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Aspects of Prose Style in Three Chicano Novels: Pocho, Bless Me, Ultima, and The Road to Tamazunchale

Willard Gingerich
gingerichw@montclair.edu

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FORM AND FUNCTION
IN CHICANO ENGLISH

Jacob Ornstein-Galicia
EDITOR

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ASPECTS OF PROSE STYLE IN THREE CHICANO NOVELS: IN THREE CHICANO NOVELS: *Pocho, Bless Me, Última,* AND *The Road to Tamazunchale*

Willard Gingerich
Department of English
The University of Texas at El Paso

Chicano English is not English spoken with a Spanish accent - though in some regions that may be one of its characteristics, albeit the least significant one. Nor is it a dialect of invented and specialized words, distinct speech rhythms and syntax, generated from a fundamentally English speech pool, as is Black English. The English learned and spoken by the sons and daughters of Spanish-speaking immigrants, most but not all of Mexican origin, throughout the American West and Southwest, is often neither English nor Spanish but something other, a *tertium quid* which leans first to one, then to the other of its source languages, never fully one or the other. Bilingualism in the Southwest usually means not the calculated mastery of two separate and distinct languages but rather the inventive and often precarious spanning of an officially disparaged, linguistic free-fire zone between them. Nowhere is the hazard and creative challenge of this linguistic situation more apparent than in the attempts of Chicano poets and fiction writers to evolve effective and authentic styles of literary expression, within or against the mainstream stylistic traditions of Mexico and/or the U.S.

In an acute assessment of the parameters of Chicano literary "space" within Anglo culture published in the midpoint of the last decade, Juan Bruce-Novoa says the following about the linguistic resources of the Chicano

writer:

> As for our language, it . . . is neither Spanish or English, not bilingual. We do not go from one to the other, nor do we keep them separate. The two are in dynamic tension creating a new, interlingual "language." Ricardo Sanchez calls it the tertiary principle. I prefer the term interlingual, because as Ricardo himself has demonstrated, the two languages fragment into types of Spanish and English, and what the Chicano speaks is the product of many fragments. Using the same principle . . . Chicanismo is the sum total of all our modes of expression and no one alone. (Bruce-Novoa, 1975, p. 28)

This interlingual tension among fragments, Bruce-Novoa asserts, is precisely the image and appropriate medium of the Chicano writer's cultural position.

> We are neither [Mexican nor North American] as we are not Mexican-American. I propose that we are the space (not the hyphen) between the two, the intercultural nothing of that space. We are continually expanding that space, pushing the two out and apart as we build our own separate reality, while at the same time creating strong bonds of interlocking tension that hold the two in relationship. (ibid., p. 27)

This sense of being between-ness, of an identity and experience which must be asserted first as a no-thing, as neither this nor that but a newness, was not easily or readily arrived at in Chicano fiction, and its implications are still being explored. Bruce-Novoa's formulation makes the role of language style in Chicano experience evident: it is both the key to and the mystery of that experience, for by understanding the meaning and dimensions of the language(s) he speaks he will understand the space of existence he occupies and, therefore, who he is. In a real sense, the much-touted search for identity in Chicano literature is the metaphor of a search for an authentic interlingual writing style (not vice versa), and only those writers who have seriously undertaken the second search have been given serious consideration, by Chicano readers, as guides in the first.

What these considerations suggest is that the analysis of language style in Chicano literature, though at first glance it might appear a marginal and pedantic exercise, could provide the royal road into a given writer's deepest beliefs, convictions, intuitions, and fears about his or her existential space as Chicano and as human, thrown toward death in a life of particularly focused and restrained choices; could provide, in short,

the clearest window to his or her unique vision of Chicanismo.

The study of literary style is always in some degree the analysis of three factors: choice, deviation from the norm, and personal or representative expression in a range of language use which both participates in and transcends the commonality of use. Style is a specifically literary, as opposed to linguistic, phenomenon in that it identifies the expression of a superior particularity rather than a universality of utterance. While a literary work must always rise against the background of a common speech (Chaucer's "dialect spoken in and within 50 miles of London"), the study of its style is the study of precisely that rising, its patterns of expressive deviation which reflect the precise choices of its composer. Style is *parole* rather than *langue*. The view and challenge of style analysis, once linguistic patterns have been identified and described, is to explain in terms of the work's overall aesthetic economy, its unity of form, performance, and intent, why those choices were necessary and what they reveal. In his much reprinted "Prolegomena to the Analysis of Prose Style," Richard Ohmann argues, convincingly, that stylistic choice no longer makes sense to us as selection among a variety of cosmetic alternatives for saying the same thing. This does not mean style is an obviated or meaningless concept; on the contrary, Wittgenstein, Whorf, and other modern semanticists (considerably reinforced now by the ephebes of Heidegger and their philosophical hermeneutics) suggest a complex of interdependence among language, thought, fact, and even cosmology (and being itself in Heidegger's messianic formulations) which grants the act of linguistic discrimination an almost sacred aura: style as the untouchable, untranslatable perfection of saying, of exactly the right words in exactly the right order. But all stylistic choice, Ohmann points out, must take place within the constraints of a language community and can be attributed reliably to authorial intent (or textual performance) only when it parts from or surpasses those constraints through the patterns of the writer's "epistemic choices."

> What is relevant to the study of style is the fact that any language persuades its speakers to see the universe in certain set ways, to the exclusion of other ways. It thereby limits the possibilities of choice for any writer, and the student of style must be careful not to ascribe to an individual the epistemic bias of his language. A writer cannot escape the boundaries set by his tongue, except by creating new words, by uprooting normal syntax or by building metaphors, each of which is a new ontological discovery. Yet, even short of these radical linguistic activities, an infinite number of meaningful choices remain to be made by the writer. . . . Any . . . pattern of expression, when repeated with unusual frequency, is the sign of a habit of meaning, and thus of a persistent way of sorting out the phenomena of experience. And even single occurrences of linguistic oddities, especially in crucial places, can point out what might be called temporary epistemologies.
>
> Here, then, is one way in which the term "style" is meaningful, one kind of *choice* which really exists for the author. (Ohmann, 1959, p. 43)

Certainly, it would be difficult to imagine a body of literary texts which more immediately, graphically, and explicitly demonstrates the epistemic function of the writer's stylistic choices than Chicano literature. For the bilingual writer, escaping the boundaries of English and Spanish is a daily necessity (as it is in some degree, however small, for all of us who live in the Southwest) of his or her experience, and neologisms, uprooted syntax, and metaphor-building are the indispensable tools of the bilingual writer's profession - under the guises of code-switching, word borrowing, and oral interpretation.

