who, while able to see her body's biological function as a mother, look past her pregnancies and pain. They disregard her needs and expect her to fulfill their own sexual desires. She continues to be submissive and do what these men expect of her. So, after fulfilling her biological "duties" as a mother and sexual "duties" as a woman, she is robbed of her womanhood. Each stanza that begins a description to one of the above-mentioned incidents starts with "When." However, when the reader arrives to the last stanza, the narrator says, "So when," as if the occurrences throughout the poem have prepared her for this last one. The end of the poem provides instruction for this woman to provide her doctor access to her cervix and continue to submit herself to the man who asks for it.

Perhaps the most insightful part of this poem is the title. *The Oxford American College Dictionary* defines clog as "an encumbrance or impediment" (261). This title signifies that the woman's vagina/sexuality is the impediment of her body. Because she is a woman, her sexuality prevents her from being treated. Instead, the men in her life see her as nothing more than meat. Even worse, she accepts this. The fact that she believes her sexuality is an impediment proves that this woman has been taught to view her sexuality negatively through men's objectification.

Many of Moya's claims can be applied to García's poems, but, arguably, the first, second and fifth claims are most important when looking at these particular poems.

Moya's first claim states that different social categories that constitute a person's social location are causally related to the experiences she will have. A reader must realize when examining these poems that the women portrayed all have common experiences. Because all of these women are Latina and female from assumed low-income backgrounds, they will likely all have similar experiences. For example, most women portrayed in these poems have had terrible experiences with men leaving them, beating them, using them, and not supporting them. These terrible experiences are causally related to the fact that these women come from a macho culture that values strong, silent, submissive women.

Moya's second claim states that a person's experiences will influence but not determine the formation of her cultural identity. Each of the women portrayed in the examined poems are influenced by their own experiences in various ways. Some mothers are resilient, surviving alone yet struggling. Other women are defeated and continue to submit to men's requests. While some women are stagnating in their destitution, other women attempt to better their lives. Each woman's response to her unfortunate experiences forms her cultural identity. Whether she decides to comply with or oppose culturally-imposed norms, her choice affects her identity.

The fifth claim Moya presents states that our ability to acknowledge and understand the social political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our social location affects our ability to understand important parts of our world. Arguably, most of these women do not understand the consequences of their social location; they are therefore trying to comprehend the unfair world in which they live. For example, the

woman in “The Clog of Her Body” continues to give herself sexually and does not seem to question why. She also does not question why men continue to objectify her. She does not understand that as a female, Latina, and with a low socioeconomic status, she is not of the dominant group in any way. She will therefore continue to have people from the dominant groups try to control her for their own benefit. This is simply a matter of how the world works. Her inability to understand this dynamic is related to her failure to comprehend the consequences of her social location.

The ability to apply Moya’s claims to the women, their situations, and their experiences in García’s poetry allows Latina readers to see that the struggles of other Latina women are comparable to their own. Once a reader is able to identify these claims in a text, she could possibly identify them in her own life, bringing about an understanding of her social identity. The full realization of her social identity provides for the possibility that she will apply Moya’s claims to her own life in order to understand and use *la facultad* to ensure her success in her newly understood world.

While many feminist Chicana issues are brought forward by Viramontes and García, when analyzed through Moya’s theory, these issues are capable of helping Chicanas come to a better understanding of their world and, therefore, allows them to recognize *la facultad* as a tool to being successful. Madsen expresses a Chicana’s role as providing young women with direction: “These negative issues are explored in a context that looks forward, in the directions indicated by Chicana feminist theory, and in a style that is required formally to innovate in order to represent without distorting the very subject and subjectivity it seeks to express” (40). Latinas are now fortunate to have innovators and writers, such as Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, and

Denise Chávez, to pave the way for progress in Chicana feminism. They represent an amazing foundation from which Chicanas can learn.

Cherrie Moraga says the focus of Chicana feminism should be “liberating feminine consciousness from the invisible shackles of inherited definitions and stereotypes” (9). *Under the Feet of Jesus* and *When Living Was a Labor Camp* can help Latinas achieve the goal Moraga advances. Viramontes and García, like Rivera, use a singular character to provide the reader with a collective experience. However, Viramontes and García also address feminist issues that do not surface in Rivera’s text. As Madsen says, in Chicana literature, “a frequent theme is the joyful transgression or defiance of inherited misogynistic definitions of Mexican American femininity. The corresponding theme is the celebration of the potential for liberation offered through the expression of feminine sexuality” (40). The awareness of the power of their sexuality is one aspect of their social location that allows them to discover the benefits of *la facultad* because it is one of the most significant forms of power for Chicanas within their culture.

While the literary texts analyzed thus far, . . . *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*, *Under the Feet of Jesus*, and *When Living was a Labor Camp* provide an optimal opportunity which students can use in a first-year college composition classroom, other texts can also be beneficial. While literary texts can be used to promote critical thinking and an opportunity to analyze the migrant farmworker narrative, texts such as photographs offer students another medium to analyze.

## CHAPTER IV

### ALAN POGUE'S MIGRANT FARMWORKER PHOTOGRAPHS

In chapter IV, I analyze photographs from Alan Pogue's collection *Witness for Justice: The Documentary Photographs of Alan Pogue*. Pogue's photographs are another form of expression which Chicanos and Chicanas should examine to see additional dimensions, visual ones, which illustrate and are a part of the migrant farmworker narrative. Without question, Pogue's photographs of migrant farmworkers can be essential to students understanding the migrant farmworking experience and narrative, especially with visual learners. These photographic images can obviously also serve as supplements to the literary genre featuring the lives and experiences of Mexican American and Mexican migrant farmworkers. These photographs additionally provide an opportunity for students to conduct a postpositivist theoretical analysis of them by applying Moya's theoretical claims of a resulting ethnic identity realization and construction through an analysis of visuals. After *reading* the migrant farmworker narrative, the students can then *see* and analyze what the literature addresses when complemented by these photographic images.

They are all crazy professions. The issue at hand for Latinos regarding images is the same as literature; just as we often do not read about Latinos in canonical literature, we also do not see ourselves represented in typical mainstream media images. This omission is perpetuated in texts of all disciplines taught in public schools, as well as in



many universities. Other than one Latino television show and Latino-targeted magazines, most mainstream media does not include Latinos. The few instances when Latinos are in the mainstream media, more often than not, they are portrayed in negative or stereotypical ways. With the advent of postmodern technology, such as the Internet, HD television, and smart phones, there is no doubt that the U.S. is now very much a visual culture.

Unfortunately, most images which Latinos take in do not reflect their everyday lives.

This is arguably true of Mexican Americans, by far, the largest of all U.S. Latino groups.

If Mexican Americans, especially young ones, only see their culture portrayed by the mainstream media in a negative manner, they may possibly learn to agree with the idea that these stereotypical cultural attributes are negative. We have historically seen such an instance. For example, because they were punished in school for speaking Spanish, many Mexican Americans from my grandparents' generation, who were born around the start of the Great Depression, did not teach their children Spanish. As a result, my generation—I am a second and third generation American—did not learn any Spanish. This is extremely problematic for a Mexican American attempting to identify with a culture unable to do the very thing that maintains a culture—speak the language. This is one example of how a negative attribute of Mexican American culture can be deemed negative by the dominant culture. As a result, Mexican Americans will probably feel negative repercussions from identifying with their own cultural identity. This same idea can be applied to the negative visual media currently relayed to Mexican Americans.

