

WHERE THE BOYS BECOME MEN, AND THE GIRLS NEVER CHANGE:
THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND *ENTWICKLUNGSROMAN* IN POPULAR YOUNG
ADULT LATINA/O AND CHICANA/O GENRE LITERATURE

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Recent iterations of the *Bildungsroman* and *Entwicklungsroman* in Young Adult popular genre literature have featured Latina/o and Chicana/o characters as the primary actors in unprecedented ways. The motivations of the market and the idiosyncratic desire of individual authors to utilize ideas of Latina/o and Chicana/o identity within the dystopian and chica lit/fantasy genres have resulted in texts which adhere to different outcomes for the protagonists depending upon gender.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The literature of adolescence occupies a peculiar space: not yet freed from the pedagogical policing that the literature of childhood undergoes, and overwhelmingly engaged with journeys and problems. A wave of recent young adult novels of fantasy and science fiction (often hybrid with other genres) featuring Latina/o and Chicana/o protagonists has come to occupy this peculiar space, existing at the nexus of a mass of conflicting expectations and claims on the parts of authors, publishers, educators, readers and critics.

Educators of the readers of these novels stake a claim for the importance of the "authenticity" of the protagonists, while publishers of YA novels target the market of Latina/o and Chicana/o adolescents for their buying dollars. Authors have varying levels of investment in the ethnicity of their characters, and critics have yet to focus much attention on these most recent popular novels. Finally, the adolescent readers, whom all the hue and cry is supposedly directed around, exist as voiceless consumers, whose power is limited to whether or not they buy particular books, or check them out from the library. Or are they? For just as the intentions of today's authors are now more transparent than ever, thanks to the near-ubiquitous blogs that they keep, the reading responses of teens are available in an unprecedented way, thanks to the social networking tools of the Web 2.0.

The recent YA novels are splicing genres, creating narratives that are often problematic. Fascinatingly, the novels' use of genres is almost exclusively divided along gender lines. The YA dystopian novels usually feature male protagonists, and when they do, they are also *Bildungsromane*. While focusing on Latino or Chicano

characters, these hybrid *Bildungsromane* do not acknowledge the tradition of the Chicano or Latino *Bildungsroman* and the ways in which it differentiated itself from the prototypical white, male *Bildungsroman*. The chica lit novels are not straight chica lit; they are also fantasy novels. Interestingly, their protagonists do not achieve the journey of the *Bildungsroman*-reworkings for the different journeys that women undergo in their coming-of-age stories notwithstanding. Annie O. Eysturoy explains:

Realistic representations of the male *Bildungs* process reveal what Joanne Frye identifies as a general "assumption of male autonomy" (4), and while the traditional goal of this process is an "accommodation to the modern world" (Buckley, 17), such accommodation does not threaten the protagonist's autonomy nor his perception of his own manhood. When we turn to the female *Bildungsroman*, however, it soon becomes clear that a realistic representation of the female *Bildungs* process, which follows the traditional pattern of portraying individual accommodation to socio-cultural and cultural norms of womanhood, norms that are antithetical to an autonomous and self-defined female identity. Thus, when women authors unquestioningly follow the realistic premises of the traditional *Bildungsroman* the female protagonist will most likely, as Joanne Frye argues, "succumb to the femininity text" and "grow into the enclosing grid of the known social expectations" (78). Whether we call it the "femininity text" as Frye does, the "Love Story plot" (Russ, 9), or the "social romance" (Langland, 113), these are literary plot conventions of a tradition of "patriarchal poetics" (Gilbert and Gubar, 72) that invariably confine women characters to either passive domesticity, that is, marriage and maternity, or madness and death. (29-30)

While Eysturoy makes it clear how impossible it is for a female *Bildungsroman* to mirror the similar male narrative, it is a curious and intriguing fact that neither the dystopian nor the hybrid chica lit-fantasy novels with Chicana or Latina protagonists ultimately enact any model of coming of age story. Instead, these novels are *Entwicklungsroman*, a distinction Roberta Trites elucidates:

We should take more care in using the term *Bildungsroman*, not merely in an effort to uphold some sort of precious academic hairsplitting, but because in distinguishing coming of age novels (*Bildungsromane*) from novels of development (*Entwicklungsromane*), we can pay more attention to the relationship between power and growth that shapes adolescent

literature. . . Many of the YA novels that emerged in the 1970s that have subsequently been referred to as "problem novels" are *Entwicklungsromane*: the character grows as s/he faces and resolves one specific problem. But because of the time span of the *Entwicklungsromane*, the protagonist of the problem novel is rarely an adult by the end of the narrative. (13-4).

In the recent novels I examine, fantasy and science fiction serve as a device, a backdrop against which concerns about the ways in which today's world have an impact on teenage identity formation can be teased apart. Yet the emergence of the dystopian in young adult literature has itself been problematic:

From 1970 onward, SF books aimed at the children's and teen market were increasingly written by "writers for children" who did not also write for the adult field. Their books became increasingly concerned with those kinds of issues associated with the new YA subgenre, a genre with very different values from the old juvenile SF. The passage from juvenile sciencefiction to YA was not seamless: YA was not simply a fashionable new category, it described a different ideology of teenagehood and the teenage reader.

And this ideology, still in vogue, is not a hopeful one:

In the new YA novels, adulthood as defined by the world of work was replaced by adulthood defined by the world of relationships. And perhaps because of YA literature's preoccupation with social problems, sciencefiction for teens became increasingly a place for adults to warn the young about the future. . . Very few SF books published for the teen market since 1970 saw the future as something to look forward to, and the downbeat books. . .are downright doom-mongering and disempowering. (Mendlesohn 157)

Nancy Farmer's 2002 novel *The House of the Scorpion*, Edward Bloor's 2007 novel *Taken*, and Susan Pfeffer's 2008 *the dead & the gone* all feature Latino/Chicano characters struggling with the challenges of such "doom-mongering and disempowering" versions of the future, to varying degrees. Yet young adult literature need not be hopeful, and the *Bildungsroman* has always utilized various kinds of settings to thrash out the problems of the necessarily self-centered adolescent. What makes several recent YA science fiction and fantasy novels so interesting is that their

Latino/Chicano teenager protagonists are the first to take center stage in this genre. Literature for young adults has a strong history of producing realist Latino fiction written by Latino authors, while fantasy and/or science fiction has “has historically tended to be a very white genre. Most of its writers have been Caucasian as have its characters, and most of its readers were presumed to be Caucasian” (Levy 518). A recent study of middle school genre fiction, which surveyed reviews from prominent journals of books intended for fifth through eighth graders, a lack of prominent characters of color was found, and an almost total absence of prominent Latino characters:

Smith (2000) noted the scarcity of African American characters in children’s and young adult fantasy novels. Our study supports Smith’s observation. Only 62 (6 percent) of the 976 reviews of youth fantasy novels featured a protagonist or secondary character of color. Again, the majority of the protagonists of color were either of African, Asian, or American Indian descent. We concur with Smith’s conclusion that publishers must seek more high quality fantasy novels featuring not only African American protagonists, but protagonists of color in general. Adult science fiction is often seen as White-dominated. Few African Americans write adult science fiction, although the number is rising (Dery, 1994). Similarly, Valenzuela (1997) lamented the lack of Hispanic authors and characters in adult science fiction. Our study suggests that youth science fiction is also White-dominated. Only 5 percent, or 18, of the 387 reviews included a protagonist or secondary character of color. Unlike the other genre categories, where even though the numbers were low there was relative ethnic/racial diversity, each of the minority characters portrayed fell into one of three cultural groups: African, Asian, or American Indian. We found no science fiction featuring a Hispanic person in a leading or secondary role. (Agosto 268-9)

Recent iterations of the *Bildungsroman* in Chicano and Latino genre literature geared toward young adult readers demonstrate how this framework is being used to explore and illustrate “ethnic” identity without any changes from how it has historically been used to tell the coming of age stories of white adolescents. These narratives represent a return to the classical *Bildungsroman*, a symbolic selection of the allegorical journey of the young white male as the model for Latino and Chicano youths. The

reasons for this superficial, retrogressive use of the white model of the *Bildungsroman*, or the employment of the *Entwicklungsroman* in preference to the *Bildungsroman* are multifold. Chicano and Latino authors are faced with varied and simultaneous pressures that shape the ways in which they present the YA stories of their Latino and Chicano characters, while white authors are not always skilled at or invested in bringing to light authentic portrayals of ethnic characters. In their hybrid genre novels, Kim Flores and Alisa Valdes-Rodrigues utilize the form of the *Entwicklungsroman*, a move that can be interpreted as fairly common to YA novels, but also as a missed opportunity for creating genre stories of Latina protagonists who embrace their ethnicity. Though Valdes-Rodrigues scorns the “magical realism ghetto” that she perceives other Latina authors as inhabiting, she in fact is placing herself in an even more marginal position, attempting to create a successful chica lit-fantasy hybrid which features a Latina characters who relates to her ethnic identity by downplaying her culture.