If, then, we examine the prose styles of several Chicano novels, narratives composed by authors of Chicano background and treating characters and events from the same culture, what do we find? It is my purpose to demonstrate, by means of brief discussions of select fictional scenes, that stylistic analysis may be a particularly profitable and penetrating mode of critical reading for exposure of the rich linguistic and aesthetic resonances in which a novel like *The Road to Tamazunchale* and a poem like "El Louie" abound, so obvious to even the minimally bilingual and so invisible to the vastly monolingual North American public. Specifically, I propose that even a cursory review of the English used by Chicano writers over the past two decades reveals (1) the evolution of a growing awareness of "epistemic choice" in language resources actually available in the process of composition; (2) that the struggle for an adequate literary language, one which does not falsely delimit the image of Chicano experience within the epistemological framework of Anglo-American language, is at the heart of the unique genius which Chicano literature demonstrates; and (3) that just as Bruce-Novoa's description of the Chicano writer's idiom as a dynamic interlingual tension between fragments of English and Spanish is the image of "the intercultural nothing" of Chicano existence - a nothing, Bruce-Novoa points out, pregnant with infinite and simultaneous possibility - so stylistic awareness and analysis of that idiom's

interlingual features is our window to the being which that no-thing becomes.

Ohmann asserts that beyond the questions of epistemic choice which stylistic analysis seeks to describe, it must also take account of the habitual qualities of feeling, of emotion, as these generate the unique expressive and persuasive tone of the essay, novel, story, etc. No question for the Chicano author is more implicitly fraught with emotional tension, and bristling with an array of word choices that are at bottom epistemological, than the question of his or her use of English as a creative medium. In order to sell in North America, books must be written in English; how does one represent honestly, authentically, and fully a Spanish or bilingual experience only in the alien language of the dominant social and economic class? What compromises are inevitable and what stylistic strategies can be employed to minimize or outwit those compromises? How does one manipulate the matrix language (English) to express the experience of the core language (Spanish), especially considering that the latter is itself often a dialect (caló, "border" Spanish, regional dialect, etc.) deeply buried within the matrices of Mexican and Castilian Spanish.

In the opening scene of José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) the father of protagonist Richard Rubio, Juan Rubio, shoots a Spaniard in a Cd. Juárez bar over a bar girl. The purpose of this scene and of nearly all of Chapter One is to define the image of revolutionary *machismo* which Juan Rubio personifies and which functions always in the background of Richard's childhood and struggle to maturity. The scene takes place in Mexico, and it is obvious that all the principals must be speaking Spanish in the "original" event of which this written account presumes to be the artistic "imitation." Only one phrase occurs in Spanish, "*¿Qué quieres?*," but a number of expressions are clearly phrased as translations from an imaginary Spanish original. An especially common pattern is an adjective followed by the indefinite pronoun "one" to translate a variety of Spanish nouns and pronouns for which there is no one-word equivalent in English: "He is a bad one!"; "This one stays with me"; "Can you not hear, deaf one?" Somewhat speculatively we could reconstruct the nonexistent originals as: "*¡Es malo!*"; "*Ésta se queda conmigo*"; "*¿No me oyes, sorda?*" Only the first of these might naturally occur in normal English speech; the other two would almost certainly come out as "She stays with me" and "Are you deaf?" or "What are you, deaf?" Then, as the insults precede the bullets, these phrases occur: "'The peón has larger balls than the city-bred gauchupín'" and "'Son of the great mother whore!'" which we might reconstruct as "*El peón tiene los huevos más grandes que el gauchupín del barrio*" or "*El peón es más huevon que el gauchupín del barrio*" and as "*¡Hijo de la gran puta madre!*" But Villarreal has drawn his epistemological line, performed a code switch, at the words *peón* and *gauchupín* which might have easily been rendered as "peasant" and "Spaniard" - at the expense, of course, of all the rich cultural nuances of pride and disdain so essential to those words. Not depending on the audience, Villarreal later makes those attitudes explicit in the conversation between Rubio and General Fuentes. Another device is the literal rendition of idiomatic Spanish phrases or metaphoric expressions. "I have -- years," for the Spanish "Tengo -- años," is used often in place of the normal English "I am -- years old." When Richard is born his father tells his sisters, "Your mother has given light," a literal rendition of the metaphoric *dar luz*.

Such examples could be multiplied. None are particularly original; the latter device especially was used by Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to lend an air of exotic rusticity to his characterizations of the Spanish guerrillas, especially of the gypsy woman, Pilar. To the bilingual reader all of the stylistic devices I've mentioned are immediately obvious. What may not be so obvious is the way in which Villarreal's epistemic choice to resolve the matrix/core language dilemma with this strategy of a translation illusion implicates him in a network of aesthetic choices which reach into nearly every structural element of the novel. Take the narrator's stance. *Pocho* is told in the third person, a *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist enjoys the complete and unrestrained sympathy of the narrator. In electing to tell Richard's story to an English audience - an Anglo audience - Villarreal must assume a vast ignorance about the context, values, history, symbols, and emotional habits of Richard's Chicano culture, all of which must be explained if Richard is to be understood and taken to heart by that audience. Consequently the need for the long-winded, discursive narrator who rambles on in summaries and digressions about Richard's father's values, Mexican catholicism, the history of the pachuco. Given the epistemic choice, however, with which the novel begins, it is difficult to see what other narrative option Villarreal could have had; how could a first person narrator have supplied all this explanation about himself without swallowing the book utterly?