In their chapter, "Photography, Ideology and Education (1975)," Terry Dennett and Jo Spence state, "if we are receiving a biased, partial or totally negative and distorted view of ourselves from others, then our self image will probably contain the same kind of

biases and distortions and we may learn to be ashamed of what we apparently lack” (33). For example, *The George Lopez Show* is one of few shows currently centered on a Latino family. However, they are still a typical family of four with a nice house and good jobs. The image portrayed is still quite *Leave-It-to-Beaver*-like compared to how most Latino families I know, including my own, live. As the only Latino family on television, *The George Lopez Show* can make Latinos still see their own lives as lacking because their individual life does not compare to one of the few portrayals of a Latino family in the mainstream media. An example of a negatively portrayed Latino is the character Guillermo on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*. Among the many racist stereotypes attributed to this character, his accent is one of them. Guillermo has a heavy Spanish accent when speaking English, which makes most everything he says quite comical. This blatant ridicule resulting from a character using a Spanish accent when speaking English can easily make Latinos self-conscious of their own accents, even if they do not have an accent. These examples reinforce Dennett and Spence’s claims that through images that provide negative and distorted views of themselves, Latino students will likely adopt these same views about themselves.

An insufficient number of images of Latinos in the mainstream media are not the only problem U.S. Latinos/as face. As mentioned previously when referring to literature, because Latinos/as are bombarded with images of the dominant culture as the norm, Latinos/as are also being taught to accept certain truths. In their chapter, Dennett and Spence discuss using photography as a tool which can be used to teach young children about their social location so as to be able to construct an ethnic identity. While their means are not necessarily what can be applied here, I do agree with some of their general

claims which can be applied at the college level when teaching Mexican Americans about their ethnic cultural identity. Although the situation Dennett and Spence discuss occurs in England, which is also dominated by a seemingly benign conservative, white ideology, their generalizations can nevertheless still be applied in America.

They begin by discussing “false consciousness,” which occurs when a photographer does not “possess a coherent political critique and understanding of the social relations of production” (17). This false consciousness arises from the biases we place on knowledge that influences an acceptance of “dominant values which places one area of experience in superiority to all others, thereby invalidating the experience of oppressed groups, bringing about a resultant lack of motivation on their part to redress the balance” (17). This possibility is problematic because we are continuing to provide Latino/a students only with images that do not reflect their realities, experiences, or cultural history. Fortunately, Alan Pogue, the photographer whose photos are analyzed here, understands fully the political and social relations surrounding the topics of his photography. Because false consciousness is not an issue here, Pogue’s photography is ideal for Latinos/as to analyze because Pogue and his documentary photography go against the grain of how the mainstream believes Latinos should be portrayed.

While an analysis of photographic images can become complicated, setting parameters within which these photographs can be analyzed allows for a clearer comprehension of analyzing photographic images. Dennett and Spence suggest a list of ways that a photograph can be manipulated, and they present questions that can arise because of these manipulations. From this list, I have chosen certain issues to use for rhetorically analyzing the photographs taken by Pogue: 1) the addition of text, 2) the

purpose behind the work, and 3) the position of the photographer. While examining these issues in relation to the photographs by Pogue, I also believe it to be necessary to establish two additional ideas: the photos analyzed here are a reflection of reality, as they are documentary photos. In their chapter, “Photographs as Evidence,” Aaron Meskin and Jonathan Cohen claim that “the traditional explanation for the special epistemic status of photography is that photography is an inherently realistic medium” (71). As a medium that reflects reality or real events, documentary photographs provide epistemic possibilities.

Also, the photographs here are considered documentary photographs, compared to advertising photographs. This distinction is important to consider because “the documentary photograph provides an ‘open’ narrative in contrast to the ‘closed’ narrative of the advertising image” (Alvarado 158). Documentary photos can prompt many narrative questions, which “are all predicated on the assumption that the photographer did not ‘create’ the scene but merely ‘captured’ a moment of reality” (Alvarado 158). The narrative quality of documentary photographs is important to remember when aligning them with the migrant farmworker narrative. The fluidity of our identity also coincides with Robert Coles’ comments about doing documentary work and not being able to see *everything*: “Who we are, to some variable extent, determines what we notice and, at another level of intellectual activity, what we regard as worthy of notice, what we find significant” (178). Because of our different, always-changing identities, what each person *sees* in a photograph is different from the next person. This perspective, though, has not always been how photography was viewed.

Documentary photography reached its early peak during The Great Depression. During this time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Farm Security Administration (F.S.A.) (Originally the Resettlement Administration). The historical section, run by Roy Stryker, was commissioned to document American society during The Great Depression through the use of photography. Photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Walker Evans, and Russell Lee, among many others, were employed by the F.S.A. during this time. In total, F.S.A. photographers took about 270,000 photographs (Stryker 7). Stryker states that while each of these photographers was different, they had one trait in common: “a deep respect for human beings” (7). Walker Evans and James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Paul Taylor and Dorothea Lange’s *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* are just two extraordinarily well-known photographic documentary products that resulted from the F.S.A. project.

Of these photographers, one seems to have had the greatest influence on Alan Pogue, Russell Lee, who was born on July 21, 1903, in Ottawa, Illinois (Hurley 9). After an unstable childhood, Lee attended Lehigh University where he received a B.S. in Chemical Engineering. At first, Lee was hired on with a job in this field, but after marrying Doris Emrick in 1927, his desires changed (Hurley 11). As a painter, her artist lifestyle and outlook influenced Lee. They moved around between the east and west coasts and even lived in Europe for a time. Eventually, Lee found his calling with photography and was hired by Roy Stryker to work for F.S.A. In his chapter covering Lee’s photographs during this time, F. Jack Hurley says that “Lee’s F.S.A. photographs undoubtedly helped define rural and small-town problems during the thirties but today

they are a source of visual truth about who we are and where we have come from. As such, they constitute a precious resource” (44).

After his work with the F.S.A was over, Lee continued photography jobs that covered various topics: Black Americans in Chicago, routes and airfields used by the Air Transport Command, industrial photography, coal mining communities, and even life in Italy (Hurley 9-36). Lee’s second wife, Jean Smith, was also an integral part of his work throughout. Lee and his wife settled in Austin, Texas, where Lee taught photography classes at the University of Texas at Austin for many years (31-32). In Lee’s biography, Hurley suggests that what set Lee apart from his contemporaries is that “Lee’s work is and has been from the beginning pre-eminently discursive. It is concerned with precise description in an almost literary sense” (14). Although Lee is only one of many photographers from this important documentary era, he undoubtedly influenced other documentary photographers such as Alan Pogue.