It is important to note the ways in which the hybrid chica lit novels to be discussed differ from magical realism. Magical realism, as Scott Simpkins discusses, deals in an ambitious manner with the nature of reality:

To prevent an overwhelming sense of disbelief, magic realists present familiar things in unusual ways (flying carpets, Nabokovian butterflies, mass amnesia, and so on) to stress their innately magical properties. By doing this, magic realists use what the Russian formalists call defamiliarization to radically emphasize common elements of reality, elements that are often present but have become virtually invisible because of their familiarity. And through a process of supplemental illusions, these textual strategies seem to produce a more realistic text. But whether this endeavor succeeds is another matter. (Simpkins 147)

But in fantasy-chica lit novels, only one element of the entire fictional universe is fantastical--a power possessed by the teenage protagonist--while the rest is often determinedly prosaic. In *Haters*, published in 2006, her first novel for young adults,

Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez employs many of the conventions of the chick-lit genre that have made her 2004 novel “Dirty Girls’ Social Club,” so popular. Her heroine is able to conquer the heights of her high school hierarchy with the help of her supernatural gifts. Kim Flores’ 2008 *Gamma Glatma* deals with many of the same concerns regarding popularity and consumer culture, but with an intriguing twist—the teenage heroine supposedly conquers through her scientific talents, which seem more fantastical. The hybridization of ethnic identity and identity as an individual with powers beyond the normal that teenage girls must struggle to navigate in *Haters* and *Gamma Glatma* is messy in the same way that these novels represent a hybridization of genre: having moved beyond the solidly accepted realist tradition of coming of age novels in Chicano and Latino literature, the YA hybrid chica lit-fantasy novel must find a niche in the publishing world.

Nancy Farmer’s 2002 novel *The House of the Scorpion*, Edward Bloor’s 2007 novel *Taken*, and Susan Pfeffer’s 2008 *the dead & the gone* all feature adolescent Latino characters struggling with the challenges of defining their identities in variously horrific apocalyptic versions of the future. Subject to the same marketing conditions which push formulaic genre fiction to a teenage audience as the hybrid chica lit novels, these dystopian fictions often feature characters which seem only superficially Latino. Even more problematic, their white authors have sometimes been explicit, via their internet sites geared towards their fans, about the ways in which authenticity of their Latino and Chicano characters are not at stake for them. For example, the protagonist’s identity as a Mexican young man can be read as a sort of Trojan horse for the political beliefs of his white author Nancy Farmer, who works to explicitly connect the dots

between the events in her *Bildungsroman*, *The House of the Scorpion* and her very conservative political views on illegal immigration for her teen and preteen audience in the fan mail portion of her website.

The question of which ethnic characters are "fake" and which are "real" and who, in an idealistic or intellectual sense, gets to tell what stories is bedeviled in popular YA fiction by the cross-current of who gets to publish what stories. Ultimately, are the recent YA popular fictions dealing with Latino/Chicano identity exploring these questions of growth and belonging in a meaningful way, or simply marketing formulaic genre fiction to a teenage audience? Critics extort educators to carefully evaluate young adult texts which present Latino or Chicano characters in terms of the authenticity of said characters:

Authenticity in Latino children's literature is an important concept, which more often than not can only be initially identified as a feeling. Developing one's sensitivity to cultivate such a feeling can be difficult, but it's not impossible with the help of adult Latino and Chicano literature...Children's literature specialists. . . should. . .read adult literature such as Gloria Anzaldua's *The Borderlands /La Frontera*...We have...*The House on Mango Street*. We have. . .*The Heart of Aztlan* and *Bless Me, Ultima*." (Italiano 131)

Though the state of ethnic literature written for adults has moved beyond the days of the Harlem Renaissance when the debate over whether only positive portrayals of African-Americans should be depicted held sway, in the young adult genre, the perception by authors and critics that texts serve a didactic function demands that the literature be questioned on several levels. In the realm of literature for children, the concern over the educational nature of books has led librarians to develop guidelines to aid in selecting books that feature Latino/a and Chicano/a characters. A selection tool for libraries published by Dr. Jamie C. Naidoo in 2007, called "Evaluating Children's

Picture books about Latinos: Individual Title Evaluation Sheet” features a series of questions. A few examples:

7. Do Latinos need the help of Anglo (white) people to solve their problems?
8. Do Latinos have to abandon some aspect of their culture in order to achieve happiness?
12. Are Latino characters in culturally stereotyped roles such as newly arrived immigrants, men full of machismo, shy girls, mothers of many children, or gang members?
14. Are Latinos only depicted as poor low class citizens often living in barrios (Latino neighborhoods)?
16. Are females depicted outdoors and as equally active as male characters?
19. Do all of Latino characters have the same physical appearance? (The diversity in skin tones, hairstyles and textures, and clothing should be presented. Not all Latinos have a “Latin Look” of dark skin, hair, and eyes.)

When the experts insist upon the importance of "authenticity" but put forth either hyper-specific or vague, emotive suggestions on how to evaluate this quality, it becomes difficult to retain the argument of "authenticity" as a determining factor in pinpointing the nature of successful portrayals of Latino and Chicano characters. Yet Naidoo and Italiano, in their engagement with a concern over the utilization of Latino and Chicano characters as something other than themselves in children's and young adult literature, gesture towards the heart of the real trend towards concern over the exploitation of the utilization of Latino and Chicano characters:

Although debates about legitimacy often undergird discussions of adult ethnic texts, authenticity becomes a particularly potent issue for children's literature because of the didactic imperatives both embedded in the texts and imposed contextually by adult arbiters. Since narrative can influence political realities, those adults who purchase and distribute children's texts recognize their responsibility to offer "true depictions of ethnic experience,

particularly when those books are endorsed by institutional structures. Likewise, authors writing to children realize that their texts can influence a child's socialization, and so work consciously to respond to prejudiced narratives of ethnicity through signification, allusion, and confrontation. Texts recoup lost heroes, fill the gaps of historical memory, subvert ethnic stereotypes, and advance revisionary versions of cultural identity. Children's texts are often intensely dialogic: they interact with biased versions of the past that have previously been fortified within the classroom setting. (Smith 6)

While educators and critics may evaluate young adult literature in didactic and developmental terms, publishers and often authors are assessing the currency of books featuring Latino and Chicano characters in purely commercial terms. It is important to note, that as Roberta Trites has described, the construct of young adult books as a category is itself a commercial creation:

YA novels are certainly a marketplace phenomenon of the twentieth century. Adults create these books as a cultural site in which adolescents can be depicted engaging with the fluid, market-driven forces that characterize the power relationships that define adolescence. After all, publishers rather than teenagers bestow the designation "YA" on these books. Even when authors have not intentionally written for adolescents, they invariably portray adolescents engaged in a domination-repression model, so authors, too, are complicitous in the process (7-8).

