

WALKING DOWN THE BORDERLINE: HYBRIDITY AND THE MODULATION OF THE SELF IN THREE CANONICAL CHICANO NOVELS¹

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Abstract: This paper presents an analysis of three Chicano novels considered canonical, in which the concept of “hybridity” is discussed in relation with the individual: Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me Última*, Tomás Rivera’s *...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra*, and Rolando Hinojosa’s *Los Amigos de Becky*. The paper proposes an additional application of “hybridity”, key concept of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies, in the cultural context of the Chicano identity. The final aim is to prove, by means of the texts, the interaction between the individual and his/her context via their “hybridity” as a resulting phenomenon of a cultural multiplicity.

Keywords: Chicano, novel, hybridity, individual, cultural context.

Resumen: Este trabajo presenta un análisis de tres novelas de autores chicanos considerados canónicos, en el que se discute el concepto de ‘hibridación’ y su interacción con el individuo: *Bless Me Última*, de Rudolfo Anaya, *...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra*, de Tomás Rivera y *Los Amigos de Becky*, de Rolando Hinojosa. Se propone una aplicación adicional de “hibridación”, concepto clave de los Estudios Culturales y Postcoloniales, en el contexto cultural de la identidad chicana. El objetivo es demostrar la interacción entre el individuo y su contexto a través de la “hibridación” como fenómeno de multiplicidad cultural.

Palabras clave: Chicano, novela, hibridación, individuo, contexto cultural.

1. AT THE CULTURAL JUNCTION

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,
able to slip from “How’s life?”
to “Me’stan volviendo loca”,
able to sit in a panelled office
drafting memos in smooth English,
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated
[...]

Pat Mora, “Legal Alien” (*Chants* 1984)

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Generally speaking, all cultural movements that rise against the pressure of other menacing, larger cultural powers have a specific programme to respond to questions of identity and collective consciousness among others. Existence and its acknowledgement from the inside and the outside are key starting points to validate any fight in which two collectives collide. Clearly, and applied to all kinds of confrontation, without such recognition there is no possible inner cohesion to sustain it and stand up as one collective against another.

The Chicano movement can be said to participate under the former premises in its particular fight to assert the Chicano individual and communal identities. Two characteristics of the movement justify the necessary self-assertion mentioned above. On the one hand, its comparative recentness as a cultural manifestation (beginning in the 1960s³) may weaken its presence against other traditional, well-established cultures. On the other, it is conformed of two cultural root-traditions to give birth to a “hybrid” third one, which will be discussed below.

Thus, such assertion of individuality and collectivism is possibly best established in the arts, which are aimed to range between desired, represented and loathed realities. Literature, and especially the novel (as we will see, in connection with its very genre-requisites) are excellent vehicles to convey and document such values.

Having established a cultural frame, we can narrow down the aim of the present paper. My intention is to explore the literary manifestations of the Chicano hybrid identity that have helped to reinforce a cultural presence permanently at stake. The individual as the carrier of such standards in Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me Última*, Tomás Rivera’s *...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra* and Rolando Hinojosa’s *Los Amigos de Becky* will be the main focus of the analysis.

2. THE CHICANO HYBRID SELF AND ITS NOVELISTIC IDENTITIES

Sincere and alert Mexican Americans, *especially the young*, aspire for a dual culture, an amalgamation. [...] They *want* to retain and enjoy their Mexican ways and values, and at the same time acquire and enjoy the Anglo American culture. [emphasis added] (Ludwig and Santibáñez 1970: 252)

This quotation from the Penguin anthology of Chicano culture, *The Chicanos. Mexican-American Voices* may well be a starting point for our analysis in the representation of the Chicano identity. We can see several important aspects in the paragraph that respond to our survey. As McWilliams and Meier account in the later chapters of their *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (1990), the movement was clearly consolidated after the 1960s working-class proto-Chicano movement, to become a more global, cultural response one decade later. By then, it already featured a component of self-consciousness and intentionality that is the first premise to sustain a communal expression of belonging. Further, its intention was that of both self inclusion and exclusion.