Pogue was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, and was raised with a socially conscientious father who died when Pogue was just 13 (Flukinger x). As a young man, Pogue served in Vietnam, first as a chaplain’s assistant and then later as a medic (Flukinger x). In 1969, he enrolled at The University of Texas at Austin and studied Philosophy. However, Pogue began taking photographs, which took him away from school. He was hired on by the *Texas Observer* in 1971 and still currently works for this publication. During this time, Pogue met Russell Lee, who was forced to retire from the university in 1973 but continued to be accessible to young photographers. The two remained friends until Lee’s death in 1986. In his “Foreword: The Way of the Camera,” Roy Flukinger explains that “by 1975 Pogue began committing his time and energies to

two projects—the plight of agricultural workers and the injustices of the U.S. penal system—subjects which continue to occupy him today” (xi). He has photographed Central America, Haiti, Iraq and Israel, among others. Pogue’s idea of activism seems to align with the previously mentioned documentary photographers: “While his photographs may be confrontational to our beliefs or our prosaic status quo, their tone remains (much like the man himself) one of quiet, thoughtful, and unrelenting insightfulness” (xiv).

In 1984, Pogue published a documentary portfolio titled *Agricultural Workers of the Rio Grande and Rio Bravo Valleys: A Portfolio*, in which he wrote an insightful introduction and included a short narrative by Rolando Hinojosa-Smith titled “Es el agua.” Many of the photos from this portfolio are included in the book analyzed here, *Witness for Justice: The Documentary Photographs of Alan Pogue*. This book includes many other photographs that Pogue has taken throughout his career as a documentary photographer. Pogue’s introduction to this portfolio about migrant farmworkers clearly outlines his intentions behind photographing migrant farmworkers. As he explains, “I have approached my documentary work on the farmworkers with an eye toward raising public awareness of the realities of the farmworkers’ situation. I hope that my photographs will help the farmworkers achieve economic self-determination as well as simple human dignity” (Preface). Considering this passage, one can see how Pogue answers the questions of his purpose and position. He clearly advocates better working and living conditions for farmworkers as well as increased awareness of their plight by others.

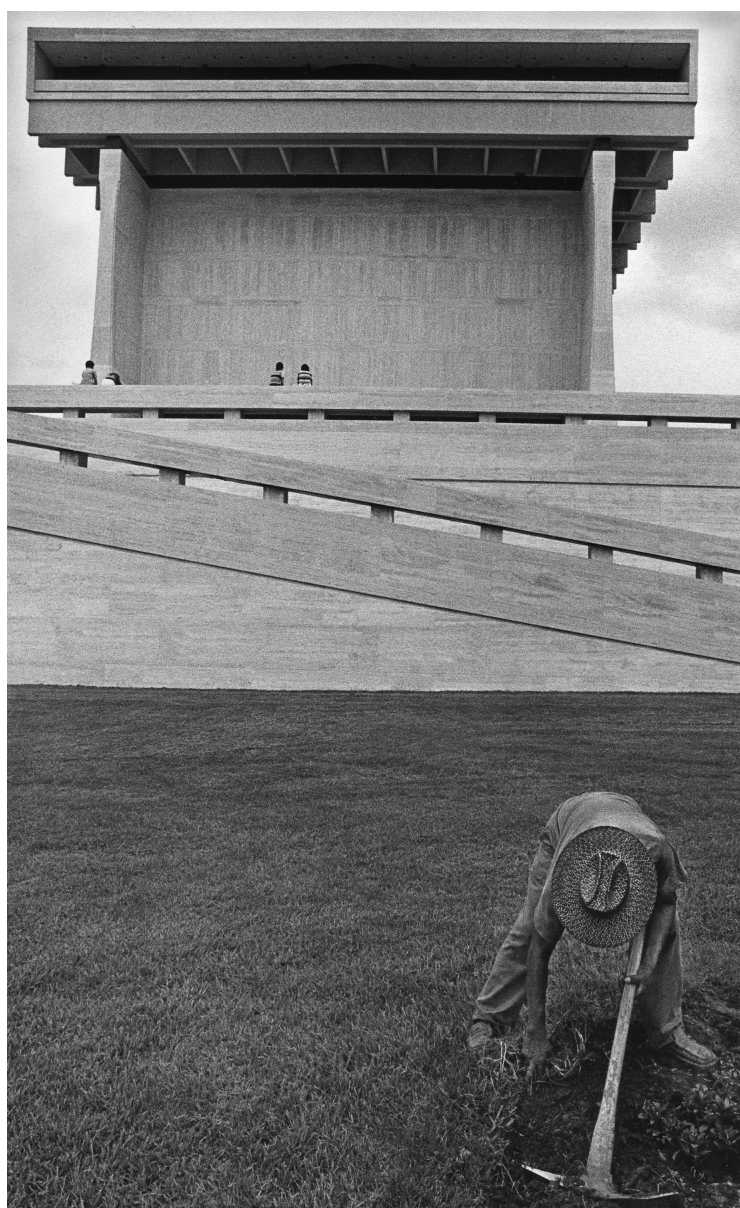
The first photograph in his book *Witness for Justice*, titled “LBJ Library and Gardener,” was taken in 1971 in Austin, Texas. Although this photo is not a part of the

collection taken in the Rio Grande Valley, it offers an important related insight. Although it was taken before the collection in the Valley was produced, it still shows where migrant farmworkers may end up after their lives as workers in the agricultural fields.

This photograph appears visually cut into two parts, the top lighter part and the bottom darker part, divided by the grass and marble. The large, white dominating LBJ Library is at the top and in the background. There are a few students sitting around the outside of the library building. However, the bottom of the photograph consists of grass, and in the bottom right corner, a man is bent over and is tending to part of the garden with his hands and a pick. The gardener's

face is not visible and is hidden by a textured sunhat. As the first photograph in this published collection, it sets up the common theme found throughout the book of the dominant group continuing their everyday lives as a member of the subordinated/minority group continues to struggle for equality.

The caption for this photograph reads, "The





gardener was a Mexican American man in his late sixties, a retired farm worker who had moved from the Rio Grande Valley to Austin where he had family. He asked me, ‘Do you know where the marble came from for the library? It came from Italy. We have plenty of marble in Texas. All that money would pay for a lot of health care’” (Pogue 1). Without the caption, viewers cannot get the same effect as with the caption that is included with this photograph. The viewer can read and can then derive meaning from the photograph alone, but the viewer would nevertheless be left with unanswered narrative questions. However, with the accompanying text, the viewer is better able to understand the narrative within which this photo is situated. We know where the man is from, what he is doing, and what the social implications of his situation are.

Using the text in the accompanying caption in combination with the photograph is essential when applying Moya’s theory. Moya’s fifth claim says, “our ability to understand fundamental aspects of our world will depend on our ability to acknowledge and understand the social, political, economic, and epistemic consequences of our own social location” (53). One could argue that this man’s comment about the marble signifies his awareness of his social location because he understands the world around him, arguably better than those who decided to import marble from Italy. The man can see what a foolish action it was to use marble from Italy when we have plenty of marble in Texas. He acknowledges why this was a foolish action: because it is another example of the government spending unnecessary money on lavish items when there are important needs elsewhere. In this brief comment, this man acknowledges his own insignificance to people such as those who decided to import marble from Italy. As someone who has probably never had health insurance, or at least on a constant basis, the man can see the

wastefulness of this action. His insignificance in the world around him is reinforced by the dominating library in the background and with the man's face not even shown.