Amanda Morrison describes the way in Latina/os have come to be perceived as a formidable market to be targeted:

From the point of view of the cultural industries, Latina/os constitute a sizeable and lucrative consumer base to tap into, much like enterprising industrialists tap into and exploit the natural resources of fertile, "underdeveloped" terrain. The 2000 US Census affirmed this fact when it revealed that Latina/os or "Hispanics" (the federal government's preferred term) now comprise the largest minority group in the United States. Leading economists predict that Latino buying power—disposable income available spending on goods and services after taxes—will exceed US\$1 trillion by 2010 (Humphries 7). (309)

In light of this view of Latina/os as a “lucrative consumer base” with spending power, it is no surprise that publishers are attempting to capitalize upon the YA demographic of the Latina/o market:

"Topeka Heights," the new urban contemporary book series for minority teens, brings the mystery of Nancy Drew, the magic of Harry Potter and the thrill of the Hardy Boys to *young* men and women of today's hip-hop culture and urban world. Alien Publishing, USA, a new literary giant, is pleased to announce the *publishing* debut of the first two books in author Jennifer Burton's "Topeka Heights" series, "Princess' Journey" and "Christopher's Dilemma," on November 15. This unique fictional book series caters to the literary proclivities, interests and abilities of teenagers living in urban America. . . Representing a diversity of minority groups including African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians and others, these *young adults* harmoniously coexist, embrace the multicultural "advantage" and boldly express the issues that impact their lives. (News 22)

As Yampbell notes,

The publishing industry is a product of its culture as a producer as well as a site of cultural creation and meaning. Through its varied marketing strategies, it often perpetuates, albeit sometimes unintentionally, divisive binaries—hegemonic notions of gender definition and division. Sales drive the bottom line for publishers, so they want to figure out how to expand their audience. Consequently, they are forced to consider, and act upon, these and other culturally constructed labels. (365)

In support of sales, many authors are now personally maintaining an online presence, often one that allows them to interact with fans. All five of the authors to be discussed herein have websites and/or blogs. This proliferation of blogs and websites, while serving publisher's marketing needs, also allows one to gather more insight into the process and motivation of writers than ever before, insight which in the case of several of the new YA dystopian novels to be examined, explains their superficial employment of Latino or Chicano ethnic identity. Trites explains why "identity politics" is so important in YA fiction:

Identity politics matter most in adolescent literature. . .in terms of how an adolescent's self-identifications position her within her culture. How an adolescent defines herself in terms of race, gender, and class often determines her access to power in her specific situation. We can surface the myriad intricacies that affect identity politics in a YA novel if we ask ourselves, "Who controls the discourse in this narrative?" Mae Gwendolyn Henderson suggests analyzing the "dialogic of differences" and the "dialectic of identity" to get at the power struggles embedded in a narrative. She defines the "dialogic of differences" as the discourses that occur between the Self and Other and the "dialectic of identity" as the dialogue with Self that occurs internally. (48)

Therefore, when the discourse between the "Self" and the "Other" is false, or when the Latino "Self" is merely a shadow who exists in concert with the "Other," the resulting power dynamics that are enacted in novels such as *Taken, the dead and the gone*, and *House of the Scorpion* are hopelessly false and unproductive for the adolescent reader.

CHAPTER TWO LATINO AND CHICANO CHARACTERS IN DYSTOPIAS

In perhaps the most distasteful of the recent crop of YA dystopian novels exploring Latino identity, Edward Bloor's novel *Taken* presents a white girl and her father who don new identities in order to pass for Mexican and minister to the poor. In this problematic exploration of affluence and poverty, Bloor tells the story of a girl who achieves a "political awakening" through the experience of being kidnapped by her father, who is posing as a domestic terrorist in order to free himself from the confines of his bourgeois life. Though Bloor does not trade in many of the stereotypical concerns of popular "chick lit," *Taken* evinces much of the same consumerist focus as this genre.

An idealized preoccupation with the sanctity of poverty and the desire to assume a more socially useful, "authentic" yet ethnically non-specific Latino identity motivate the father in this dystopian novel for teens. The white protagonist, Charity Meyers, lives in a gated community called The Highlands. She is cared for and served by servants of color. She attends school with a group of similarly privileged teenagers via the internet. But her father, a wealthy doctor, grows dissatisfied with his life, and concocts a plot to kidnap his own daughter, with the twin goals of relocating to Mexico to volunteer his surgical skills, and escaping the responsibility of alimony payments to his ex-wife.

In Bloor's dystopian future, being "taken" is a threat that all rich children are familiar with, as the protagonist tells us: "if you lived in The Highlands, like I did, then you were an expert on kidnapping" (2). Much of the novel is spent directing the reader at red herrings, infusing the kidnapping with a sense of danger that is ultimately shown to be false. The idea of performance and masking, connected with names and naming, emerges as a significant preoccupation, one which is connected to notions of

authenticity, for Bloor. Many of the rich children have virtue names, while their servants have assumed traditionally British names, as per the terms of their employment in the novel's bizarrely anglophiliac compound. The servants in Charity's household are called Victoria and Albert. Their identities and ethnicities are fodder for Charity's curiosity. Of the pair, she says, "genetically, he was somewhat of a puzzle to me. He worked as our English butler, but he was probably of Caribbean origin. Victoria, on the other hand, was clearly of Mexican origin...She was Mexican, with an English name, but worked as our French maid" (15-16).

Charity does not know the real names of her servants, as one of her kidnappers points out to her in a charged exchange that highlights many of the presumptions and stereotypes that Charity and, by extension, the reader, must be disabused of. In one particularly significant interlude in a series of conversations that take place in the ambulance that Charity is kidnapped in, the unnamed kidnapper, heretofore identified only as "the dark boy," schools Charity on language and comprehension. Though the point seems to be to undercut stereotypes, ultimately the same old notions are trotted out as the kidnapper makes a case for the superiority of Romance languages over Haitian Creole:

The word *Creole*, with the capital C, describes Haitian Creole as a civilized language worthy of capitalization, just like French or English. But in fact it is not a civilized language. It is a creole, with a small c, which is defined as a civilized language mixed with the language of a savage tribe. In the case of Haitian Creole, you have the language of the civilized masters, the French, mixed with the languages of the many African tribes that they enslaved. No disrespect to my *fres* and *ses*, but their language is a textbook example of a creole with a small c (44).

The insidious hazards for the reader of inculcating new prejudices while her old ones are ostensibly being debunked cannot be understated. The reader absorbs a sense of

heightened consciousness regarding social issues that may have never occurred to her, a superiority charged with the presumed power and authenticity of the minority voice. Yet despite his cultural machismo, the “dark boy” chooses a name that Charity can refer to him by, and his choice is Dessi. Dessi explains the origin of his name: “Jean Jacques Dessalines was a hero in Haiti. He drove the French out in 1803. He massacred the whites and made himself the emperor. He won a great victory for the slaves” (80).

Nestled in the middle of the book is a critique of the use of fiction as a didactic tool, as Dessi explains why he dislikes the “Ramiro Fortunato” series, an imaginary line popular with many characters in *Taken*: “They are social engineering. They are telling someone like me how to behave, how to be a good boy. And they double nicely as military recruiting” (82). In consciously positioning himself as part of the debate on literature as political tool, Bloor opens himself up to a more cutting examination of the politics of his novel. If his aim is to politicize and enlighten, then how to understand the facile ways in which ethnicity is manipulated in the novel? Whole geographic areas are dismissed as dangerous, the provenance of criminals: “Even now, there are parts of Florida and Texas that are beyond reach of regular police forces. And from there, who knows? The Caribbean, Mexico, South America? Once you are gone to one of those places, you stay gone” (4). After her “kidnapping,” Charity “consumes” identity by acquiring goods that allow her to “look Mexican”—she applies her father’s self-tanning product in order to achieve darker skin and buys a Guatemalan jacket, a false note Bloor seems oblivious to. By the end of the novel, Charity has assumed a superficial, culturally vacant identity as a “Latina girl:”

As before, a large vidscreen has been set up on the side of the stage...I moved forward carefully until I could see both my father and me on it. My father had very dark skin, and the white hair and white bushy mustache of an elderly Hispanic man. He looked somewhat hunched, as though he'd spent a lifetime picking lettuce.(He did not look that way in his clinic, though, as Dr. Nueves.) I looked more like his granddaughter, *su nieta*, than his daughter, *su hija*. My straight brown hair was gone--it was now curly and black. . .My derma was three shades darker than it had been, too. I was wearing a Guatemalan corte jacket with deep pockets...(225)

Ultimately, Bloor's exploration of Latino identity feels a bit like the apocryphal school report that Charity describes to Victoria: "It's about the global community. We each had to spin the globe and put our finger down on a random spot and write about someone from that spot. I have to write about a man living in Mexico City" (127).

Science fictions for boys are very different than those for girls. The exploration of the limits of the patriarchal system is an intrinsic component of YA dystopian fictions for girls. As Kennon explains,

In their exploration of their own subjectivities, the young female protagonists must address the claims of individual self-actualisation while re-assessing the validity and appeal of traditional hierarchical systems of authority located in a radically changed and hostile world. (42)

While the science fiction and fantasy novels for girls explore ethnic identity through consumption, Susan Pfeffer's *the dead & the gone*, and Nancy Farmer's *House of the Scorpion* explore the ways in which ethnic identity is recreated and reframed by boys within dystopian universes.