But even this translating narrator (both linguistically and culturally) chokes at certain inviolable limits. The choice *not* to use English in certain expressions, that is, to break the translation illusion and switch codes, is perhaps a more obviously epistemological choice in that it identifies a limit to

the resources of English for the Chicano artist. *Peón* and *gauchupín* from the above scene are ready examples. The play of insult around the word *peón* between Juan Rubio and the Spaniard leads into the direct affront of the word *gauchupín*: "You need not associate with peones," says the Spaniard to the bar girl seated with Juan Rubio. "The peón has larger balls than the city-bred gauchupín," Rubio replies. The Spaniard's casual disdain is transformed through the same word into Rubio's grotesque arrogance. Perhaps "redneck" could provide something of a cultural analogue - but not a translation - in American English. Behind these words is the consciousness that *peones* made the Revolution, part of which was the occasional unrestrained massacre of Spaniards. These things, Villarreal chose to believe, cannot be translated and must be learned, even by Anglo readers, in the original.

Richard's father, in fact, becomes for the narrator of *Pocho* the living symbol of Mexican Spanish and his decline from an almost superhuman revolutionary patriot to a paunchy, bitter, exploited farm worker runs directly parallel to Richard's growing ambition to become an artist, a writer, one who masters the alien tongue of a yet unconquered identity.

> "Silence!" roared Juan Rubio. "We will not speak the dog language in my house!" They were at the supper table.
>
> "But this is America, Father," said Richard. "If we live in this country, we must live like Americans."
>
> "And next you will tell me that those are not tortillas you are eating but bread, and those are not beans but *hahm an' ecks*."
>
> "No, but I mean that you must remember that we are not in Mexico. In Mexico --"
>
> "*Hahm an' ecks*," his father interrupted. (Villarreal, 1959, p.133)

Juan Rubio knows that "bread" cannot say "tortilla" and "ham and eggs" cannot become "huevos con jamón"; the cuisine of the culture lives in its words. Rubio knows the "correct" name for things, but it is a defeated knowledge, a knowledge to which "America" is somehow opposed. Again the conversation is presented as a translation from Spanish; Juan Rubio says "and" in one sentence and "an'" in another when he is actually speaking the "dog language." This scene, and in some ways the entire novel, is an exploration of the tragic irony and ambivalence implicit in Rubio's first sentence. "We will not speak the dog language," he says in the vocabulary, syntax, and grammar of the dog language itself. It is, of course, the narrator's irony and ambivalence, not Juan Rubio's. By no accident

is *Pocho* a *bildungsroman* of the young artist, as are a number of other early Chicano fictional works, nor are they less resonantly symbolic of the Chicano struggle for being so. The struggle with the irony and expressive ambivalence of Juan Rubio's roaring declaration is the struggle for Chicano identity itself; the struggle for a language *is* a struggle for exact, discriminating, and authentic identity, and in that struggle the writer finds him- or herself willy-nilly in the vanguard. Many will no longer find Richard Rubio's answer viable (nor likewise Villarreal's aesthetic strategy of the translation illusion and its attendant network of stylistic and epistemic choices) but the novel is an honest and integral effort to account for its own style and being.

By the time Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* appeared in 1972 a sufficient public for artistic production had developed within and around the Chicano community itself to support enterprises such as Tonatiuh International which published the novel. No longer did Chicano authors presume they had first and foremost to address an alien, monolingual audience. The tone of explanation almost totally disappears and the expressive purpose comes clearly to dominate the shape of stylistic devices. The translation illusion strategy is still fundamental, but it is less obvious in the English style and can usually be detected only in contextual details of plot and characterization. "All of the older people spoke only in Spanish, and I myself understood only Spanish. It was only after one went to school that one learned English," the narrator informs us in the first chapter. We can presume, therefore, that every scene in which adults predominate is "originally" in Spanish. Except in school, of course: "'¡A la veca!' 'What does that mean?' Miss Violet asked. 'It means okay!'" (Anaya, 1972, p. 145). Or "'Gosh, okay, let's go!'" exclaim the protagonist's older sisters on the morning of his first day of school. "'Ay! What good does an education do them,' my father filled his coffee cup, 'they only learn to speak like Indians. Gosh, okay, what kind of words are those?'" (ibid., p. 50) Without such specific indications there would be almost no textual clue that a generational language shift is occurring within this culture; none of *Pocho*'s direct translation devices are found in the English style of *Bless Me, Ultima*. The only stylistic pattern that hints at a Spanish original is a certain vague formality of address between adults and especially from children to adults: "'Your son lives, old man.' Ultima said. She undid her rolled sleeves and buttoned them. My grandfather bowed his head. 'May I send the word to those who wait?' he asked" (ibid., p. 96). In only one case, the conversations between Cico and Antonio

concerning the golden carp, does a similar tone occur between children:

> "There are many gods," Cico whispered. "Gods of beauty and magic, gods of the garden, gods in our own backyards -- but we go off to foreign countries to find new ones, we reach to the stars to find new ones --"
>
> "Why don't we tell others of the golden carp?" I asked.
>
> "They would kill him," Cico whispered. "The god of the church is a jealous god, he cannot live in peace with other gods. He would instruct his priests to kill the golden carp --" (ibid., p. 227)

These are not phrases, however, that can be easily reconstructed in some hypothetical but precise Spanish; in Cico's case we cannot at all be sure the rather stilted parallel syntax and glorified diction is actually meant to reflect any Spanish original; there is no compelling reason to believe Anaya intends anything more than the direct imitation of preadolescent speech. In other words, the stylistic limits between the fictional transcription of direct speech and the illusion of translation from a Spanish original become blurred in *Bless Me, Ultima*. The translating narrator recedes before a presentational one; explanation fades into expression. What does make awareness of a Spanish original inescapable in numerous conversations is the direct transcription (without translation) of Spanish words and sometimes entire sentences. The formal "*buenos dias le de Dios*" salutation is used repeatedly, and in the presentation of Ultima to Antonio's family no less than seven phrases or full sentences (out of fourteen verbal exchanges) are rendered in untranslated Spanish. The use of Spanish words and phrases is a frequent device scattered throughout the novel; a count of fifteen pages chosen at random reveals the following frequency per page, not counting proper names or repeated words: 6,3, 1,2,5,0,4,3,1,0,3,3,0,4,0. A closer analysis of such expressions in two scenes, one in which the narrator clearly functions as translator and one in which he does not, will clarify Anaya's use of this stylistic feature.