The second photograph I address here is "The Short-Handled Hoe," taken in 1979 in Hidalgo, Texas. This is the first photograph in this book from the collection about migrant farmworkers taken in the Valley. It is a great first photograph because it exemplifies the work and life of a migrant farmworker. At first, this photograph seems to be an image of migrant farmworkers, similar to other photographs which have documented the same thing. There are many farmworkers spread out and working in the field. The farmworkers nearest to the camera appear to be hoeing the soil. The closest

worker is a female with her hair up in a baseball cap. She is dressed in pants and a flannel shirt, similar to the men. She and the worker next to her appear



to be using hoes with short handles.

At first glance, the viewer may not think about the farmworkers doing fieldwork. The viewer may even feel sympathy for the farmworkers doing manual labor; however, upon reading the accompanying text, the viewer's opinion about the photograph might change. The caption here reads,

There is no functional reason to use a short-handled hoe, but some growers claimed that at least they could see that laborers were working because they were bent over. The Texas legislature passed a law against the short-handled hoe's use, but then had to amend the law to read "short-handled implement" because some growers, in response to the first law, had given butcher knives to their workers to till the soil. (37)

Arguably, most viewer's opinions about farmworkers will change after reading this caption. Pogue perfectly captures in his photograph what is conveyed by his text—the injustice of these farmworkers' situations. This photograph is not typical of farmworkers in their everyday work. It is a photograph that portrays why their work can be and often is inhumane. The photograph shows how a worker has to bend over with a short handled-hoe, and while useful to labor managers, this position is undoubtedly extraordinarily uncomfortable and unnecessary for farmworkers to fulfill their jobs. The simple fact that legislation had to be passed and amended to be specific enough to stop labor managers from abusing their farmworkers is simply disgusting. It speaks to the inability of migrant farmworkers to change their own living and working conditions.

Considering this photograph and its accompanying text, one will find that it is beneficial to apply Moya's sixth theoretical claim, which says, "oppositional struggle is fundamental to our ability to understand the world more accurately" (44). Unfortunately, because there are people in this world who will take advantage of anything and everything they possibly can without any regard for the consequences, it takes photographs like Pogue's for people to see the inhumanity and insolence in making a farmworker use a short-handled hoe for the reason listed in Pogue's book. It also took

legislation to outlaw this practice of requiring migrant farmworkers to use short-handled hoes and then short-handled “implements.” Some labor managers are not innately humane enough to see the unjustifiable reasoning behind this practice. Moreover, it is essential for the viewer to see that the struggle to enact this legislation is necessary in order to understand the world in which we live. This photograph and its accompanying text, when analyzed through Moya’s sixth claim, prove that we oftentimes need to understand that the struggle to enact laws to protect our own people is necessary because we cannot rely on other people’s consciences, such as those of labor managers, to make the “right” decisions.



The next Pogue photograph which I address here is titled “One Day Old,” taken in 1988 in Kokomo, Indiana. This photograph is perhaps one of the more serene photos in Pogue’s impressive collection of documentary photographs about farmworkers. It pictures a mother dressed in white, sitting on a bed and holding her newborn baby. At first glance, it seems like a typical photo of a mother and child. However, upon further

examination, one can see that the house she is in is simply made of wood. The headboard of the bed has photos posted to it, and there is a basinet on the edge of the bed. The room is modest with hardly anything in view.

Once again, the caption of this photo offers otherwise unknown information. It says, “A mother with her one-day-old baby. Photographs of her family are stapled to the headboard of the bed. The window is covered with plastic to keep out the cold wind. She and her family were from Raymondville, Texas” (43). The viewer can easily see the plastic covering the window, something possibly not noticed before and which is indicative of this young woman’s socioeconomic status. While one could argue that at least this woman has a bed with linens and a basinet to provide for her baby, one could also argue that unlike most mothers in 1988, this woman does not have a steady home where she can take her newborn baby. The caption explains that her family is originally from Raymondville, Texas, which implies that they are very far from home. There is one narrative question that seems to go unaddressed: “Is this woman’s mother or mother-in-law present to help her with the newborn?” In the U.S., it is customary for a woman’s mother or mother-in-law to help with the newborn for the first couple of weeks; however, migrant farmworkers may not be able to afford such a luxury. Although it is possible, the viewer can still see the instability of raising a child far from home and in a house with plastic covering the window.

The situation in this photograph brings us next to applying Moya’s second theoretical claim which says, “an individual’s experiences will influence, but not entirely determine, the formation of her cultural identity” (39). It is important for a viewer to see this photograph and know that the baby in this photograph can grow up to be the gardener

at the LBJ Library or possibly something else. Simply because this child was born under these circumstances does not mean that the child has to continue to live his or her life under such circumstances. A child born away from home while his or her parents are working as migrant farmworkers can choose a different life after seeing the instability of his or her own growing up. Or that child can grow up and provide a home to take his or her own children to after they are born.

Documentary photographers since the F.S.A. project have documented American history as seen through different lenses. In reference to Lange's well-known photo "migrant mother," Robert Coles says in his essay, "The Tradition: Fact and Fiction," that Lange would go out and shoot pictures and then "looking for one picture that would make the particular universal, that would bring us within a person's world rather than keep us out (as pitying onlookers), she decided upon a photograph that allows us to move from well-meant compassion to a sense of respect, even awe" (188). It is this effect that often makes documentary photography a medium important to evaluate alongside migrant farmworker literature. Both mediums have a potential for initiating change. Coles continues his evaluation in reference to Lange, but what he says can be applied to the importance of Lee's and Pogue's photography as well. Coles states that Lange's work is not just a look at the past but also "a summons to what might be done in the years ahead, what very much needs to be done: a humane literate kind of social inquiry" (195). Again, in alignment with the migrant literature previously addressed, documentary photography can initiate a social inquiry. The ability of documentary photography to evoke and provoke such questioning and possibly even action makes this type of

photography, in addition to the literature discussed, critical in raising the consciousness of views and readers.

Not only is photography a useful tool for questioning our norms, but as a reflection of certain realities, it also allows us to evaluate our society and its actions. For example, in his chapter “Realism, Photography and Visual Culture,” Jan-Erik Lundström says that “photography comprises a set of modern epistemological conditions—and paradoxes—that reflect larger patterns of how our culture knows and evaluates itself” (58). Lundström further argues that because photography is an accepted medium of art, historians need “to recognise and explore photographic images as complex and, still, often underestimated agents of how we understand ourselves and the world around us” (58). This is an argument similar to the one Moya makes when she says why it is important for us to understand our own identities and our social location in our world.