Pfeffer's 2006 novel for boys, *the dead and the gone*, the second in her "Moon Crash" trilogy, is problematic in the extreme, due to the enthusiastic manner in which it perpetuates ethnic stereotype and sexism. Ostensibly the story of a Nuevo Rican teenage boy, Alex Morales, and his family, markers of ethnic identity are virtually absent from the novel. While the entire trilogy focuses on the aftermath of a meteor

hitting the moon and its effects on the earth, the books before *the dead and the gone* features a female protagonist and this book is an *Entwicklungsroman* in which the upper middle class white heroine does not lose her parents or evolve or change into adulthood. Only the book focusing on a male protagonist becomes a *Bildungsroman*, for in Pfeffer's conception of the future, the world is simply too dangerous for a woman to be without the protection of a male.

Pfeffer publishes the notes she made in the writing process on her blog, allowing a greater degree of insight into her motivation as a white author writing about Latino characters:

The first is that a lot of things I thought would happen in the book never did. The second is that all three of the major characters changed their names. Carlos became Alex, because I prefer the name Alex. Niki became Julie, because I was concerned Niki sounded too much like Sammi, a name I used in *Life As We Knew It*. And Juliette became Briana because Niki became Julie. Family is Latino because I don't want another white upper middle class family.

Pfeffer's notion that the choice to make the character Latino is simply an alternative to the presentation of the ethnic majority, that it can be slipped onto a character as easily as a new name, is offensive, particularly when one teases out the implications.

Apparently, according to Pfeffer, poverty is to affluence, as Latino is to white. When a meteor hits the moon, Alex and his siblings are left without parents, and must rely on the Catholic Church and various wealthy white men in order to survive. Over and over again, Pfeffer seems to conflate Catholicism and sexism with Puerto Rican identity, a sloppiness that leaves her open to the accusation of exploiting the idea of being Latino for marketability, but is most likely attributable to personal prejudice. Alex is a poor young man, and much of the struggle surrounding his attempts at identity formation is

centered around his class status. Not surprisingly, given the genesis of his character, Alex's ethnic identity is almost blank.

Pfeffer leans on the crutch of *machismo* stereotype to flesh out her character's "Puerto Rican-ness." There are countless examples of Alex's sexism, apparently learned from the elder men in his family, yet a dearth of examples of any authentic markers of ethnic identity. Alex refers to his mother and father as "Mami" and "Papi," and we know that when the meteor hits the moon, Papi is home in Puerto Rico for a funeral. He refers to a tenant in the building his father supervises as a *bruja*; and Alex's uncle owns a bodega. These four scant details are the only markers of Latino identity that are given. In contrast, the novel overflows with sexist ideology. After the meteor hits, Alex decides "he had to be strong, the way Papi or Carlos would be" (97). Despite being only two years older, Alex decides to send one of his sisters away to a convent upstate: "The nuns will look after you, and you'll make lots of friends. The important thing is you'll be safe...if I can find a safe place for Julie, I'll send her there. I'm responsible for the two of you, at least until Papi or Mami come back" (94). This unabashed sexism appears to be an intrinsic component of the dystopian world Pfeffer has created. In the first book in her "Moon Crash" trilogy, *Miranda*, the female protagonist comes to the realization that she cannot attend school anymore, because as a girl, she must live in fear:

Why do you need the police? Has anyone attacked you?' I shook my head. 'Well, it's not wise for a girl your age to be out by herself,' the guard said. 'I won't let my daughters or my wife go outside anymore unless I'm with them.' The other guard nodded. 'Times like these, you can't be too careful,' he said. 'I won't let my daughters or my wife go outside anymore unless I'm with them.' 'Thank you,' I said...I shivered the entire ride home. Every shadow, every unexpected noise, made me jump. (Life/Pfeffer 178)

Despite the apparent handicap of her gender, Miranda and her family, led by her single mother, survive because of their own intelligence and perseverance. In stark contrast, Alex and his family are extremely dependent upon others. Alex endures greater hardship than Miranda--losing his parents, and watching his sister grow ill and eventually die, trapped, in the elevator of their building. Thanks to a rich, white classmate from the exclusive school that Alex attended on scholarship, Alex is initiated into the practice of scavenging corpses for goods he can sell to a black-market dealer:

Kevin shook his head. 'You act like you never saw a dead body before,' he said. 'What are you, a tourist?' 'I don't know,' Alex said. 'It's different actually tou-ching them.' 'It'll be us soon enough, Kevin said. 'Tell you what. Let's get our feet wet and walk up a couple more blocks. Then we'll turn this stuff in. When all this turns into loaves and fishes, you'll have a different outlook. (156)

Pfeffer presents an uncomplicated view of the uses of power that owes much to the dystopian setting. The wealthy parents of Alex's classmates have the power to escape New York as the entire infrastructure crumbles into chaos and lawlessness. As conditions deteriorate, the black market dealer offers what appears to be a way for Alex to enact their escape from the island of Manhattan, but this hope is brutally destroyed. Julie, his youngest sister, was given a winning lottery ticket. Yet the lottery ticket is now useless, and the black market dealer, far from accepting the ticket in exchange for food, offers to buy Julie and sell her to an unknown man. Alex must seek out the father of his best friend, a rich classmate who was able to leave New York City directly after the meteor strike:

Papi taught me the most important thing a man can do is protect the women he loves. I have to protect you and Julie, and I've been trying the best I can until now. But conditions are getting worse, so I've made arrangements for all of us...Remember Chris Flynn? His father gave me passes for the three of us to take us to a safe place, a place where the families of really important people go. (259)

Pfeffer's version of the dystopian is Hobbesian in nature, and revives many tired, sexist and racist tropes that one would hope had been laid to rest. Mendelsohn describes a particular kind of YA science fiction that seems to limit the scope of the possible world, a subset that the dead and the gone seems to participate in:

Many young adult novels position maturity as something that is measured in terms of the teenager's response to the family. These novels feel more frustrating than the chapter books because the potential for teenagers to spread their wings is so much greater, yet the heroes of these books seem in many ways more, not less, tied to the family as the focus of their lives. These books are intensely solipsistic, creating a science fiction that lacks wider consequence. These are the books whose concerns are essentially to use SF as the scenery against which a discussion of personal issues can take place, and which substitute the attainment of emotional maturity for any kind of encouragement of curiosity or response to the universe. (303)

In Pfeffer's conception of the dystopian, women are deprived of power, subject to the constant threat of attack, reduced to the state of perpetual childhood. Boys, on the other hand, are transformed into men, who must provide for their dependent females. The rich, who are white, survive, and the poor, who are frequently ethnic minorities, perish. Latino ethnicity exists merely to provide a counterpoint to the white majority. Interestingly, *the dead and the gone* is a *Bildungsroman* by virtue of the transformation that Alex undergoes. He begins the novel as a boy, and ends it as an adult. He goes away from home, never to return presumably, as his home has been rendered uninhabitable by the meteor strike. By experiencing the loss of loved ones, witnessing violent death, and becoming the head of a household, responsible for its survival, Alex becomes an adult in an extremely compressed space of time. The novel unambiguously communicates that there will be no return to childhood for Alex, as he now does what a man must do.

CHAPTER 3 THE CHICA LIT HYBRID

While publishers are eager to capitalize on what they see as the new, "untapped" Latina/o market, YA novels featuring female protagonists are still overwhelmingly white, straight, in the genre of realism, and uncomplicated by any "unpleasant" topics such as racism or sexism:

The data show that the great majority of female protagonists recommended across the professional literature are still white and members of the middle class. Moreover, I found a lack of intersection between gender, class, race and sexual identities across all the recommended young adult subgenres. This means, for example, that the protagonists are either of colour or queer, but seldom both. In her thorough review of young adult gay literature, Jenkins (1998) found that only about 3% of the thirty four gay/queer novels published between 1993 and 1997 addressed race, ethnicity and class. Novels such as *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (Woodson, 1995), in which the central storyline revolves around the young adult (male) protagonist's black mother and her amorous relationship with a white woman, is a rare exception even across the LGBT genre (Jenkins, 1998). As Taxel (2002) points out, nonmainstream voices are too often silenced across fictional literature and 'ignored by society's dominant modes of cultural expression' (p. 180). In fact, Taxel also states that fictional novels that deal with multiple, complex, realistic issues such as race relations, prejudice, discrimination and homophobia are 'deemed risque' (Taxel, 2002, p. 179); thus publishers perceive their marketability as limited.