³ See Moore and Cuéllar (1976) for a more comprehensive history of the origins of the Chicano identity dating back to the late nineteenth century. For a more specific account of the working-class conscience in the makings of the Chicano identity and the socio-economic clash with the Anglo population see Gómez-Quiñones and Arroyo (1978).

Thus, although never in a uniform fashion and depending on personal attitudes and social pressures, the Chicano is by definition an identity that shuttles between the Mexican and the Anglo-American traditions, no longer belonging to either of them. Moreover, it is precisely due to the connection to both cultures that the Chicano reality can only be partly studied from a postcolonial perspective, one of whose sub-fields focuses typically on relations such as master-slave or coloniser-colonised. Nevertheless, a relationship between Chicanos and Anglos (and to a lesser extent Mexicans) can be often paralleled to that of the postcolonial reality in terms of cultural bondage, power relations and other resulting social questions, as seen in *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century*, especially in Part II, “Dismantling Colonial / Patriarchal Legacies” (Aldama and Quinonez 2002).

It is at this point that we must introduce a very important concept borrowed from the Cultural Studies discipline that appears as a consequence of such will “to retain and enjoy their Mexican ways and values, and at the same time acquire and enjoy the Anglo American culture” (2002: 252.) The identity configuration in question is based, as so many others in the postcolonial context, on a process involving “hybridity” or the “in-between” condition formulated by Hommi K. Bhabha (1994). A concept that was itself borrowed from the field of Biology, the principle of hybridisation involves two parent cultures, and its resulting hybrid can be represented by the equation $A + B = C$. To extend the geographical metaphor, the well-referred “borderland” frequently related to the Chicanos seems an appropriate home for the hybrid.

Robert Young, in his *Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, 2002, exposes very clearly the entrance of “hybridity” into the Cultural Studies discipline and acknowledges its tradition by quoting authors such as Stuart Hall or the mentioned Bhabha, who are tied very closely to the postcolonial discipline. Once more, Bhabha’s definition of the hybrid included in Young’s work can easily apply to the Chicano reality: “Here the transformational value of change lies in the re-articulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) nor the *Other* [...] *but something else besides* which contests the terms and territories of both” (Young 2002: 23).

Clearly, and as we will see in the literary analysis of the Chicano hybrid self in the three novels, the “[c]ultural contact, intrusion, fusion and disjunction” mentioned by Young (Young 2002: 5) will be the underlying premise for any cultural product that intends, as those novels do, to reinforce a given identity. Thus, to prove the existence of a Chicano hybridisation –a step beyond general cultural observations present to the general, casual observer such as the use of *Spanglish* or Caló, or the insistent targeting on an Hispano population by US politicians– we might like to take a glance on the term “Chicano” itself.

As *Tijerina and Gutiérrez argue*, “Chicano” was initially a term derived from the Spanish word “Mexicano” and was used by Anglos to despise Mexicans by taking a word of their language, of “the other”, and turn it into a dialectical weapon –which in itself is clearly a double derision (*Tijerina and Gutiérrez 2000*). However, a new appropriation of the term set the ground for the Chicanos to establish their presence. Other groups like the Black-American movement, for instance, practised the same kind of dialectic fight, whose members decided to call themselves ‘blacks’ in an effort to break with the political incorrectness of the name. By no means should we understand this fact then as a mere coincidence,

but we should rather as an absolute awareness of the power of language and the word. The Chicano identity is eventually propped up by its power to refer to itself.