In Chapter 12 (all chapter numbers are given in Spanish) a lynch mob led by Tenorio Trementina comes after Ultima, whom Trementina accuses of having killed his daughter by witchcraft. It is a scene deeply imbued in every sense with the law, custom, emotion, and expectations of the pre-Anglo New Mexican Hispanic rural culture; given what the narrator has told us of the language habits of this community, it is reasonable to assume that dialogue in this scene would "originally" have been as free of English as any passage in the book. The narrator, in other words, must be at one of his

translation peaks. In the space of five and one-half pages the following Spanish words, phrases, or sentences occur once each: *¿Quién es?; ¡La mujer que no ha pecado es bruja, le juro a Dios!; ¡Chinga tu madre!; ¿Qué pasa aquí?; jodido; mira;* while *sí* occurs four times, *bruja* three times, and *curandera* and *cabrón* twice each for a total of seventeen separate narrative choices to not translate the "original" Spanish expressions of the scene's characters. If we examine a scene of roughly equal length from one of the school episodes where English is presumably dominant (that is, where the translating narrator keeps his lowest profile) we find the following. The hilarious and ill-fated Third Grade Christmas play in Chapter *Catorce* occurs in English; if the narrator's earlier comments about his school language are not sufficient to demonstrate that, this little phonetic device drives home the point: "'No play, shit!' Abel moaned. Miss Violet came in. 'What did you say, Abel?' 'No play, shucks,' Abel said." In six and one-half pages the boys say *mierda, puto, jodido, qué* once each, *a la veca* twice, and *cabron* and *chingada* four times apiece, or a total of fourteen Spanish expressions in this scene - only three less than the fully Spanish lynch mob scene. Clearly Anaya does not distribute his Spanish expressions only through the scenes where the original event is imagined to have occurred in Spanish. The differences are that in the lynch mob scene, only three of those expressions could be classified as profane expletives or insults while in the Christmas play scene only one is not a profanity, *qué*. And only in the Spanish-original scene do complete sentences in Spanish occur.

Beyond and around these uses of Spanish in dialogue, Anaya frequently employs another device which echoes Villarreal's uses of *peón* and *gauchupín*: certain richly culture-bound terms are never translated. The *Llano estacado* which endures so vividly in the memories of Antonio's father and of all the Márez clan is never called the Staked Plains as it became when Texas moved into eastern New Mexico in the 19th century; *llano* and *llaneros* persists throughout the novel, likewise *vaquero* in place of "cowboy." *Curandera* is the frequent title for Ultima, and *compadre* and *vatos* are found here and there. *Gabacha*, deprecatory term for "Anglo girl," occurs once. None are translated or specifically explicated anywhere in the story. Anaya's final and unique stylistic use of Spanish is in the symbolism of the names Luna and Márez (from *mares*, seas) which the narrator continually juggles as the conflicting names of warring destinies.

What these various stylistic devices add up to in *Bless Me, Ultima* is an aggressively bilingual mode of

presentation. Though the book is in English, a reader with no knowledge of Spanish would be literally unable to read the emotional intensity of the confrontation between Antonio's father and the lynch mob or the exuberant profanity of the boys in the Christmas play. In essence, Anaya's narrative voice insists, you can't know this community, can't assimilate this fictional image, unless you are familiar with a certain number of its linguistic habits. The author's authentic expressive purpose takes priority over any desire to explain the background, power, or nuances of those habits. By refusing to assume his major audience must be monolingual North Americans, Anaya broadens the range of epistemic choices available to his expressive style - though the strictly English resources of *Bless Me, Ultima* are clearly inferior, in my judgment, to those of *Pocho*. By insisting on *llano* instead of "plain," *curandera* instead of "herbalist," *ristas* instead of "strings of chili," *Buenos dias le de Dios* instead of "A good day to you," *compadre* instead of "godfather," and *por dios, cabrón, mierda, a la veca, puto,* and *chingada* instead of their equally rude Anglo Saxon analogues, Anaya is adding to his fictional image the "temporary epistemologies" that each of these words contains.

The first person narrator of *Bless Me, Ultima* is a man of indeterminate age who recounts events of some two-and-a-third years of his childhood between the ages of six and eight or nine, the period of his acquaintance with Ultima. This narrator is characterized in the vaguest of terms and never clearly materializes; one must presume, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that he is a figure of the artisan's consciousness attempting to account for its own origins. But, consistent with the stylistic tendency described above to express rather than explain Chicano reality, this narrator speaks of the events and characters of this moment in his life through a style which I could only call nostalgic "rhapsody." Its chief characteristics are the frequent and often abrupt use of value descriptors - "good," "beautiful," "free," "evil," "clean," "lovely"; and a diction of exaggeration almost entirely free of any ironic undercutting, sometimes reflecting exaggerated violence:

> "Ay maldecido!" Tenorio grunted and *hurled himself* at Narciso. The two came together again, *like two rams locking horns*, and the bartender and the other two men had to pull *with all their strength* to pry them loose. (Anaya, 1972, p. 153)

sometimes reflecting the excessive vitality of the children:

> Bones climbed up a stage rope and perched on a beam near the ceiling. He refused to come down and be in the play. "Booooooooo-enz!" Miss Violet called, "come down!" Bones *snapped down at her like a cornered dog.* "The play is for sissies!" he shouted. *Horse threw a chunk of a two-by-four at him* and almost clobbered him. The board fell and hit the Kid and *knocked him out cold.* It was funny because *although he turned white and was out, his legs kept going* . . . . (ibid., p. 145)

sometimes reflecting the influence of Ultima in the emotions of young Antonio:

> Huddled *in the kitchen* we bowed our heads. There was no sound. "En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y el Espiritu Santo--" I felt Ultima's hand on my head and at the same time *I felt a great force, like a whirlwind, swirl about me.* I looked up in fright, thinking the wind would knock me off my knees. Ultima's *bright eyes held me still.* (ibid., p. 51)

and often reflecting the romantic sentiment of the narrator's memories:

> "Ah, there is no freedom like the freedom of the llano!" my father said and breathed in the fresh clean air. "And there is no beauty like this earth," Ultima said. They looked at each other and smiled, and I realized that from these two people I had learned to love the magical beauty of the wide, free earth. (ibid., p. 217)

Another rhapsodic quality is the heavily symbolic and ritualistic dream descriptions revolving around the "blood" of the Lunas and Marez's, a language which for all its symbolism nevertheless lacks specificity of image and detail:

> It is blasphemy to scatter a man's blood on unholy ground, the farmers chanted. The new son must fulfill his mother's dream. He must come to El Puerto and rule over the Lunas of the valley. The blood of the Lunas is strong in him. He is a Márez, the vaqueros shouted. His forefathers were conquistadores, men as restless as the seas they sailed and as free as the land they conquered. His is his father's blood. (ibid., p. 6)

A similarly ritualistic language emerges in the episodes of the golden carp. Finally, the language of a messianic mysticism which gathers around the image of Ultima gives the nostalgic style its central focus:

> And that is what Ultima tried to teach me, that the tragic consequences of life can be overcome by the magic strength that resides in the human heart. (ibid., p. 237)
>
> Her hand touched my forehead and her last words were, "I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and owls sing in the hills, I shall be with you--" (ibid., p. 247)

All of these stylistic qualities - blurring the limits of the narrator's translator role by code-switching and scattering Spanish phrases homogeneously throughout; using untranslated culture-bound Spanish terms and symbolic names; a vaguely conceived adult narrator who makes frequent use of heavily polarized value descriptors; an irony-free diction of exaggeration reflecting violence, childish vitality, and the sentiment of memory; dreamily imprecise but heavily symbolic dream descriptions; and a language of messianic optimism focused on the figure of Ultima - combine to produce a fictional experience which is simultaneously expressive and escapist. All conflict in *Bless Me, Ultima* is within the Chicano culture itself, with two highly significant but backgrounded exceptions: the seizure of the *llano* by the Anglo intruders, and the distant World War from which the older brothers return. For all the bravado of their vaquero and conquistador heritage the Márez clan has tragically lost its birthright, the open ranges of Eastern New Mexico, to an alien power and is impotent either to recover it or redirect their masculine energies into other activities. Gabriel Márez is reduced to repairing the westward roads of other men. The rage, frustration, and restlessness which is Márez's legacy to his oldest sons is romantically transferred by the narrator to a Poesque curse of the "blood"; its true source is the historic aggression of the dominating Anglo culture, though the narrator summons all the defenses of his imagination against the awareness of that fact. The deepest, most secret, conflict in *Bless Me, Ultima* is between the power of Ultima and the dispossessing power of the invaders who have emasculated the Márez men, a conflict for which the much foregrounded Luna-Márez disputes are only a diversionary tactic, hence the rather wooden and insubstantial tone of these disputes. The domestic drama of Antonio's parents is a ritual displacement of which the now-adult narrator has become dimly and unwillingly aware. Ultima (promise of a potential ultimatum to the usurpers) is the fantasy image of compensatory power through which the narrator hopes to escape the destiny of frustration which has

fallen on his older brothers. Here is the motive and source of the rhapsodic, nostalgic style I have described above: in his mythical retelling of the story of Ultima, the narrator literally seeks a personal "magic" which will either empower him to take up the burden of the historical injustice for which he must eventually demand redress or will grant him a peace from that burden such as she gave to the wandering souls of the three Comanches who had been dispossessed of the *Llano* by the grandfather of Tellez, three souls who are, as Antonio's dream insists, the three dark figures of his brothers, "driven to wander by the wild sea-blood in their veins" (ibid., p. 225). The power Ultima wields is not a real power of the real world but an image of promise, an image of spiritual power which the adult Antonio sees as a promise of his salvation from the historical injustice which has embittered his father and seems destined to consume his brothers.

The Road to Tamazunchale (1975) marks a more accomplished and self-assured stage in the evolution of Chicano prose style. Set in the East Los Angeles barrio during contemporary times, this exquisitely crafted little novel follows an old Chicano encyclopedia salesman, Fausto Tejada, through the last vertiginous, desperate, and glorious week of his life. There is no alter ego of the narrator, no voice elaborating an image of its own origins as in *Pocho* and *Bless Me, Ultima*. In *Tamazunchale* we find a fluency, control, forthrightness, and transparency of style which renders both narrator and novel credible to a degree we cannot feel in either *Pocho* or *Bless Me, Ultima*. Credible because this story projects an expressive image of a man and a culture which is at once more sensory than that of *Pocho* and more "real" than that of *Bless Me, Ultima*, in spite of the incredible and wildly unrealistic turns of its plot.