## CHAPTER V

### IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING THE MIGRANT FARMWORKER NARRATIVE

This chapter presents a pedagogical approach for teaching lessons from Chicano Literature, specifically with the genre of the migrant farmworking narrative and images about that narrative. I discuss the implications resulting when theorizing and then having first-year college composition students engage in implementing, in practical terms, analyses of narratives reflected in literature and photographs of Mexican American migrant farmworkers. With their specific pedagogical interests in mind, I also address how the importance of Mexican American students learning about their culture and how an understanding of their social location can promote a validation of their ideas about their identity. However, my pedagogical approach is not limited to only Mexican Americans and their interests, as this approach should also work with mainstream students and their interests. The positive results arising from such a pedagogical approach can thus be applied on a larger scale to better our society as a whole.

Using these types of literary and photographic texts in first-year college composition classes can help ensure that Mexican American students are receiving the kind of education that more realistically reflects many of these students' heritage, as found in and through the migrant farmworking narrative, textually and visually. These kinds of texts can provide Mexican American students what their own society and culture may not be providing. These texts, for instance, can explain to these kinds of students the history of the ethnic group to which they belong and the significance of that ethnic



group's traditional place and perception in a postmodern American society. Students from the mainstream who are not ethnically or culturally Mexican can also learn valuable analytical skills by studying and writing about this kind of migrant farmworker narrative and photographic texts.

Although specifically addressing school-aged children from England, Terry Dennett and Jo Spence's concerns about minority students can be applied to the American educational system as well. Referring to minority children in England, Dennett and Spence say in their chapter "Photography, Ideology and Education" that "the right to have their own culture, history, language and social customs respected and revealed, the right to be validated, is in no way the concern of a state agency like the educational establishment" (19). As a product of the Texas public education system, I can testify to the truth of this statement here in Texas within Texas public schools. In an effort to ensure that students pass standardized tests and meet minimum educational requirements, the idea of actually educating them in a manner, and with relevant materials, that will cultivate aspects of their ethnic identity is often not deemed important. Yet ensuring these students' academic success and possibly their success in life could not be more important today.

Dennett and Spence, in a similar context, continue their analysis of traditional schools by saying that "children's text books and reading materials are not concerned with the work and social experience of the mass of the people, but only with the experience and customs of those who have enough leisure, time, power, and wealth to prescribe what is culturally acceptable" (19). This idea presents the danger of continuing on with the status quo of our current educational system. The dominant group controls

the content of what students are taught in schools, which typically promotes the ideology of the dominant culture. Arguably, the same thing occurs at the college level, and this can leave minority college students feeling as though their cultural ethnic identity's ideology is wrong or unacceptable.

Unfortunately, this lack of a proper educational context is not only a problem at the primary education level. As I have previously noted, college students are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills by using personal experiences and opinions when addressing controversial topics, first-year college composition courses can cause students to flourish with their own ideas or fail because of a lack of validity in what they study and write about in their assigned essay. As a hierarchical institution too often run by the dominant group, universities can be a key agent in not validating and possibly even negating minority students' ideas and identities. And while some texts by Chicanos/as in recent years have been making their way into first-year college composition textbooks, not all are ideologically representative of this group. It is probable, for instance, that writers such as Richard Rodriguez can make their way into these kinds of textbooks because their published work often supports the ideas of the dominant group.

However, including such writers in these college textbooks often creates the appearance of including multicultural texts. In her book, *The Chronicles of Panchita Villa and Other Guerrillas: Essays on Chicana/Latina Literature and Criticism*, Tey Rebolledo addresses this illusion by saying, "we are hired to teach the curriculum of tomorrow in traditional and conservative departments, so the canon wars start.... And finally there is the feeling that the institutions are only creating the illusion of change, but not real change itself" (30). Her point is valid and represents a problem that composition

professors, instructors, and graduate teaching assistants face when teaching multicultural literature in composition classes. Many Mexican American college students also face this illusory curriculum and have trouble relating to the mainstream literature and essays they are assigned to read and analyze in first-year college composition classes.

However, texts such as the ones I am proposing can fill the gaps Latino students experience in understanding how to analyze their ethnic history and social location in composition classes. For example, in his article “Latino Students and Anglo-mainstream Instructors: A Study of Classroom Communication,” Raul Ybarra explains his personal experiences with Latino, first-year composition students. For instance, one student, Connie, was referred to him for help by another professor who did not know how to address the student. Connie was not completing her assignments. Ybarra discusses an essay prompt about cultural expectations with Connie. He writes, “I realized that Connie was not having problems with the topic or with writing, but rather Connie was having trouble with her own cultural identity, that she did not see herself as having/or belonging to any particular culture” (167).

Ybarra later states that he realized that he needed to shift the focus of their conversation, “not so much to have her define herself culturally or ethnically, but to let her know that it was all right to be confused about her cultural identity” (167). This is an example of how students’ lack of knowledge about their ethnic identity can hinder their ability to perform in their first-year composition courses. The student was capable of writing; however, her lack of knowledge about her identity formation and a lack of reinforcement of her cultural upbringing invalidated her response to the prompt. As the daughter of an Argentinean father and Ecuadorian mother who had not returned to their

home countries in many years, Connie did not feel a connection to either culture, yet the essay prompt told her that she should (165). This is also an example of a situation where reading texts that reflect the student's cultural identity could cultivate an awareness of his or her own cultural identity and identity construction.

Being educated with the kinds of literary and photographic materials about our past and which I am proposing in this thesis will also help encourage students' future productivity as successful Americans and eventually as equal members with the dominant group in many regions of the U.S. In her chapter "What's Identity Got to Do with It? Mobilizing Identities in the Multicultural Classroom," Paula Moya discusses what Claude Steele has labeled the "Stereotype Threat" (99). Moya explains the occurrence of ethnic stereotypes as well as how to prevent them:

Since stereotype threat is activated when students fear they will be evaluated in terms of a prevailing negative stereotype about a group with which they are associated, students need to feel that their teachers, and peers, are capable of seeing them as complex individuals with the capacity to grow and change rather than as embodiments of a reductive stereotype. (109)

If a student's academic environment is not conducive to validating the student's ethnic and cultural identity and ideas about this kind of identity construction, and instead reinforces a student's own negative image of him-or herself, the student may be less likely to succeed in a composition class. Moya also explains the effects a "stereotype threat" can have on a minority student's academic performance: "Latina/o and African American students, who may have achieved well in elementary school, begin to

disidentify with education as adolescents and either under-perform or drop out altogether. They are responding to myriad messages about who they are and what they are capable of that they get from larger society” (100). While a “stereotype threat” can have a negative impact on a student’s academic success, reading and analyzing literature and photographic images that reflect the students’ ethnic identity and that validates their ideas of who they are as minorities can serve to facilitate an awareness of *la facultad*.

If Latino students have learned about the past struggles of the ethnic group to which they belong, and, through *la facultad*, can learn to understand their disadvantaged position in society as a minority and learn how to counter this position, ideally they can work to ensure that they are successful members of society. For example, Moya explains that certain social categories have different meanings or associations, and that “These meanings and associations—many of which linger long after the economic or social arrangements that gave rise to them have been dismantled or even outlawed—are often invoked and mobilized by those in positions of relative power to justify day-to-day processes of social and economic inclusion and exclusion” (97). Through a basic self-awareness made possible with *la facultad*, a student may be able to recognize the truth and injustice which Moya’s comment is referring to. The student should then be able to fight against an unjust situation that is rooted in a past but which he or she now understands.