The previous discussion and the way the classical Saussurean concepts of signifier and signified function in a constant state of flux (motivated by culture) lead us to face a new question. One is invited to examine how Chicano, Cultural and Postcolonial Studies have never forgotten the versatile concepts of polyphony and the dialogic nature of the self developed by the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. In his treatment of language hybridisation and the languages used by social hybrid outcomes, R. Young appeals to a Bakhtinian hybridity “in which language, even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced” (2002: 20) as a means of expression and self-definition. According to the Russian critic, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, language may be classified as “intentional hybrid” and “unconscious hybrid” (1981: 75), concepts between which the Chicano expression and its reality may be observed to fluctuate. Young calls the former a “contestatory”, self-conscious attitude that considers language and its infinite possibilities essential to create the specific sought-for meaning (2002: 20). Thus, the hybrid outcome seems to be fully aware of the sources the individual and the collective are indebted to. At this point, the hybrid, just as well as the Chicano may well do, is able to literally choose between the cultures in contact to construct a response, regardless of its nature, to his / her surrounding reality. The “unconscious hybridity”, on the other hand, is a stage at which the degree of fusion between the two cultures in question is considerably high. In this case, the hybrid can only be reminded of or told about the degree to which she or he is immersed in one or another culture (20). As for the Chicano culture, the use of either English or Spanish languages, or a combination of both, is a clear example of the identity range, between unconscious and intentional hybrid, in which the Chicano is clearly situated.

The final point of our introduction to the Chicano hybrid self concerns the reliability and usefulness of the novel. As a genre, the novel allows one to put into practice all the premises about the “compound identity” and the Bakhtinian fluctuation that permit the appropriation of language, the control over discourse and the establishment of a self. As M. Bakhtin very wittingly points out in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the novel is the literary epitome of the expression of the self through a multi-voiced discourse, or “polyglossia” (1981: 12), which is fairly frequent in the Western literary canon (1981: 67). Further, the novel has a potential to be extrapolated to represent the preoccupations and joys experienced by a collective through its protagonist, as we shall see. Therefore, the deduction of such reasoning would be to assert that, to be of collective validity, the Chicano novel must be one that engages greatly the “reader” while creating a common superstructure for its “readership”. Finally, if such bridges are built between the individual and the collective, the novel in question will then be performing a political act in its own right, which is the final stage in which the individual and the collective become solidly engaged.

As a final comment to be added to the present discussion, it is easy to relate Bakhtin’s concept of “intentional hybrid” to the discourse of José David Saldívar in *Border Matters. Remapping American Cultural Studies* (1997), if we focus on the literary language that the Chicanos may feature in their representation of their particular individual and collective configuration. Quoting the renowned anthropologist N. G. Canclini and his studies on the borderland, Saldívar advocates for “Canclini’s experimental ethnography of the U.S.-Mexico

borderlands [that] requires the new narrative fragmentariness, he says, of the “videoclip”, of hybrid cultures, and of our labyrinthine freeways” (Saldívar 1997: 30).

As will be demonstrated, and with the aid of the Bakhtinian natural plasticity of the novel (Bakhtin 1981: 3), the Chicanos will introduce a hybrid component into their literary language in the representation of their compounded nature. In a clear parallel between form and content, there must be room for literary experimentation, fusion, and reinterpretation, especially in relation with Bakhtin’s polyglossia. Our analysis of discourse, the collective and the individual in the novels will prove such modulation of the established structures of the novel to transcend the imposed social structures. The intention in the rest of this paper is to analyse the construction of the self as a potential device to create a shared engagement evident in the depiction of the protagonists of the mentioned novels: Antonio / Tony, the unnamed boy, and Becky.

3. COMPLEMENTARY HYBRIDISATION: RUDOLFO ANAYA’S BLESS ME, ÚLTIMA (1972)

Rudolfo Anaya’s 1972 *Bless Me, Última* has been acknowledged as one of the most important works of Chicano literature, and is certainly one of its most outstanding novels. In a clear structural effort to depict a dialectic opposition between the Mexican and the Anglo-American cultures, *Última* is a clear bildungsroman in which its protagonist is situated at the centre of a restless struggle between a set of opposed forces that will define his existence.