Fantasy is emerging as an area in which Latino characters are becoming better represented, particularly in works that are hybrids of the chican lit genre. Fantasy ideally serves as a space of possibility, for self-actualization, both in terms of gender and ethnicity. Lea states:

It is in the "space between" that the reader fill in the gaps regarding this secondary world and perceives it through the lens of their own culture and experience (Benton, 1992; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Harding, 1962; Iser, 1978). This is the very essence, if not purpose, of fantasy: that the readers ultimately analyze and readjust their own world view by comparing and contrasting it to what is presented in the fantasy world. Higgins (1970) describes this process in emphasizing not the imaginary world created by the author, but rather the ability of the author to entice the reader to willingly suspend disbelief when entering the secondary world. He writes that

“inventiveness...is not to be judged by how far out the imagination of the writer may take his readers, but rather by the degree to which he can make the readers believe in the world he has created. After they have believed, finally returning to their own world, to what measure then will their own world seem different to them?” (Higgins, 1970, p. 28)

The transformation that fantasy and its attendant powers enacts brings young women power, but only within existing, limiting structures of social institutions. The magical or fantastical powers that the heroines of Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez's *Haters* and Kim Flores *Gamma Glatma* acquire, far from allowing them to escape or explode the constraints of their lives, actually function to root them far more firmly within the realities of their lives, fulfilling roles approved of by adults, only allowing them to achieve within already conceived of identities and activities. The fantastical powers that the heroines possess serve to allow them to achieve ends so narrow that they hardly deserve to be described as fantastical. The average teenager existing outside of the confines of the fictional realm of fantasy would be better equipped to “disturb the universe” by imagining more and better uses to put the powers that the heroines in novels such as *Gamma Glatma* and *Haters* are able. For all their claims to power, their abilities are confined to the realms of the material and superficial, a characteristic of their nature as a product of a hybrid genre: fantasy and chica lit. Yet to dismiss the tame nature of their use of teenage powers as simply part of the model of the genre is to participate in the cultural model which dismisses the teenage girl as limited.

Gamma Glatma and *Haters* belong to a new strain of YA chick lit that differs from its predecessor in being less preoccupied with sex and partying:

A version of chick lit has emerged that is comparatively benign in its message, even though it may be decorated with some of the markings of the books described above. At the center of this pattern is a girl who finds herself an outsider at her school, either because she is newly arrived from somewhere else or because of actual physical or social differences. The

school is dominated by the Queen Bitch and her friends, who are the most cool, the most popular, the most desired. The QB is rich and beautiful, but mean, always ready to tease and torment those less cool than herself or her chosen few. The outsider girl yearns to be accepted by this powerful in-group, even when she becomes the target of their jibes. She subverts her own real identity in the effort to fit in with the ruling group, copies their clothes and accepts their values, but eventually (and here is where the pattern differs) becomes disillusioned with them and regains her integrity (Campbell 489).

The complicated role that fantasy plays in young adult chica lit novels becomes apparent when each of these novels end with the heroine, with all her supposed powers, having been integrated into the dominant white culture of her high school, her powers neatly tucked away, her ethnic identity subsumed. The heroines have seemingly made gains—becoming more popular, more attractive, more endowed with consumer goods. But the ethnic identity that has served as window dressing throughout the novels—the sprinkling of Spanish phrases that even the most monolingual English speaker can figure out from context, the consumption of dishes that are proto-typically Mexican--this ethnic identity is unable to grow stronger, or explode beyond its stereotypical confines. The protagonists are uncertain about the degree to which they wish to identify with their ethnic heritage. Their behavior as teenagers and their attitude towards their ethnic identity are conflated—they reject adults and the ways in which they “act Mexican” or “Latino” in the same way in which they reject adults in their taste in music, or their other behaviors. In these fantasy chica lit novels, one sees no politicized teenagers, and no young women who take pride in their ethnic heritage. These stories cannot be *Bildungsromane*, both because there is very little maturation that takes place, but also because in each novel, the heroine's engagement with her ethnic identity does not fit the mold that Eysturoy delineates:

In the Chicana *Bildungsroman*, the ethnic experience is presented from a female perspective, a perspective through which such cultural heritage takes on distinct characteristics. Each novel illustrates to some degree Irene Campos Carr's observation that "Chicanas carry an additional burden of internal oppression by a cultural heritage that tends to be dominated by males and exaggerates male domination over women" (269). . . It is only when the Chicana protagonist begins to narrate her *Bildungs* process from her own experiential perspective that we encounter a conscious exploration of ethnic heritage and patriarchal norms and values. In both *The House on Mango Street* and *The Last of the Menu Girls*, the ethnic experience is filtered through the consciousness of the Chicana protagonist who, through the act of narrating, enters into an active engagement with different aspects of her cultural heritage. It is this engagement that leads to an opposition to patriarchal norms and values while affirming other aspects of her ethnic identity. Narrating her own story, the Chicana protagonist explores the relationship between self and community, a process of creative self-formation that at the same time is her own redefinition of her Chicana identity. (135)

Q: I loved *Haters*. Will there be a sequel?

A: Sadly, the answer is no - but not because Alisa don't want to write a sequel to *Haters*. Rather, *Haters* did not sell well enough to warrant a sequel, from the publisher's point of view.

(Valdes-Rodrigues website).

In *Haters*, published in 2006, her first novel for young adults, Alisa Valdes-Rodrigues employs many of the conventions of the chick-lit genre that have made her 2004 novel "Dirty Girls' Social Club," so popular. The cover of *Haters'* 2008 paperback edition shows three girls sipping from straws, seated on stools, facing the viewer, presumably in some sort of restaurant or deli. All three girls are heavily accessorized and made up, their clothing skimpy. Of the three, two are brown-skinned, and one is white. But it is their expressions that are the most arresting. The girl on the left rolls her eyes, her mane of highlighted hair topped by a pair of red sunglasses. The girl in the center tilts her head to the side, looking directly at the viewer with a hint of a smirk, while the girl on the right casts her eyes down, ignoring the viewer. It is a powerful

image that conveys the impression of the title with as much force as the pink-highlighted letters that spell it out--*Haters*.

The cover of the paperback edition is a far cry from the cover of the 2006 hardback, which depicted an impressionistic swirl of flowers and shapes, topped by a black-and-white line drawing of a female face with flowing long hair. This practice of changing a book's cover is known as repackaging. According to Yampbell,

Borders' YA book buyer Ami Hassler notes, 'The covers in this category are driven by today's fashion world. Teens, particularly teen girls, are smart, savvy shoppers and they want the look of what they read to reflect current trends. Hence, the covers that have bold single images or use the most popular colors of the season tend to fare very well. (357)

It can be assumed that the cover was changed to appeal more to the target audience, which is of course in line with the concerns of marketability that appear to govern much of Valdes-Rodriguez's work. The biography given on her website says,

Alisa Valdes-Rodriguez is the bestselling author of seven novels, including *The Dirty Girls Social Club*, *Playing with Boys*, *Haters*, *Make Him Look Good*, *Dirty Girls on Top*, and the upcoming novels *The Husband Habit* (July 2009) and *Three Kings Dates* (Christmas 2010). Named one of Time magazine's 25 most influential Hispanics, Alisa is credited with breaking the stereotypical "magical realism" mold, opening doors for Latina authors in humorous commercial women's fiction in the United States.

Valdes-Rodriguez is invested in this image of herself as a commercially successful Latina author who has broken the "'magical realism' mold," yet the psychic visions of the central character in *Haters* and the evacuation of ethnic identity notable in virtually every other character undercut the validity of this image. Valdes-Rodriguez is famous both for pioneering the genre of chican lit and for her questionable portrayals of Chicanas:

Valdes-Rodriguez undoubtedly was the first to do it —"it" being to publish a formulaic chick-lit novel featuring predominately Latina characters. She did so, however, largely at the expense of Mexican American characters and culture. As problematic as her portrayal of Chicanismo and La Chicana may be in her first two novels, it is a key component of her generic

positioning and, thus, marketability. In order to establish herself as an author within the lucrative chick-lit genre, whose central premise is the upward mobility of young urban women and the evocation of glamour and beauty via characters' consumption of luxury goods, Valdes-Rodriguez uses Mexicana/os and Chicana/os as the lower-class foil against which to elevate her characters. (Morrison 313)

In *Haters*, Pasquala de Archuleta, known as "Paski," moves with her single father to Los Angeles from Taos, New Mexico. From the very beginning of the novel, ethnic identity is uneasy, the rural and the urban are synonymous with poor and rich, and consumable goods are substituted for intangible aspects of character. Paski's relationship to her ethnic identity is also connected with naming: "I hate my name. Pasquala. What kind of sixteen-year-old has a name like that? I've only ever seen that name in abandoned graveyards in northern New Mexico...My mom and dad, at the time they named me, were on this whole Mexican power trip..."(5).