In another context, Helena María Viramontes advocates this social understanding as well. In her short story “Neighbors,” Viramontes embodies through her character Aura the lack of knowledge about history that creates a complacent attitude among the youth.

In her chapter “Media Reportage as ‘History-in-the-Making’: Two Short Stories by Helena María Viramontes,” Leticia Garza-Falcón states,

The struggle is what is important to the seventy-three-year-old Aura, but the young people who surround her know nothing of what she and her generation lived. All they know or will ever know is a sense of defeat that has no history. Because they know nothing of the struggles, they have no sense of the origins of their defeat, or how they have gotten to the place their present world assigns them. The past for them is unaccounted for.  
(211)

Through the very same literature which I advocate that Mexican American college students should study and analyze, Viramontes makes an argument explaining why it can serve as an important tool which Mexican American college students can use to aid them in understanding their identity construction. This tool can also help them in gaining an awareness of *la facultad* and ultimately in attaining success in their academic careers.

I would also argue that the reason the migrant farmworker narrative and photographic images illustrating this kind of narrative can facilitate these actions, more specifically the ones analyzed here, is because they are complex in the way they are presented. In her analysis of Viramontes’ short stories, Garza-Falcón aims to prove the benefits associated with analyzing and writing about such complexities. As she says, “I hope to show how a gradual unfolding of the variability and multiplicity of an event presented in a fictional narrative (but not allowable in history) can bring reality home, full and fresh, to the reader, and thus challenge the rhetoric of dominance” (200).

Moreover, in her book, *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles*, Moya also addresses how Viramontes' other texts can provide the same effect. In her last chapter, "Reading as a Realist: Expanded Literacy in Helena María Viramontes's *Under the Feet of Jesus*," Moya explains why this novel is an ideal text for the type of pedagogical application provided in this thesis. Moya says that "through the use of variable character-bound focalization, Viramontes demonstrates the partiality of individual perspective. In the process, she reveals how social location and social ideologies influence characters' identities and, by extension, their understandings of the world" (185). Again, the literature which students can apply Moya's identity theory to in order to facilitate their own ethnic identity formation embodies these ideas implicitly from within.

Moya continues to reinforce this analytical point by saying, "she [Viramontes] employs a narrative structure . . . that is designed to reproduce in her ideal reader a transformation of consciousness similar to the one Estrella undergoes" (185). As an example to help explain the usefulness of Viramontes' focalization, which helps readers identify with fictional characters, Moya compares the focalization of *Under the Feet of Jesus* to William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. This comparison emphasizes that while both novels have multiple focalizers, Dilsey, a minority, is the only character Faulkner does not use as a focalizer, even though she is arguably the most stable character in this novel. Viramontes' novel, on the other hand, according to Moya, "is focalized entirely from the perspective of Mexican-origin migrant farmworkers" (190). Because Viramontes' novel is solely focalized from this perspective, Mexican American college readers may find it easier to achieve the same consciousness as the characters do.

In addressing the focalization of Viramontes' novel, Moya clarifies why this novel is a useful tool which Mexican American students can use to facilitate their identity awareness. In understanding this reasoning, one can also see why the other texts analyzed in this thesis can elicit a similar conscious-raising of its Mexican American first-year college composition students.

Since many Mexican American students in the United States clearly are of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds, many Mexican Americans are White and Mexican or Mexican and Puerto Rican, and some do not speak Spanish or have not been exposed to certain aspects of their own Mexican American culture and Latino heritage. Because the identities of Mexican Americans are also complex, the complexity of these texts makes them key agents in the process of facilitating the identity development of Mexican American college students. The fluidity of Moya's identity theory when applied to texts with complicated focalization presents an opportunity for Mexican American students to analyze literary and photographic texts without feeling constrained to place their ideas into concrete categories, as many minorities feel forced to do with their ethnic identities.

Certain categories, however, remain important as analytical and rhetorical tools. In her book *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States*, Claudia Sadowski-Smith explains how Gloria Anzaldua's work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* was and continues to be a cornerstone for Chicano/a Studies. Her work became so important because it uses another complicated symbol, the border: "Theorizing questions of [the] mixed identity of Chicanas like herself, Anzaldua's book extends the metaphorical use of the border as a designation of Chicana/o empowerment to notions of hybrid identity formation" (29). Also supporting



the usefulness of borderlands writing, Sadowski-Smith says that “rather than migration, frontera writing stresses the *result* of a shifted border and of (im)migration, the formation of hybrid cultures and identities that complicate dominant U.S. notions of citizenship” (27). This “result” from frontera writing explains that texts that address the borderlands and the repercussions of a shifted border can help situate students to better understanding their own complicated hybrid location that is typically situated around notions of race and culture.

By understanding one’s own social location and the functionality of *la facultad*, Chicanos/as can not only understand how to ensure their own just treatment, but they can also fight against the injustices often conducted against migrant farmworkers in a racialized manner by the dominant group. As a people ostracized by the general public, migrant farmworkers, especially undocumented ones, are even mistreated by Mexican Americans who adopt the xenophobic ideas of the dominant group. However, after studying and analyzing the texts highlighted here in this thesis, Chicano/a students can understand the struggle of migrant farmworkers and more importantly, can understand how the migrant farmworkers’ social locations can expose them to such mistreatment.

In an interview, Viramontes explains how the complications of the border and of those who cross it are not left at the border: “‘When you’re treated a certain way, no matter where you go, no matter who you are, you’re going to believe that this is the way it has to be. You carry the border with you. You don’t have to be near the borderlands to understand that transgression, that violence, in terms of the mind, the heart, and the imagination’” (“You Carry the Border with You” 85). If a college composition student who is not from the border, such as myself, is able to understand these complexities

relating to identity construction through studying and analyzing the migrant farmworker narrative and photographic images about this narrative, much can be accomplished. Once these students understand how these complexities can negatively affect the perception of the student by the dominant group, he or she may feel more empathy and obligation to fight for the injustices placed on migrant farmworkers.

When Mexican American students are able to come to an understanding of their own ethnic identity as well as an awareness of their social location, they will have become Chicanos/as who will have the opportunity to promote a democratic society. Moya claims that “only by treating identities as epistemic resources and mobilizing them . . . can we draw out their knowledge-generating potential and allow them to contribute positively to the production and transmission of knowledge” (“What’s Identity Got to Do with It?” 96). This argument first assesses the possibilities of what an understanding of identities can do when they are seen as having epistemic value. Established thus, we can see how identities have a larger effect in our lives. Moya applies this importance to situations one might consider in real life: “The link between knowledge and identity provides a compelling rationale for why a diverse work force, professoriate, or research team maximizes objectivity and innovation in knowledge production. People with different identities are likely (although not certain) to ask different questions, take various approaches, and hold distinctive assumptions” (102). In any entity that promotes the development of knowledge, various identities as contributors are necessary. If Mexican American students are not encouraged to formulate their own ethnic identity, they may be forced to align with the dominant group, which will often counter the knowledge-generating abilities of those holding an ethnic identity.