In *Tamazunchale* the translation illusion strategy almost entirely disappears. There is no direct comment and only the flimsiest of stylistic evidence to suggest that the narrator ever functions as translator of any Spanish-original conversation. With *Tamazunchale* the image of a lost language which the narrator presumes his audience cannot hear or understand has been abandoned. With the evolution of language awareness and control (not assimilation - *Tamazunchale* is not an assimilationist novel), the narrator's sense of inaccessible original experience, the authentic image of his cultural reality which he feels must be "translated," is gone. A tone of adequacy and self-contained wholeness characterize this style. If we examine briefly Chapter Seven, the "wetback" episode in which Fausto plays a minor part and which stands as an especially autonomous event in the novel, we notice the

following. First, though the gathering of barrio residents around the body of the young *mojado* which the children find in the riverbed and their subsequent dealings with him are scenes as deeply imbued with the narrator's sense of Chicano values as is the lynch mob scene in *Bless Me, Ultima*, we cannot with any certainty say, as we can in both *Pocho* and *Bless Me, Ultima*, that the narrator requires us to imagine a scene transpiring "originally" in some other linguistic form than that in which he has rendered it. There are no literal translation devices which call attention to some idiomatic Spanish expression, as in *Pocho*. The children and even the adults speak in common, colloquial English phrases: "'I'm telling!' the other boy said, backing away" (Arias, 1975, p. 57). "'No,' Tiburcio said. 'Leave him alone, he's been through enough. Next you'll want to take off his clothes'" (ibid., p. 58). "'How can you tell?' Smaldino asked" (ibid., p. 59). (This last question is an especially telling note on the cultural ambience as it occurs in response to Fausto's assertion that the dead young man is a "wetback." As other commentaries make clear, the image *Tamazunchale*'s narrator spins is of an emphatically Chicano community at some distance from Mexican "roots" and the realities of Mexican migrants.) Untranslated Spanish phrases (code-switches), however, do occur with only slightly less frequency than in *Bless Me, Ultima*. In this six-page chapter, *quê, mojado, mija (mi hija), vato, tio, no te apures, está bién Señora,* and *chaparrito y con una gorrita* each occur once while the title *Señora* is used three times. A count of such expressions on 15 pages chosen at random gives 0,0,4,1,0,3,1,1,2,1,3,0,3 - not counting proper names.

Most revealing of Arias's particular stylistics of code-switching and his sense of bilingual epistemic options is his use of "wetback"/*mojado* and his description of the naming of the corpse. The narrator of *Tamazunchale* does not fix on certain key words which he always renders in Spanish, as Anaya does with *llano* and *curandera*; the epistemology of Arias's code-switching is more varied, subtle, and at first glance even haphazard. Chapters Seven through Eleven (pp. 57-90) all have wetbacks/*mojados* in primary roles; from the incident of the dead young man the story moves on to a wild scheme (which may all be a feverish fantasy) in which old Fausto brings hundreds of undocumented workers across the border at Tijuana disguised as drunken U.S. sailors, marches them north to Los Angeles where the barrio residents prepare a huge picnic to feed them and then improvise a stage happening at the Los Feliz Theater for the diversion of the visitors; called "The Road to Tamazunchale," the play shows an imaginary busload of people on their way to the semi-legendary village of

Tamazunchale which seems to be death, but only for those who "pretend" to be dead: "Once we're there, we're free, we can be everything and everyone. If you want, you can even be nothing" (ibid., p. 90). At the close actors and audience, including the horde of Mexican guests, all march up a stage ramp into the sky, "and eventually all were lost, diminished, gone between the horizon and the stars."

In these chapters the word "wetback" occurs three times (pp. 59, 70, 71), "*mojado(s)*" eleven times (pp. 59, 63, 66, 67, 72, 81, 82, 83, 84, 86, 90), and "illegals" once (p. 69). "Wetback" occurs only in the first two of these five chapters, and only in the descriptions of the narrative voice, never in direct conversation among barrio residents: "Fausto turned to the young wetback" (p. 70); "The signal was given, and the army of wetbacks rose and started off toward Los Angeles (p. 71); "Fausto, winking at his niece, immediately grasped the situation. David was a wetback" (p. 59). Only in the latter case (actually the first use of the word in the novel) does the narrator say "wetback" when reporting a thought process of one of his characters. Twelve lines later on the same page the word "*mojado*" occurs for the first time: "'You think I don't know a mojado when I see one?'" and the semantic link is subtly joined for the monolingual, non-Chicano audience (who would not have understood *mojado* otherwise) without alienating the bilingual audience whose hackles might well rise in response to the offensive and disparaging connotations of the Anglo word. From pp. 72 to 90 only *mojado* is used, whether in conversation ("'Eva, a few mojados isn't the world.'"), in describing a character's thoughts ("The problem of the mojados called for something drastic, but Fausto had no idea where or how to find a solution."), or in the descriptive voice of the narrator alone ("Filled and belching, the mojados wandered back to the river."). Clearly, Arias's pattern of code-switching in the uses of "wetback"/*mojado* is calculated to lead the reader through a transition into bilingualism if he or she is monolingual, and to avoid offense if he or she already knows. It is a strategy as much artistic and educational as epistemic and provides a concrete instance of Arias's comprehensive image of audience which insistently reaches beyond the alien, monolingual audience to which *Pocho* seeks to explain Richard Rubio, and beyond the narrow Chicano audience which Antonio Márez strives to enchant out of its condition of social marginality and loss; Arias wants both. This image of a universal audience governs his epistemic choice to first project a linguistic distance between the narrator's use of "wetback" and the characters' use of "*mojado*" which is then collapsed as the narrative voice shifts also to the exclusive use of

"*mojado*," the only word that adequately denotes the unique and ambivalent balance of identity and dis-association with which this Chicano reality views the recent, undocumented immigrant. The shift is a calculated, efficient figure of the reader's perspective which is forced by this stylistic use of code-switching to move from the Anglo, outsider's view ("wetback") to the internal, Chicano perspective of Fausto, Tiburcio, Mrs. Rentería, and the children ("*mojado*") as the narrative progresses.