Chicana identity for Paski has been displaced onto her dead mother, in a pattern replicated by many characters of recent Latina/o literature:

The protagonists of contemporary U.S. Latino/a fiction are caught in a bind. On the one hand, they face the pressures of assimilation into mainstream American culture. On the other, they are profoundly enmeshed in families closely tied to their communities of origin. Due to the proximity of the places of provenance--Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico--to New York, Miami, and Los Angeles. . . .and the persistent use of Spanish both as pure and hybrid marker, families are idealized by protagonists as close to the Latin American or Caribbean "source. To resolve the predicament, the protagonists. . .project desires that are unacceptable onto their dark doubles--mothers, sisters, wives, sometimes even fathers and brothers--alternate, allegorized, versions of the self. Madness and death are most often the fate of these doubles. . .(Sandín 1)

Because Paski's dead mother is the embodiment, or closest female site of identification with Chicana identity for Paski, Paski equates a strong sense of ethnic identity with things passed, or dead. While her father, who also possesses a strong Chicano identity, is "uncool" because of his ethnic identification, and her grandmother is "weird,"

Paski's mother, or double, is dead, and hence her avenue of ethnic identification is in some senses closed.

Valdes-Rodrigues strives to minimize Mexican-American identity, while at the same time utilizing it as a marker of difference. The preoccupation with consumerism is par for the course in popular fiction for women and girls, Valdes-Rodrigues takes this preoccupation and transforms it into a full-blown fetish, a towering character all its own, a monster of Juicy Couture tracksuits and expensive dirt bikes that tyrannizes all of the other characters in her universe. And the consumer monster gets its own familiar, in the form of the meanest mean girl in school, Jessica Nguyen.

Though Taos is a major resort town that enjoys a strong degree of prosperity, it is dismissed as too backwards, too rural for desirability. The unsavory implications of declaring places as undesirable due to their relative lack of income flow are never explored, as Paski and her father delve headfirst into all the materialist pleasures that California can afford. There are no poor people in Valdes-Rodrigues's Los Angeles, only the rich and less rich. Paski attends a high school where a number of very privileged teenagers of varying ethnicities play out their solipsistic concerns. It is curious how fractious yet unexamined the question of class is in Valdes-Rodrigues's novel, and this lack of examination is perhaps a result of the tension between the demands of popular fiction and the desire to explore the real conflicts that exist contemporaneously within a fantasy setting. While Valdes-Rodrigues peppers *Haters* with asides in which white characters utilize the vocabulary of other ethnic groups in demeaning, superficial ways, the exploration of these instances, and of the rampant

sexism, never rises above the level of the incidental and internal. In one scene, a white boy, Chris, picks up Paski to take her to party:

He smiles and nods with enthusiasm. 'Daaaammn. You're hot, *mamacita*.' *Mamacita?* Why did he call me that? I don't know if any of this is supposed to make me feel good, but what it actually does is make me feel naked. At the same time I'm totally flattered, in a sick way. (155)

At the same party, a white boy uses a racial slur while attempting to persuade Paski to kiss another girl, for his viewing pleasure:

Trent starts to jump around and says, 'That would be the most amazing threesome of all time, those two and me. Damn, come on, Paski, do a niggafavor!' *Nigga?* Did this little white boy just call himself a *nigga*? How disturbing. On so many levels. (169)

While Paski comments mentally on these incidents, her commentary is never externalized, leaving any meaningful reaction to this type of slur unexplored. The comments of the white boys are condemned in the narrative discourse between Paski and the reader, but never explored in the world of the novel, leaving the reader vaguely complicit in this tacit acceptance of racism.

Paski's psychic visions, a heritage from her grandmother, are more thoroughly explored. The grandmother's ethnic identity is explicitly linked to her visions:

Her room has freaked me out since I was very small. It's painted dark red and has incense going all the time. It's full of weird art that looks like photos uploaded directly from the dead zone--ghoulish things from Mexico, miniature sculptures of skeletons and skulls that she tells me are in celebration of the afterlife. (24)

Valdes-Rodrigues utilizes the sub-genre of fantasy to examine questions of adolescent Mexican-American identity, folding this examination into a conventional plot concerning the cliquishness that Paski experiences as a new girl in school. Paski's visions, which largely stand in for her ethnic identity, serve as leverage in her power struggle with the mean girl clique. If Paski's connection to her Mexican-American identity is most strongly

manifested through her visions, it is an identity that she strives and fails to control, an unwelcome presence that brings images of death and destruction, threatening her burgeoning relationships with her peers. Paski's explicit take on her ethnic identity is disinterested: "I don't why my dad is all 'I'm Mexican' when he doesn't even know how to speak Spanish, but you can't argue with him about it. To me, people are people, and some get better names than others. You know which side of that I fall on, anyway" (6). Being Mexican-American, then, is associated with having a "lame" name, a grandmother who has "creepy" knick-knacks, and inconvenient psychic furniture, in both senses of the word.

Yet her visions, conflated with her ethnicity, are a gift, according to her grandmother and the rejection of these visions would have negative consequences: "Grandma's face turns fierce. 'You don't want to believe what I'm telling you, Pasquala. But if you continue to reject your powers, there's no telling how badly things might turn out'" (27). Ultimately, Paski uses her visions, for good, and is rewarded by becoming rich and popular, able to neutralize her enemies and get the guy. In *Haters'* happy ending, typical of the "chick-lit" genre, though not the fantasy or dystopian, Paski's acceptance of her psychic gift can be read as the triumph of her identification as Mexican-American, over her former overt disinterest. If being Mexican-American means being psychic, and being psychic means acquiring material and social status (the ultimate goal in the chick-lit novel), then being Mexican-American must not be so bad.

Yet her internalized hatred and racism are unresolved. Paski identifies with those aspects of her identity she considers "ethnic"—her visions—ultimately, when it is convenient, and when they bring her status. She criticizes her father for claiming his

Mexican heritage when it is devoid of linguistic significance, yet the end of her story looks much the same as her father's adulthood. The Archuletas occupy a peculiar liminal space, like the individuals of countless ethnic background whose ancestors immigrated to the United States, whose descendants retained some markers of their ethnicity, and lost others. Curiously, Valdes-Rodriguez chooses to have her teenage narrator serve as the mouthpiece of a cultural critique of those Chicanos who identify as Mexican when they do not speak Spanish. If Valdes-Rodriguez had decided to give Paski Archuleta an Amex instead of psychic visions, one suspects Paski's *Entwicklungsroman* would have ended with the total loss of her ethnic identity instead of an uneasy embracing of it.

Paski has acquired a new designer wardrobe throughout the course of *Haters*, but it is the final object that she acquires that solidifies her acceptance and integration of her hyphenated ethnic identity. Chris, Paski's new boyfriend (who is both wealthy and the former boyfriend of Paski's arch-enemy, Jessica Nguyen) gives her a "brand-new yellow Yamaha women's bike, the kind all the tops racers are using" (341). When she rides the bike, Paski thinks to herself, "I can feel the power of the earth, of animals, of the spirits with me. The amulet warms on my neck" (342). The amulet, a Chicana spiritual emblem given to Paski by her grandmother, comes into play when worn in connection with the use of the dirt bike. It is only when Paski has triumphed as teen queen at her new high school, having achieved all possible markers of material and social status that the former queen possessed, that she is able to connect with her own ethnic identity. The message Valdes-Rodriguez is promulgating for her young readers

seems to be that it is not safe to own your individual identity and ethnicity, until you have conformed to the prescribed mold. Only then will the “ancestral spirits” approve.

It takes very little imagination for Paski Archuleta to become a dirt bike racer and the girlfriend of a popular boy in *Haters*; indeed, her magical powers seem to serve only to allow her to take over the life of another. Indeed, in some sense, she seems to be reenacting the role of the succubus, a failure of imagination that seems to exist less on the part of the fictional character than on the author. The highest good that unlimited powers can be put to is to become the most popular girl in school, and one cannot become the most popular girl in school by doing things which are acclaimed as popular; one must literally *become* the most popular girl, supplanting her in her life. Thus, Paski takes over Jessica Nyugen's life, dating her boyfriend, becoming a dirt bike racer, and acting like a mean girl. At the end of *Haters*, Paski has not achieved adulthood, and has only partially accepted her ethnic identity, which is a marker of her entrenchment in adolescence, as she inches slightly closer to adulthood and resists internalizing the "unfashionable" things that her elders embrace in owning their ethnic identities.