Moya warns against this possibility by saying that

Because the identity contingencies we are likely to face have potentially debilitating effects on our life chances, we ignore the dynamics of identity at our peril. To the extent that we are interested in transforming our society into one that is more socially and economically just, we need to know how identities work in order to effectively work with them. (“What’s Identity Got to Do with It?” 99)

Ultimately, without understanding our own place in society, we are not fully able to comprehend how society functions in the way it does and why. Dennet and Spence reiterate this fact and support identity awareness as a means of creating a better society:

We think that identity projects are the correct starting point for the teaching of history and many other subjects. Starting from the personal level it is then possible to move on to family, peer group, local, regional, national, then international structures and relationships. It is impossible to really understand anybody else until you begin to understand who you are. It is impossible to be usefully involved in forms of social organisation and social responsibility until the process of self validation is under way. (34)

The idea of having an identity awareness through literature and photographs for Chicano/a students functions as a means to ensuring that a better democratic society can also be applied to and be thus a part of the dominant group.

However, in their article, “Perspective-Taking as Transformative Practice in Teaching Multicultural Literature to White Students,” Amanda Haertling Thein, Richard Beach, and Daryl Parks warn that “when we encourage white students to relate to or

empathize with unfamiliar characters and situations, we risk simplifying and universalizing complex experiences of discrimination and oppression” (54). This point is important to consider, not only for White students, but also for other students who do not feel they can relate to the migrant farmworker narrative. In their article, these authors explain the empirical results after conducting an experiment in teaching multicultural literature to high school students. The authors say they were disappointed in the white students’ lack of change, but they also say,

Recognizing that significant changes in beliefs and attitudes are rare and happen slowly, over the course of many years, we’ve come to understand that a different and no less powerful kind of change can be imagined when students read, discuss, and write about multicultural literature—a change that we define as an increased willingness to “try on” different perspectives. (55)

So while these students do not overtly change their opinions through obvious actions, they are nevertheless taking small measures to at least acknowledge and evaluate other perspectives.

Thein, Beach, and Parks continue by saying that they were not expecting a change in ideology, but “rather, we suggest that by encountering tensions and trying on new perspectives, students experience changes that are often subtle, usually transitory, and frequently contradictory [and] that increase their understandings of how their beliefs and values are formed and why other people think differently” (55). This response should be expected of both minority and dominant group students. The point in presenting a different perspective, such as that of the migrant farmworker, is for students to come to

new knowledge that can possibly make them question what they believe to be true and important. The argument here is not that studying literature and photographs *will* ensure a different or more authentic identity formation, but only that they *can*. Moya addresses the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that students' beliefs are challenged through more open yet rigorous education:

Insofar as preparing students to be good citizens of a functioning democracy is an important goal of education, it must provide students with opportunities to exercise their critical capacities by reflecting on the convictions that guide their judgments about the best way to structure our common society. Students who are not encouraged to think about *why* they believe what they do will have difficulty understanding why other people believe differently. ("What's Identity Got to Do with It?" 104)

By considering what they have learned from analyzing literary works and photographic images of the migrant farmworker narrative, Chicanas/os should take the necessary measures to further their own, as well as other Chicanos'/as', success in American society. Educating younger generations of Latinos about their past in order to facilitate an understanding of their ethnic identity is simply one way to begin. Cultivating our academic abilities through the validation of ideas and positive expectations can produce more educated and successful Chicanos/as. An understanding of where one is situated in society allows for a better understanding of society as a whole, and in turn, promotes a more just and democratic society. Tey Rebolledo more poetically conveys our responsibility by saying, "what we can learn from all these books is that we have a

tradition and we have a history; we each need to take responsibility to remember them and to pass them on, and we can do so with creativity and with pleasure” (157).

The possibility presented then of working to live in a more democratic society is to ensured by passing on our traditions and history to younger generations through students studying texts like these used in first-year composition classes. When teaching the migrant farmworker narrative in a composition class, it is first important for students to consider what the characteristics are of an ideal migrant farmworker narrative. If an ideal migrant farmworker narrative did exist, there are certain qualities that it would contain. These include gender issues that are specifically attributed to Mexican culture and which provide negative repercussions in the lives of migrant farmworkers and/or their children after they are no longer migrant farmworkers. A society that ignores, reinforces, or combats the struggles of migrant farmworkers would also be a characteristic that is often included in this type of narrative. Lastly, an ideal migrant farmworker narrative should elicit an empathetic response from its readers.

Once these characteristics are established, as some of the ideal qualities of a migrant farmworker narrative, students will have parameters to work with and ideas to identify in the texts they study and analyze in their compositions. So after constructing the idea of a model migrant farmworker narrative, students will also have a text with which they can compare other similar or divergent texts. So as students read and analyze a certain text, such as the ones previously discussed in this thesis, they can think about whether or not these texts contain the ideal characteristics established as part of an ideal migrant farmworker narrative. Students will then be able to assess if this narrative is as

successful as an ideal type, based on how it compares to an ideal migrant farmworker narrative.

The establishment of these ideal characteristics also functions as an assessment tool for the first-year composition teacher. In order to assess students' reading comprehension and their analysis of assigned texts, instructors can assign a writing prompt that asks the student to make such a comparison between the assigned texts and an ideal migrant farmworking narrative. For example, Rolando Hinojosa's short story, "Es el agua," and Alan Pogue's photo "Nasario Aispuro and Son," can both function as ideal models of the migrant farmworker narrative. If this text and image are analyzed by students in a composition class to establish the characteristics that make them ideal, students can then read and analyze the assigned texts and should then be able to respond to a writing prompt requiring the analysis of multiple yet related texts.

An example of such a prompt would be, "Both Hinojosa's short story and Pogue's photograph have many of the characteristics that make them close to ideal migrant farmworker narratives. They both include gender issues, present a life that results from migrant farmworking as well as the attitude of the surrounding society, and they can elicit an empathetic response from their readers. Considering these characteristics, analyze one of the texts we have read in class and one of the photos we have looked at and show how each may or may not align with these characteristics. In doing so, establish whether or not and how the chosen text is an effective migrant farmworker narrative." This is just an example of a sample prompt that could allow for an assessment of students' critical thinking abilities.

Before assigning a prompt like the one above, it is important to analyze Hinojosa's short story and Pogue's photograph in class so students can see this process and do the same with the texts they choose. Hinojosa's short story is presented as a sort of monologue. The narrator, an old man, explains his life as a migrant farmworker in this short story. Arguably, Hinojosa includes all of the characteristics of an ideal migrant farmworker narrative. First, he includes specific gender roles in his text. The narrator mentions a few of the people in his life who fulfill these roles. For example, he says that because his wife and son have died, his son's widow now runs the house (Hinojosa 210). This perspective reinforces the notion that women are the caretakers when it comes to the household of Mexican American migrant farmworkers. The fact that one woman replaces another proves that this is a woman's job. The responsibility of taking care of the house is undoubtedly passed from woman to woman. The narrator also mentions that his grandson is a champion hay-stacker who sends his sister money because she attends college in Austin (210). The narrator's grandson is an example of a man taking care of a woman in his life. He does manual labor to ensure that she does not have to. Both of these instances show Mexican American cultural values.