In Chapter Seven, after the children report their discovery of the dead youth in the riverbed, this little scene occurs:

> "David is mine!" Mrs. Rentería shouted for all to hear.
> "David?" Tiburcio asked. "Since when is his name David? He looks to me more like a . . ." Tiburcio looked at the man's face. ". . . a Luis."
> "No, señor!" another voice cried, "Roberto."
> "Que Roberto--Robert!"
> "Antonio."
> "Henry."
> "Lupe!"
> Alex, Ronnie, Armando, Trini, Miguel . . . Everyone had someone.
> Meanwhile Mrs. Rentería left her neighbors who one by one turned away to debate the issue. . . . When the others returned no one noticed the change, for David appeared as breathtaking dressed as he did naked. "You're right," Tiburcio announced, "his name is David . . . but you still can't have him." (Arias, 1975, p. 59)

The reader already knew the outcome of this little naming ritual, since in the first sentence of the chapter the reader is told, "Mrs. Noriega's grandchildren discovered David in the dry riverbed" (ibid., p. 57). He is destined, the narrator seems to suggest, to this Anglo-Jewish name, even though he "looks like a Luis." Mrs. Rentería wants a David and even a corpse will do - especially a corpse will do because there is no David from the South such as she imagines. This poor, dead illegal is no more David than he is alive. The irony of his naming is another resonance of the various ironies of which the chapter is constructed. "They all agreed it was death by drowning. That the river was dry occurred only to the children, but they remained quiet. . . " (ibid., p. 58). So dry, in fact, that when the barrio residents return him to the riverbed after a three-day "honeymoon" with Mrs. Rentería, this "wetback" has to be soaked down with several pitchers of water brought from the house. He is "restored to his former self" by an ancient ritual, but remains dead. The name David, which the narrator mentions was also the name of a small boy who really had drowned in the riverbed years before when an unexpected cloudburst had filled it, serves everyone's needs but his own.

The ironies of this chapter are variations of *Tamazunchale*'s most significant and characteristic stylistic feature, the breakdown of traditional realist and modernist narrative devices for separating "illusion" and "reality" in fictional structure. Here is Arias's deepest yet perhaps least obvious influence from the Spanish. Despite his apparent commitment to English as a creative medium, he is in this regard the most "Latin" of Chicano authors; his artistic apprenticeship has been as much with Borges, Quiroga, d'Assis, Juarroz, Donoso, Benedetti, García Marquez, Rulfo, and Fuentes as with Hemingway, Joyce, Faulkner, Lawrence, Mailer, Updike, or Bellow. It is from these Latin masters that *Tamazunchale* takes its post-Modern techniques and effects: a central character - Marcelino, the Inca alpaca-herder - who originates as the sound of a flute in Fausto's mind, then appears with a herd of alpaca on the LA Freeway (he'd gotten lost in the Andes), but is not actually seen by anyone else in the story until Chapter Six when he appears in Fausto's bathtub and is thereafter one more "person" in the barrio family; a continual blending of "actual" and dream events in the life of the protagonist (Fausto's trip to Peru, his racing trip to Mexico, his smuggling operation, and the whole Los Feliz Theater show); fantastic events depicted in "realistic" detail (the little cloud which blows all about the barrio dropping snow here and there); and dead characters who act alive (Fausto's wife Eva and Fausto himself in the transcendental picnic of Chapter Thirteen when people become foxes, chrysanthemums, a dog's howl, a rustle of wind, and cars prance like horses). As though to confirm this influx of Latin American narrative style which numerous critics have observed in *Tamazunchale*, Arias has referred to a taco vender he once observed in Michoacan as a model of artistic performance. Describing how this "Señor Chivo" heckled, teased, and challenged his customers, Arias notes that his "jiving, cabuleando . . . style of expressing language and experience, this exchange of assaults and retreats, glimpses of truth and untruth, this game-playing with reality" offers the image of a truly epistemic alternative to the crisp, reductive, journalistic prose style so common in American English: "I'm annoyed when someone says they can explain or understand another person completely, as if they were writing *Time* or *Newsweek* epithets: 'Juan Valera, the balding, 40-year-old misogynist from Tijuana.' Poor guy. He's now relegated to the 'known' world of facts.

No mystery, no complexity, no questions. We can drop him and go on to the next item" (Arias, 1976). Having worked as a reporter with the *Buenos Aires Herald*, as a stringer whose exclusives have appeared in *The New York Times* and whose commentaries (most recently on the Falklands/ Malvinas war) continue to appear in *The Los Angeles Times*, Arias's acquaintance with English journalistic style, the proving ground of so many American novelists, is intimate, thorough, and professional. He teaches journalism. But the shape-shifting, double-jointed realities of Chicano experience cannot be encompassed, in his opinion, by that realistic, straightforward, and essentially naive prose style. The mysteries, complexities, and questions of a Fausto Tejada require the shape-shifting narrative techniques which can at present only be learned in Spanish. Surely some part of the critical excitement with which this little novel was received by the Chicano journals is the realization that the interlingual space which its style defines, the "intercultural nothing" which it ascribes to Chicano reality is something considerably more than a river zone between Mexico and the U.S.; it is a space which can reach as far as the Andes and as deep as *Don Quixote*, taking Hollywood in stride between them.

There are three passages of "advice" passed between characters at crucial moments in each of the three novels under discussion, three messages which provide a summarizing view of the stylistic intent and accomplishment of these three works. After a climactic, violent family scene in Chapter Ten of *Pocho*, Juan Rubio gives his son a parting blessing; both father and son are recovering from the trauma of their first physical confrontation, and Richard has now told Rubio for the first time of his aspiration to be a writer.

> "Do you want that more than anything?"
> "Yes, my father. More than anything, and forgive me if I put that before you and my mother."
> "There is nothing to forgive," said Juan Rubio. "Only, never let anything stand in your way of it, be it women, money, or -- what people talk about today -- position. Only that, promise me -- that you will be true to yourself, unto what you honestly believe is right. And, if it does not stand in your way, do not ever forget that you are Mexican." It was Juan Rubio who was now crying.
> "I could never forget that!" said Richard. (Villarreal, 1959, p. 169)

Pocho is a Mexican-American novel and its style partakes only of polarities - Spanish or English, Mexican

or American. Since Richard is not, cannot be, Mexican, he must become an "American" writer, a master of Anglo English who keeps his Spanish at a distance and incorporates it into that English only through clearly identifiable stylistic devices in which a tendency toward literal translation rather than code-switching predominates to the point of echoing that classic English platitude of Shakespeare's Polonius, "To thine own self be true." Again, the irony of that advice in the mouth of Juan Rubio is a figure of the tragic irony of polarities in which the narrator sees Richard trapped. ". . . and forgive me if I put that before you and my mother"; since as we have seen in the symbolic economy of the novel the father is intimately bound to the power and priority of Mexican Spanish as an epistemological system, it is *only* by putting "that" - the professional domination of Anglo English - before his father that Richard has any hope of success. From these authorial determinations, epistemic choices, the style of *Pocho* has its genesis.