Making use of the parameters presented in the introduction, we may describe the novel’s structure as working on various levels, where the levels of individual and communal representation are superimposed. Authors like Héctor Calderón have naturally focused on the individual in it, who seems to be “a preordained hero in any romantic way” (Calderón 1994: 112). Its degree of technical experimentation seems not to be as high as in the other Chicano novels we will analyse here, as Calderón suggests. Although there is a strong presence of magical realism and the narration takes place between reality, the world of dreams and the realm of myths and legends, *Última* appears to be a fairly uncomplicated novel, though very rich in content. This structural feature is perhaps explained by its author’s interest to reach his audience more directly and by the recentness of the Chicano renaissance when the novel was written, in the early 1970s.

Due to the representative potential of the novel, Antonio, the protagonist, could be seen as the personification a very specific type of hybridity. In a strong relation with the general Chicano existence, he is forced to build a self-consciousness based on the result of the constant clash that takes place on the borderland between his childhood and his adulthood. Thus, Antonio’s hybridity responds to a conciliatory effort to become complete and to combine all the traditions, sources and roots, with a strong individual component he cannot exist without. He must build up a self-aware, powerful personal identity, and making the best profit of his own potential: “I was a very important part of the teeming life of the llano and the river” (Anaya 1972: 44.)

It would be very interesting to analyse the binary forces opposed that Antonio has to face up to, as many authors have done very brilliantly during the last three decades. However, my concern here is not to make up a whole list but to discern the hybrid quality of them.

Presenting his own list of contrasting forces, Ramón Saldívar stresses in his *Chicano Narrative. The Dialectics of Difference* the importance of the world of dreams in the novel: “Antonio’s dreams effectively set up the conflicting qualities of his young life” (Saldívar 1990: 110) It is clear that Antonio and his dreams are a workbench for the Chicano ethos to develop but also for its members to become fully aware of the possibilities and responsibilities that a double reality and the past necessarily bring about. Anaya seems to be rehearsing a reality, and its consequences, in Antonio’s dreams. What is more, this intention of focusing on the non-real could reinforce the idea of the potential representativeness of the novel: dreams and fiction may warn in parallel about similar aspects. As featured in the following quotation, Antonio dreams about his own birth and reveals how both sides of his family expect him to follow their steps. Despite the open-endedness of the novel, one is to discern that his own personal choice will not be either of the proposed by his divided family/tradition, but a ‘complementary hybridisation’ of both:

This one will be a Luna, the old man said, he will be a farmer and keep our customs and traditions [...] He will make a fine vaquero! [...] they rubbed the stain of earth from the baby’s forehead because man was not to be tied to the earth but free upon it. (Anaya 1972: 6)

Throughout the whole novel, Tony –a name that appears, for the sake of hybridity, to configure the “Anglo” version of Antonio after his enrolment in the English-speaking school– will have to be fair in the gathering of his deconstructed self that the dialectical forces represent. The land beneath Antonio’s feet is perhaps one of the most representative images of his hybrid nature. His words when speaking of the llano and the river, echoing Bhabha’s definition of the hybrid’s culture seen in the introduction, are a very elucidating example: “I love them both, and yet I am of neither. I wonder which life I will choose?” (Anaya 1972: 44). As announced above, a fairly plausible conclusion is that the open ending of the novel seems to be the answer suggested to any Chicano in search for an identity. In the end one can only look to the future, by looking at the past, and utter the invocation ‘*Bless me, Última*’.

4. TOMÁS RIVERA’S ...Y NO SE LO TRAGÓ LA TIERRA (1971): THE INNER HYBRID SELF

The next Chicano novel is framed in similar premises than *Bless Me, Última*. Tomás Rivera’s 1971 *...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra* is also a bildungsroman in which the individual’s strife through a path full of bifurcations interacts with a self-consciousness that covers the whole experience: “Se dio cuenta de que él mismo se había llamado. Y así empezó el año perdido. [...] se dio cuenta de que siempre pensaba que pensaba y de allí no podía salir”⁴ (Rivera 1971: 7).

⁴ For the sake of this paper’s readability, the quotations in Spanish have not been translated into English, assuming the majority of its readers are familiar with the works or with the Spanish language.