This story also presents the result of migrant farmworkers' lives as such. The narrator spends a great amount of time relating all the places where he has gone to work in the agriculture fields and what he picked at each place. He then explains that they always return to the Valley at the end of each harvest season up north. He succinctly explains the reason for why they return: "es el agua" (Hinojosa 210). The narrator says migrant farmworkers from the Valley have a connection to the land and the river, and that is the reason why they always return. Hinojosa's portrayal of the migrant farmworkers'



relationship with the very land and nature that condemn their lives to hardships while providing them with the means to live shows important aspects of their living and working circumstances. They have a distinct appreciation for the land and the river, which in turn supports their desire to return to the Valley. While most people would want to get away from manual labor and an area of relatively low socioeconomic status, the fact that these workers do not can be seen as a testament of their migrant farmworker pride.

Another key point of this story is the surrounding society's attitude toward migrant farmworkers. The narrator says he went to France in 1918, presumably for World War I, and he says his cousins did not return. Their memorial veteran's plates are in Austin "in a park at the University where the young men play football" (Hinojosa 209). While this sentence may seem of no significance, in reality it represents the importance such people place on serving in defense of their country. These Mexican Americans went to war overseas to fight for the U.S. yet came back to live a life such as the narrator's. The Mexican Americans who returned to continue their lives as migrant farmworkers were treated the same as Mexican Americans who were casualties of war, as their pride for putting their lives on the line for their country has no limits. They have paid the ultimate price so their families can live as rightful citizens of this country.

Another characteristic that Hinojosa's short story includes is the ability to elicit an empathetic response from readers, regardless of whether they are Mexican Americans who are able to identify with the story's characters or White students who might not. One instance of something in this story that can rhetorically elicit such a response is a discussion of migrant farmworkers' living conditions in the Midwest. The narrator lists

the different places they might live: cars, tents, chicken coops. Then the narrator says, “But one endures, one survives, and one even survives and endures *racismo* and *prejuicio*—racism, prejudice—from everybody, even our own” (Hinojosa 211). This is a very powerful passage, as the narrator does not complain about how hard and how unfair this life is. He simply states that the work is hard, but it is clear that he has survived unfathomable situations. A reader, regardless of ethnic identification, should feel empathy for a person who does not complain about the injustices in his life but simply points to his own strength in surviving and overcoming these injustices.

After looking at Hinojosa’s text and the characteristics that might make it an ideal migrant farmworker narrative, students would do the same with Alan Pogue’s photograph “Nasario Aispuro and Son.” This photograph and Hinojosa’s short story are both included in Pogue’s portfolio of migrant farmworkers from the Valley, and they can therefore complement each other as texts in a classroom. This photograph was taken in 1998 in San Juan, Texas. A man is holding his son, and they are both authentically smiling. The viewer can tell that this man has been working because his shirt has paint stains on it. The wall in the background appears to be an unpainted wall of a building, and



his son seems to be sitting on a wooden stool or ladder. Most importantly, the two are embracing and happy. The caption for this photograph reads,

Nasario Aispuro and his son, Nasario Jr., listen to a mariachi band at a reception in honor of Andre Cuomo. Cuomo brought a check for \$800,000 from the Federal government to Proyecto Azteca, a housing and community movement founded in 1991 by members of the United Farm Workers. Proyecto Azteca helps very low-income families build homes on its property which are then transported to lots. Several families work cooperatively to build the houses with help from professional carpenters, electricians, and plumbers. (Pogue 53)

This photograph could be interpreted as first addressing a gender issue in Mexican culture. Because he is the man in the family, Nasario should be able to provide a home for his family. However, a common problem among migrant farmworkers is the inability to maintain a stable living situation. As the head of the family, Nasario is apparently not able to do this. While this inability for a man to fulfill his gender role expectations can cause problems within the family, Nasario is fortunate because his family has received help in obtaining a home. Moreover, the instability of living situations can unquestionably be a result of a family's migrant farmworker status. If they were employed in a job that paid better money and that did not require having to travel across the country for, Nasario's family might have a larger income and in turn a stable house. Although the photograph alone does not convey this situation, the photograph works in combination with the text to convey Nasario's situation.

The surrounding society is also presented in the text that accompanies the photo. Although the caption says that the government gave \$800,000 to Proyecto Azteca, the organization was founded by the United Farm Workers Union. Not to discredit the government, but this proves that it takes organizations such as the UFW to work as catalysts to correct the injustices committed against migrant farmworkers. The society surrounding Nasario is therefore an understanding one. Fortunately, he has encountered people who understand his struggles and who have attempted to improve his life.

The empathy this photograph elicits is immense. The thematic idea is the same one as Hinojosa's story—pride. Although Nasario and his family are not in a desirable socioeconomic situation, the simplicity of his happiness is incredible. While a viewer is reading the sad yet inspiring caption stating that these workers need help just to have a home, the reader looks back at the caption to see a man and his son happy just to listen to a mariachi band. This can provoke in the reader a sense of empathy for a man, who despite his struggles, is able to enjoy the most important matters in his life.

Once establishing the characteristics of an ideal migrant farmworker narrative, a composition instructor can analyze Hinojosa's short story and Pogue's photograph as a model for students. This model should prepare them to answer a prompt like the one previously suggested. The results of such an assignment should produce certain results. Because the student has a model to follow, the assignment will demonstrate how closely students should read and understand the text and will serve to have students demonstrate their critical thinking skills. In the process of writing such an assignment, students should hopefully also demonstrate a humanistic understanding of migrant farmworkers' situations. Part of a college education is to produce responsible, productive citizens who

will work for a better democracy. An inability to empathize with migrant farmworkers' lives, regardless of whether students identify ethnically with them or not, proves a failure in students' overall critical thinking, which is an important goal when obtaining a university degree.

Students will on one level be able to identify the characteristics of an ideal migrant farmworker narrative for the sake of assessment. On another level, Mexican American students will be able to connect these characteristics of each narrative to Moya's postpositivist theoretical claims in order to ultimately understand and employ *la facultad* to be successful despite their minority status.

Overall, this thesis advances the idea that Mexican American students will greatly benefit from studying Chicano/a literature in first-year college composition classes. As a hierarchical entity, the public education system in the United States arguably denies such students the opportunity to learn such materials, and in doing so, does not foster a realistic understanding of their minority ideas or ethnic identity. However, in analyzing Chicano/a literature through Paula Moya's postpositivist realist identity theory, Mexican American students can identify with the text in a way that allows them to recognize Moya's theoretical claims within the text and eventually in their own lives. This recognition can also be a catalyst for *la facultad* in students' lives. A first-year college composition class is an ideal setting to apply Moya's claims to literature because it should encourage critical thinking and make students question their beliefs at a crucial point in their lives. It is the responsibility of educators to ensure that students receive an education that promotes the students' future success as members of a democratic society,

and I believe that teaching Chicano/a literature, specifically the migrant farmworker narrative, to Mexican Americans is one starting point to ensure their academic success.

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## **VITA**

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