Issues of identity transformation are central to Kim Flores' *Gamma Glatma*, though their focus is displaced from the protagonist. In *Gamma Glatma*, Kim Flores explores the possibilities of genre hybridity, interweaving elements of science fiction, fantasy and magical realism into a base of standard chica lit fiction--a hybridity which seems poised to open up more autonomous possibilities for the heroine. Yet the inherent control exerted by the creation of this novel by a literary agent, presumably backed by a publishing house, upon its plot, parallels the ultimately safe, conventional, white-washed by the dominant culture conception within the novel of the choices that a

Latina teen with fantastical powers would make. In dissecting the shortcomings of hybrid novels such as *Gamma Glamma* and *Haters*, one wonders what portrayals of Latina teens within stories in which they took their fantastical powers and subverted the boundaries of the adult world would look like; in which they did something that the adults could not contain or process. Are these stories so unimaginable, in the sense that they have not been imagined, or are they not viewed as marketable?

Gamma Glamma came into being because of the request of a literary agent, and as such, is by definition a creature of the mainstream literary market. Much like *Haters*, *Gamma Glamma* exists because of the pressures of the market, not in spite or in relation to it. In this sense, *Gamma Glamma* exists primarily as a product, more in line with the tradition of series books such as *Nancy Drew* or *Trixie Belden*, in which the vision of the author interacts with the pressures of the marketing department and the endless story with its perpetually adolescent heroine is more important than who tells it.

The novel originally existed as a television show concept that Flores was persuaded to write as a book:

I met my brother's friend who happened to be a literary agent in NYC. He asked me what I was doing in town and I told him about *Gamma Glamma*. He then asked me if I could turn my show into a book. Since I had written films before, I was like, why not? After six months, I had a novel. I had lived with all these characters for a year so I knew them very well. Plus, I used all my TV episodes and combined them to form a longer story. (Flores website)

Gamma Glamma is a true genre-bender, combining chica lit, fantasy and science fiction. The elements of science fiction pop up in the technological innovations that the heroine, Luz Santos, invents, things that do not exist in their current form in today's world. And yet, the "science" that would accomplish them is not given any basis in reality or even any explanation, lending an element of fantasy to the whole endeavor.

Luz is never shown making anything—like magic, she thinks up an idea for a science experiment—and wills it into being.

On one level, the book pushes a message of the participation of two underrepresented groups—women and Latinos—in the hard sciences. On another level, the book does the exact same thing, but what it is doing can be interpreted as the imposition of a more powerful groups' agenda—the adults, represented by Dr. Hamrock—onto a less powerful group—the adolescents, represented by Luz Santos. Dr. Hamrock does not encourage or persuade Luz to participate; she is not shy or lacking in self-esteem or needing encouragement to follow her dreams. In fact, Dr. Hamrock's expectation that Luz will participate in the science fair and reach the Regional level of the competition is in direct conflict with her desire to attend the Homecoming dance. In this construction, the wishes of a female (Latina) adolescent are construed as subservient to the dictate of a male (white) teacher. Eliane Rubenstein-Avila discusses why, in YA novels about female protagonists, the construction of this type of power dynamic is so problematic:

Few across the professional literature directly attack, as Hubler (2000) does, the individual approach to sexism that conveniently locates sexism in one ignorant individual character—'the lone perpetrator' (p. 84) of gender discrimination, such as a classmate, a teacher or a principal. Hubler (2000) points out that this approach to sexism evades a pervasive institutional problem that supports sexual discrimination and harassment. For example, she claims that in *Boys against Girls* (Suzanne, 1988), the reader is led to conclude that the perpetrator of sexism is a 'single aberrant individual' (Hubler, 2000, p. 84)—Mr. Davis, the new homeroom teacher. Thus, the implicit message is that removing Mr. Davis from that setting would solve the problem of sexism. This type of 'narrative technique ... makes the representation of a complex and messy social system neat and tidy' (Hubler, 2000, p. 84), and, therefore, easy to dismiss and to overlook (Rubenstein-Avila 371)

Though the strain of paternalism in his behavior is evident, the book does not explore any critique of the methods or motives of Dr. Hamrock. The highly problematic nature of Luz's entry into the science fair is ignored. Instead, the focus of the novel is shifts to the social hierarchy of Gamma High School; the dynamics of different cliques and who rules them is also what Luz intends to be the spotlight of her science experiment. Luz's power is channeled into her experiments, a series of fantastical, technological, and hybrid creations that she applies mostly to others. For the science fair, she transforms "outsiders," her friends and others, into contenders for Homecoming King and Queen. The apex of her power is the "Truth B. Told" a magical-technological hybrid that forces the wearer to tell the truth. Fittingly, Luz places her truth-telling headset within the Homecoming crowns, finishing her experiment in the dynamics in social hierarchy at her high school by exposing her enemies. But what is exposed to the reader? Luz has spent the entire novel engaged in social engineering through magic and technology, skills that she has used to further the status of others. At the end, she is poised on the brink of a relationship with Sven, her fairy tale Aryan prince, regarding whom she rationalizes her attraction in evolutionary anthropology terms:

Time after time, the scent that each woman preferred was one that was directly opposite of her DNA chemistry. Scientists say that this little gift is engineered in our systems so that we can produce the healthiest offspring and not have any inklings to go date our siblings. Ew. I know, but thank goodness for smart DNA. So, the fact that a Latina like myself who digs science could totally crush on a blonde, blue-eyed, Nordic-god writer. . .was chemically reactive romance. (Flores 18)

Luz has to work harder at combating the attempted ostracism by the high school queen bee than she does at her school work; and this is precisely the point of the young adult chick lit novel. Since chica lit, even in its most creative incarnation in this type of hybrid, has a broadly formulaic outline that readers expect the plot will adhere to, it is no

surprise that Luz's "experiments" are actually more magical than scientific. If too much of the plot were devoted to the endless hours she toiled in the laboratory, then the intricate social world that the reader expects to see dissected would not get its full due.

One would not expect the adolescent chica lit novel to move beyond an examination of the social sphere, even when the heroine has powers that have nearly unlimited potential. But these expectations are precisely the problem, as one cannot get around the fact that young adult novels are written by adults. For the impact upon female readers of the displacement of the focus of Luz's efforts onto others, even in a novel that is ostensibly about her entry into the statewide science fair while a freshman at a competitive magnet high school, is huge. *Gamma Glatma* is superficially about female adolescent empowerment: Luz is highly intelligent, has friends, supportive parents, identifies as Latina and is endowed with powers that bridge an unspecified fantastical-technological range--all this, and she gets the guy, too. Yet with all of her strengths and qualities, Luz is not allowed to truly focus upon herself. All of her devices and concoctions are applied towards others. She spies upon others, and uses her knowledge to help transform them.

The gaze of others is then reflected back upon Luz. She and her fellow candidates for Homecoming King and Queen becomes the subjects of a reality TV show, which for today's adolescents is a marker of the interest of the wider world, but is merely a quick way for Luz and her peers to be commodified and humiliated for the viewer's pleasure. As Luz says about watching her introductory appearance on the reality show, in the cafeteria, "I was excited at first until I heard 'La Cucaracha' playing as background music to desperately amp up my Latina heritage. At least for Jimbo's

video they played ‘She Blinded Me with Science’” (214). While Luz shrewdly recognizes the limiting nature of her depiction within the reality TV show, the novel itself never tips its hand to the reader regarding Luz's continually self-effacing behavior. Ultimately, while Luz's magical-technological abilities have been revealed to her peers, and theoretically her parents and a large viewing population, via the reality TV show, the knowledge of these abilities is mysteriously elided.

In the end, the science fair plot is supplanted by the reality TV show plot, a sign that in its hybridity, the chica lit side of the novel is stronger. The nature of Luz's experiments fold neatly into the young adult chick lit novel's prototypical discussion of social hierarchy, writ large for all the world to view. When Luz abandons her project at the state science fair to rush to the Homecoming dance, she does so at the behest of her friend, who calls to tell her that another friend is in trouble. Typical of the unending social drama in the book, Luz is called upon to solve all of her friends' problems, never thinking of herself or her own priorities and desires (240). As the book concludes, Luz plans to engineer a pair of “electronic rhythm *zapatitos*” for Sven, who doesn't like to dance, to wear when he accompanies her to a “Sadie Hawkins Spring Fling Dance” (258). The girl who invented a camera ring and purse, “self-tanner jelly beans,” and gum that makes a person talk a lot has concocted nothing for herself. But she has managed to snag the guy, and thus the novel has a happy ending.