On the technical level, ... *Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra* seems to be more adventurous and experimental than *Última*, as Ramón Saldívar notes in his chapter devoted to the novel (Saldívar 1990: 75). Calderón himself confesses his admiration for the novel's form and structure, while commenting again on the individual's "reformulation of the Mexican-*mestizo* cultural world into the beginning of a Chicano narrative tradition" (Calderón 1994: 110). In my opinion, the main structural peculiarity of the novel lies in its narrative strategy. It is shaped in an ambivalent fashion –both the individual and the collective are represented and have a voice. We experience a continuous shift between voices through the chapters: examples of it are an omniscient third-person narrator; the voice of various characters taking over the narration (the mother in "Un rezo", for instance); or a direct address from an unidentified narrator to a second-person entity (that may be occupied by the reader) in "La mano en la bolsa".

For his part, the protagonist seems to be the observer of external reality and the numberless injustices that he and his people go through. Social and working pressure by the Anglos, religious belief, Christianity as institution, poverty and social inequality, or war are representative of the actual Chicano anxieties of the time. Therefore, as a result of his observation and meditation of the external world, the boy chooses to seclude himself and start a new path of his own. Thus, the multiple encounters with opposed forces lead him towards an individual self-shelter represented in his final hiding away from the world ending up under (not into) a house, to find a place for meditation. The great mythological pair of opposites, good and evil, is the spinal-chord of the dialectic narration in *Tierra*. As Ramón Saldívar points out, "The binary structure of what I have termed the «differential structure» of Chicano narrative brings into question the complement of evil and the supreme origin of value, God itself" (Saldívar 1990: 87). In fact, the solution to the confrontation of these two external forces will be the dissolution of their power, after which the individual pervades towards the search for the self. Eventually, "...no se lo tragó la tierra".

Furthermore, the boy will be forced by the external circumstances to find a balance between outer and inner enigmas. Thus, the kind of allegory that *Tierra* seems to construct for the (Chicano) reader is one advocating for the self-shelter, the withdrawal and the reflection about oneself and the others. It is clearly established by the end of the novel, when the boy has closed the circle of the bildungsroman and has gone back to a different 'normality':

Apenas estando uno solo puede juntar a todos. Yo creo que es lo que necesitaba más que todo. Necesitaba esconderme para poder comprender muchas cosas. De aquí en adelante todo lo que tengo que hacer es venirme aquí, en lo oscuro, y pensar en ellos. (Rivera 1971: 75)

However, the experience of the character, whose lack of name paradoxically reinforces the presence of the self if combined with its potential as representative entity, seems to respond to different patterns of interaction with his surrounding reality than the protagonist of *Bless Me, Última*. Whereas Antonio / Tony is overwhelmed with the flood of dialectics brought in by his family, his dreams, the local beliefs and a strong mythological system, the protagonist of *Tierra* seems to manage his self-aware existence from a more detached perspective. The world in *Tierra* seems to be cruder, tougher and less colourful. Apparently,

feeling Mexican or Anglo-American are two islands onto which the boy can jump, and an individualistic hybridity seems to be the alternative to both.

Finally, the very telling ending passage explains both the hybridity that the protagonist chooses for himself and the collective representation of the novel. In it, the communal voice takes over breaking into the boy's interior world, so that he succeeds in his inner embracement of the compound existence of Chicanos. It is done much in a Bakhtinian polyglotic fashion, when hybridity is best expressed by the use of Spanish and English in juxtaposed sentences. Thus, the interiorisation of the mentioned communal voice in the final passage is indispensable to attain the construction of a hybrid self. Consequently, both entities clearly reflect on each other, generating the equilibrium that the Chicano must be founded upon:

Lo que más me gustaba era que me abrazara y que me dijera que eres más águila que la luna... get out of there, get away from that goddamn window. Go away. Go away... you know, you can't come home with me any more. Look, I don't mind playing with you, but some old ladies told mama that mexicans steal and now mama says not to bring you home anymore. You have to turn back. But we can still play at school. I'll choose you and you choose me...que te digo, te digo que de jodido no pasa uno. Yo sé por qué lo digo. Si hay otra guerra nosotros no vamos a sufrir. No seas pendejo. (Rivera 1971: 72-5; emphasis original)