I have already called attention to the final words of Ultima to Antonio in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the blessing from which the novel takes its title:

> I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and owls sing in the hills, I shall be with you. (Anaya, 1972, p. 247)

The romantic sentimentality of this prose style - light years distant from the verbal brutalities of *An American Dream* or *Executioner's Song*, from the despairing jocularity of *Giles Goatboy*, or the adolescent metaphysics of *Slaughterhouse Five* - can be taken seriously only if its focus and image of audience are held in mind, only if we remember the social background of loss and marginality and despair against which Ultima speaks and against which the "blessing" of her book rises up. That is, in speaking strictly to a Chicano audience whose historical and psychological needs are adjudged to be distinct and separate from those of the dominant language class, Anaya can generate a deviational prose style calculated to serve those needs. The nostalgic, rhapsodic English style in which the voice of the dying Ultima is cast focuses her advice on that segment of the Chicano audience (of which young Antonio is the embryonic symbol) which is actively searching for its most fundamental images of cultural integrity and power. It is a voice neither credible nor comprehensible to the monolingual Anglo reader. Withdrawn into a gestational isolation, the voice of *Bless Me, Ultima* proclaims a romantic detachment from the dominating

Anglo styles, as its narrative enacts a corresponding detachment from the dominant cultural mores, scientific values, medical arts, and reality principles of the matrix language.

Finally, in the magical tragedy of *The Road to Tamazunchale* a new voice of confidence, promise, and assurance speaks through its protective layers of shape-shifting and disguise. Within the play "The Road to Tamazunchale" in Chapter Eleven (of the novel *The Road to Tamazunchale*) the following dialogue occurs on stage between two actors, an "old man," who is "probably Robert, Smaldino's eldest son," with his face patterned by black crayon wrinkles, and a little girl in pigtails:

> "Mijita . . . everyone should go to Tamazunchale."
> "What's it like?"
> "Like any other place. Oh, a few things are different . . . if you want them to be."
> "What do you mean?"
> "Well, if you see a bird, you can talk to it and it'll talk back. If you want something, it's yours. If you want to be an apple, think about it and you might be hanging from a tree or you might be held in someone's hand, maybe your own."
> "Could I be a flower?"
> "You can be the sun."
> "How 'bout the moon?"
> "You can be the stars. . . ."
> "What if I want to be me again?"
> "Mijita, you can be a song of a million sounds, or you can be a little girl listening to one sound." (Arias, 1975, p. 89)

The old man (who is not really an old man), the girl perceives, is speaking of death (which is not really death): "Tio, are we going to die?" she asks, planting the communal first person plural pronoun squarely against the one reality which ought to cut through every layer of dramatic, narrative, fictional, and personal illusion; yes, mijita, the reader responds to that small voice, "we" are going to die, book, paper, print, author and, perhaps lastly, reader. But Arias's old man confounds that priority, that "natural" response, with an assertion as baffling as it is certain.

> "No one dies in Tamazunchale."
> "No one?"
> "Well, some people do, but they're only pretending."
> "Like in the movies?"
> "Not exactly. They do die, they're even buried and people cry, and some of the men become very drunk. . . ."
> . . .
> "Then what happens to the dead people?"
> "They usually see how stupid it is to die, so they come out of the earth and do something else."
> "Do we have to die if we don't want to?"
> "Not unless you're curious. That's what happens to most people. They have to try it once." (ibid., pp. 89-90)

Are we going to die? "No one dies in Tamazunchale" (Tamazunchale: the play, the novel, the liberated fictive imagination, the mystery which human imagination itself is only the figure of). Do we have to die if we don't want to? "Not unless you're curious." With these questions Chicano fiction addresses a "we" for which the labels "Anglo" and "Chicano" become just that, useless labels. This is decidedly *not* to say, as one reviewer has, that *The Road to Tamazunchale* "transcends Chicano experience." Precisely the contrary. I believe the fictional voice which speaks in this imaginary drama could only have come from the interlingual space of Chicano experience. Its tone of familiar commerce with the dead - reflected in the easy presence of Fausto's dead wife Eva, in the David episode, in Marcelino (who seems like a visible spirit), and culminating in the supra-rational certainties of this dialogue and the vision of Fausto's wake in the final chapter - owes more to the memories of the Mexican Day of the Dead festival (November 2) and its magnificent *ofrendas* of candies and sweet breads, to the vivid intercession of a multitude of *santos* in daily affairs, to the skeletal cartoons of Posada, and the poem "Muerte sin fin" of Jose Gorostiza than to anything in the North American Gothic derived from Edgar Allen Poe. On the other hand, *Tamazunchale*'s conquest of despair, its tone of assurance beyond everything, so evident in the above dialogue, echoes directly that sublime Anglo-American prophecy of Walt Whitman: "To die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier" ("Song of Myself," I.130). Only in that distinctly interlingual Chicano space, of but not in both Mexican and North American linguistic and folk traditions, could a fictional voice in the 1970s find the stylistic grace with which to avoid, to sidestep capably and convincingly the flat realistic "yes" we must feel looming in the little girl's primeval questions: Are we all going to die? Do we have to die if we don't want to? And that, raising yet another faithful and *fidedigna* illusion in the face of death's dominion, is what the art of narration has always been for.

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SECTION V: A BRIEF ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON CHICANO ENGLISH