Despite its many problematic messages, *Gamma Glatama* is at its best when handling issues of Latina identity. While its best may be limited, Luz nonetheless identifies as Latina, a major departure from Paski in *Haters* and from the protagonists of the dystopian novels, who while perhaps accepting their ethnic identity, had to live

variously unpleasant lives as a result of their ethnic identities. Though much of Luz's identification as Latina is limited to declarative statements of fact—"I'm Latina"—and the sprinkling of Spanish phrases that are to be expected in the *chica lit* novel, the most interesting moments of the novel come via Luz's relationship with her mother. There are none of Sandín's "dark doubles" in *Gamma Glatma*; indeed, to play with Sandín's term, Luz's mother functions as a light double, a mirror for how to be an adult Latina for an adolescent who already identifies as such. Luz's mother is presented as anything but the stereotypically self-sacrificing Latina mother: "Mom's name is Armida and she works as an art director for an advertising agency. She has impeccable taste, and as a strong-willed Latina woman, she knows exactly how to make people take notice" (50). How exactly it is she "make[s] people take notice" is never explained, and what being a "strong-willed Latina woman" means in relation to people's attention and her taste is not clear. What is clear is that Luz and her mother enjoy a close relationship; though, frustratingly, Luz does not reveal to Armida that she was forced to participate in the science fair. Throughout the novel, Armida supports Luz in her social and academic challenges, until finally, Armida is indirectly responsible for bringing Luz and Sven together. While *Gamma Glatma* is an *Entwicklungsromane*, one could imagine Flores allowing Luz to grow up to be a "strong-willed Latina woman" like her mother at the end of a long, profitable series of books.

CHAPTER 4 CONCLUSION

While publishers are eager to capitalize on what they see as the new, "untapped" Latina/o market, YA novels that are receiving critical attention still most often feature female protagonists who are overwhelmingly white and straight. These novels are often in genre of realism, and uncomplicated by any "unpleasant" topics such as racism or sexism:

The data show that the great majority of female protagonists recommended across the professional literature are still white and members of the middle class. Moreover, I found a lack of intersection between gender, class, race and sexual identities across all the recommended young adult subgenres. This means, for example, that the protagonists are either of colour or queer, but seldom both. In her thorough review of young adult gay literature, Jenkins (1998) found that only about 3% of the thirty four gay/queer novels published between 1993 and 1997 addressed race, ethnicity and class. Novels such as *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (Woodson, 1995), in which the central storyline revolves around the young adult (male) protagonist's black mother and her amorous relationship with a white woman, is a rare exception even across the LGBT genre (Jenkins, 1998). As Taxel (2002) points out, nonmainstream voices are too often silenced across fictional literature and 'ignored by society's dominant modes of cultural expression' (p. 180). In fact, Taxel also states that fictional novels that deal with multiple, complex, realistic issues such as race relations, prejudice, discrimination and homophobia are 'deemed risqué' (Taxel, 2002, p. 179); thus publishers perceive their marketability as limited. (Rubenstein-Avila 366)

It is crucial to acknowledge that *Gamma Gomma* and *Haters* are constructed as *Entwicklungsromane* because of market considerations. Having formed the concept of *Gamma Gomma* into a novel at the suggestion of an agent, Flores positions her narrator as a high school freshman and stops the novel with barely a concluding page to make sense of the events that have preceded. It seems clear that *Gamma Gomma* is intended as the beginning of a series. Valdes-Rodriguez has acknowledged that she wanted to write a sequel to *Haters*, but that she could not sell it. Had these novels

ended with their protagonists having reached adulthood, there would be no room for sequels or series; no room for the profitable media tie-ins; no possibility, in short, of further profit for the publishers or authors. While I am not advocating the *Bildungsroman* as the superior genre, it is nonetheless galling when the *Entwicklungsroman* is employed to tell the stories of Latina and Chicana adolescents largely it will prolong the protagonists' status as marketable commodities. The deployment of the *Entwicklungsroman* in the service of profit is nothing new—it is in fact a time-honored tradition, from Trixie Belden and Nancy Drew, up through the twins of Sweet Valley High, to keep fictional white girls in a perpetual state of adolescence in order to generate a seemingly endless flow of books to be consumed by teenage readers. In its latest incarnation in the hybrid chica lit novel with Latina and Chicana protagonists, the potentially endless *Entwicklungsroman* disturbs again because of the uneasy nature of the protagonists' relationship with their ethnicity. While Paski and Luz relate in different ways to being Chicana and Latina, the intention of their authors to continue their stories forces a construction of their identity within their novels that is unresolved. These heroines neatly fix their social problems, but do not satisfyingly clarify their feelings towards their status as young women of Chicana and Latina heritage. The importance of their personal identity is forever subjugated to their status as members of a social group, an ironically apt status for the heroines of novels that rise and fall only on the whim of the sales figures.

While the arc of development of the heroines in the YA hybrid chica lit novels is constrained by their status as commodities, the arc of development of the protagonists in the YA dystopian novels is usually not. In these science fiction novels, the Latino or

Chicano young men become adults and the young women retain or revert to the status of little girls. While the recent emergence of Latino characters into the genre of young adult dystopian fiction could be viewed as encouraging, the mere fact of inclusion is of course not enough. In *Taken*, *The House of the Scorpion*, and *the dead and the gone*, the Latino and Chicano protagonists are deployed in unison with the perpetuation of gender and ethnic stereotyping by white authors. Some, such as Nancy Farmer, are politically reactionary, while others, such as Edward Bloor and Susan Pfeffer, seem too ensconced in white privilege to be aware of the way in which their depiction of Latino characters reinforces stereotypes. The motivations for the creation of these Latino and Chicano characters varies from author to author, but all appear to be constructing characters whose ethnic identity is not intrinsic, but merely a shell. These shells of characters function as mouthpieces for their authors, projecting their distasteful and oft-times racist views on poverty, immigration, the drug trade, consumer culture and sexism. To compound the problem, these novels are not merely popularly marketed to young people, but also institutionally sanctioned and acclaimed. *House of the Scorpion* has won over 15 awards, most notably the 2002 National Book Award and the 2003 Newberry Honor. *Taken* was the winner of a silver medal from the Florida Book Award, and was nominated for the Grand Canyon Reader Award 2010. While *the dead & the gone* has not yet won any awards since its 2008 appearance, its prequel, *Life as We Knew It* was awarded a 2009 Garden State Teen Book Award and is the 2009 One Book New Jersey program YA selection. The consequence of such laudatory recognition is to support and further disseminate these portraits of prejudice.

The model for provocative works of YA Chicano and Latino science fiction, and by extension fantasy, has already been constructed by authors of science fiction for adults such as Catherine Ramirez:

The concept of Chicanafuturism, which I introduced in *Aztlán* in 2004, borrows from theories of Afrofuturism (see Ramírez 2004). Chicanafuturism explores the ways that new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture. It questions the promises of science, technology, and humanism for Chicanas, Chicanos, and other people of color. And like Afrofuturism, which reflects diasporic experience, Chicanafuturism articulates colonial and postcolonial histories of indigenismo, mestizaje, hegemony, and survival. . . .The future. . .is generally imagined as white, as many of the science fiction movies and TV shows of my childhood made evident. More recently, information technologies such as the Internet have prompted some cultural critics to celebrate the present and imminent future as “placeless, raceless [and] bodiless” (Nelson 2002, 1). Already, people of color have been erased from the future, just as many of us were excised from narratives of the past and remain hidden from view in the barrios, ghettos, reservations, and prisons of the present. By appropriating the imagery of science and technology, Chicanafuturist works disrupt age-old racist and sexist binaries that exclude Chicanas and Chicanos from visions of the future. (188-9)

Young adult genre fiction is of perennial interest because works of fantasy and science fiction promise to reveal something beyond the mundane to the reader. When YA popular genre literature with Latina/o and Chicano/a protagonists merely reconstructs tired tropes of the high school social hierarchy, with a superficial gloss of the fantastical, or worse, conjures a murky vision of an even more classicist, sexist, racist tomorrow, it fails in ways that insult and injure its adolescent readers. Yet there are hopeful signs that even the most market-driven genre fiction can present interesting Latina/o protagonists that identify with their ethnicity. As YA literature continues to rise in popularity, one hopes that we will see the heirs to Luz Santos emerge, in Latina/o fantasy and science fiction that offers not reflections of the past, but glimpses of a better future.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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