5. ROLANDO HINOJOSA'S REGRESSIVE HYBRIDITY IN *LOS AMIGOS DE BECKY* (1991)

The last of the novels intended to be analysed here was written in 1991. Granting a certain degree of contemporariness, we may take the novel as the representative of a long fiction-writing career that started in the early 1970s. Besides, Hinojosa's fictional explorations of the individual and the collective over the years demonstrate to what extent the discussion remains alive in Chicano culture. It seems therefore that the task of Chicano writers is and will continue to be for long the assertion of their identity. Although *Los Amigos de Becky* develops a type of narration concerned with the collective and the individual (its very title reveals the focus on both entities), we will see how the concepts are laid out differently.

In a first approximation, one must say that it is not only a novel about a woman called Becky, but about her friends talking about Becky herself. Although the primary concern of the novel is to tell her story, it also depicts the neighbours of Klail city. Saldívar points out that Hinojosa creates "less a history of individual subjects and unique personalities than a history of the collective social life of the Mexican American community" (Saldívar 1990: 141.) One could argue, however, that his writing offers a crack in-between the individual and the collective that enables the representation of the intersections of both entities. In fact, there seems to be no doubt that a multi-voiced entity is clearly established by this very fact. The reader is even presented with whole passages that deal with matters apparently unrelated with Becky, connected with their essential hybridity. Family: "Mi padre era otra cosa. Se aplatanó como dicen. Se hizo aquí y anduvo insistiendo de que yo hablara español" (Hinojosa 1991: 66); generations: "De los chicos de mi generación yo debo ser la única que

habla español” (1991: 75); the present and the past of Klail city: “En el valle hay mucha gente emparentada. No salimos zonzos porque el cruce de sangre casi siempre pasa tres generaciones” (34); gender discussions, most often about women’s new freedom: “Para mí y para mi modo de pensar y ver, cada quien debe vivir su vida tal y como le parezca.” (59). The ideas behind the examples seem to be Chicano aspects that needed to be analysed by its literature.

Paying attention to the literary techniques featured in the novel, we may observe that there are two intersecting points. On the one hand, it is built up in a deconstruction of the identity of Becky, which is broken down by the multiple voices presented for the reader to try and re-construct the actual Becky. On the other hand, its technical structure is successfully set up to convey such interaction between the individual (Becky) and the collective (the people of Klail city.) With the latter, the author endows the narrative lead to a whole amalgam of individuals, who belong to different social and family backgrounds and who feature varied degrees of sympathy towards Becky. In their dialogue with an unidentified voice, they will become the bricks of a wall on which the reader must start to discern the identity of Becky. The novel is, as in the other examples of this paper, the workbench on which the characters test the present and the past against the individual, so that a fully committed discussion about the Chicano social and personal reality comes to existence.

Bakhtin’s polyglossia fits perfectly in the perspective from which the author wants to show his materials; the reactions and bias of the narrative voices are the elements that enable the infinite versions of Becky’s behaviour. Not only is not her version the one that finally counts, but it is equated to the rest. The message we can infer from this is the actual necessity of the collective for the individual to exist, as the author demonstrates against the Chicano cultural background.

Thus, Becky’s identity discussion in the novel is her decision to break up her marriage and change completely her own life. Among other things, she establishes the most important changes concerning her individuality and freedom as a woman in terms of gender. Her decision to stop speaking English and go back to a faulty Spanish is an evident effort to proclaim an individual reaction in relation with “the others”. The following quotation depicts a romantic view on Spanish and how it seems to be the key for her renewed identity as a divorced, free woman. In it, she expresses distance (presumably from her ex-husband) and proximity (towards her family) through language:

¿El español? Bueno, la verdad es que nunca se me olvidó. Lo que pasaba era que no lo hablaba. [...] Ahora sí lo necesito y no me parece gran cosa el rescatar lo que ya sabía. Mi mamá nunca aprendió inglés bien a bien y ni falta que le hizo. Papá hablaba y habla español en casa, y donde sea, y lo hace a la perfección. (Hinojosa 1991: 81)

From the last ideas discussed, one can discern a particular kind of hybridity based on a (partial) return to the Mexican culture without leaving the hybrid status. Returning to one’s roots as far as family and childhood years are concerned, seems to be a fair strategy to re-construct one’s identity. Becky is visibly in need for a new self-configuration that can be opposed to her older, now unwanted self. What is more, the regression is made only concerning those aspects that are convenient for Becky to assert her identity. Very coura-

geously, she exerts her own self-granted freedom to re-establish the cultural parameters in which she wants to be inscribed. There is little doubt that this fact clearly indicates Becky's full awareness of the existing interaction between self and community and eventually of the possibilities of being a cultural hybrid. In the end, she realises the potential of what the Chicano culture offers her as a collective to give shape to her individual existence.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The intention of this paper has been to analyse the degrees and modes of individual hybridisation and the potential of the self as common representation of the Chicano hybridity in the three Chicano canonical novels.

Having presented the concept of 'hybridisation', typical of Postcolonial Studies but also borrowed by others such as Cultural Studies, our study meant to revisit the protagonists from a Bakhtinian, hybrid approach, proving to be constructed out of infinite versions of what the Chicano can be observed to be.

Thus, the novel has been understood as a workbench for authors and readers to observe the Chicano experience and aim at the understanding of its social and historical reality. A classic theme in the western novel, the individual and the collective interact to give as a result the decisions both cultural entities have to make to find an identity. As we have seen, a common ground for discussion in the three novels is existence, understood as the relationships via tradition, religion and the social status of Chicanos, and new attitudes towards them all.

In the case of Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me Última*, we have discerned a 'complementary hybridity' that is based on the combination and integration in the individual of the present and past of Mexico and the United States. Antonio / Tony must face social, religious and mythological traditions, family and group pressures and the prospect of an open future he has to construct for himself. That is the starting point for him to take up a journey to find his own identity as a Chicano, in a clear interaction of the individual and the collective. Finally, the representative power of the novel as a genre has permitted us to establish a direct connection between fiction and reality. Thus, the author attempted to propose a contextualised way of conciliation between the two worlds the Chicano belongs or is indebted to.

Tomás Rivera's *...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra* has been analysed as an exploitation of the individual in the person of its protagonist. Observing the bleak external reality based again on social, family and religious forces, the protagonist is compelled to seek for an internal way of understanding the combined existence of his Chicano identity. Eventually, he understands what being a Chicano means and entails with regard to the collective, best represented in the final passage of the novel. The communal voice in the boy's head may be seen as the consummation of the intersection between the individual and the collective, the necessary elements for the Chicano culture to develop.

Finally, Rolando Hinojosa's *Los Amigos de Becky* features a technically successful combination of voices where the individual –i.e.: the focus of the dialogue between the neighbours and another unidentified entity– interacts with the collective –the narration of Becky's life-change and a common cultural background by certain citizens of the city of Klail. The aim of her "regressive hybridity", going back to the Mexican source of her

double cultural extraction, is based on her awareness of the potential of the Chicano culture to construct a different self. As a final remark, the inclusion of a fairly contemporary work as *Los Amigos de Becky* clearly demonstrates the continuity and active nature of the discussion of the self and hybridity among Chicano prose writers.

To conclude, I have aimed at illustrating hybridity in the specific context of Chicano culture and argued that the interaction of both the individual and the collective take several interesting shapes as seen in the novels analysed. Self-consciousness, the personal experiences of the individual the external influence of the context will determine such shapes. Finally, I have hopefully proved that fiction writing can serve both as mirror and testbed to experience hybridity as a manifest cultural and social phenomenon, as it does in many other typical contexts in which hybridity is present like the postcolonial world.

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