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Breaking the Silence: Contesting Manifest Destiny in María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?*

Shimberlee Jirón-King

In *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872), María Amparo Ruiz de Burton places her child-heroine, Lola Medina, in the Norval's New England household not only as a representation of newly appropriated Mexican lands and wealth, but also as a means to alert her own contemporaries to the fact that U.S. culture emanates from New England Puritanism. By doing so, Ruiz de Burton clearly demonstrates her early recognition that the hegemonic structure of U.S. exceptionalism and the foundation for Manifest Destiny grows out of long-established discourses of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and she establishes a clear sense of urgency that her contemporaries understand the new conditions that they must now negotiate. In her essay comparing Henry James's *The Bostonians* and Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* Anne Elizabeth Goldman argues the point that Ruiz de Burton saw significant differences between the dominant culture and her own, but Goldman emphasizes Ruiz de Burton's desire to be understood as a European woman of culture. Goldman proposes that "the puritan code" that James satirizes can also be found in Ruiz de Burton's novel and in her comparison she demonstrates the significance of how that code plays out in the two authors' novels (77). In my extension of this discussion, I propose that in Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* we may also find a metaphorical rebuttal intended to challenge the moral justifications that serve as the foundation for U.S. hegemony in the conquered territories. As José Aranda has emphasized in "Returning California to the People," the newly incorporated Mexican-American community experienced a "widespread disenchantment with and resentment of Anglo American colonization of California after 1848," and Ruiz de Burton, in particular, sought to create an antagonistic narrative that would "rescue the native Californios from economic and political ruin and cultural anonymity" (12).

Ruiz de Burton's text centers upon what has often been considered the defining geopolitical moment of crisis in Mexican-American and Chicano/a literary and cultural studies—the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the consequent dispossession of former Mexican citizens who accepted U.S. citizenship in accordance with the terms of the treaty. However, one must recognize that *Who Would Have Thought It?* and its author's elitist subjectivity is only a partial historiographical representation. Ruiz de Burton came from a more powerful position than most Mexican-Americans in her time, and thus her text reflects a profoundly unique understanding of race, class, and ideology than has been recently theorized within the Chicano/a intellectual community. Aranda has argued that “the adoption of post-colonialism in Chicano studies has been awkward, a victim of institutional forces that consistently reduces the field of analysis to only one colonialism” (12). Ruiz de Burton's heritage as a privileged *californio* with lands and a European education reminds us that Spanish colonization was an important part of the hierarchical culture from which Ruiz de Burton came and that not all Mexican-Americans absorbed into the U.S. after the war came from poverty. The Treaty brought forth many different levels of anxiety towards the newly defined status of Mexican-Americans as well as a wide spectrum of reactions, many of which contrast Ruiz de Burton's own privileged position. While the specific anxieties and concerns discussed by the author should be recognized for their importance and contribution to a full understanding of Latina/o studies, it was definitely not a perspective experienced by all Mexican-Americans at the time; many Mexican-Americans were glad to see the *hidalgos* go because of the violence and oppression that they suffered as members of an oppressed class within the existing regime. Latino authors such as Alejandro Morales often make the point that many newly-absorbed Mexican-Americans had good reason to be glad to see the overthrow of *hidalgos*:

On one hacienda in the state of Guanajuato, the mayordomo who guided Walter through the estate came upon a peon family. While Walter observed, the mayordomo ordered the young daughter to follow him into the field where, in the presence of the parents, he raped the girl who was no more than fourteen years old. After the mayordomo finished, the parents thanked him for his kind attention.

As the mayordomo and Walter rode away, the mother and father ran to comfort the naked child. The mayordomo noticed Walter's interest and asked him if he wanted her. Walter almost answered yes. He had been disgusted by everything he had seen except with the idea of absolute power that the hacendados had over the peons. Walter felt that power was needed to help the people, but in Mexico the abuse of power was the way of life. (41)

Scholars have been quick to point out an apparent duality or hypocrisy inherent in Ruiz de Burton's elitism—and in doing so they have often overlooked the immense contribution and literary finesse of the author as she attempts to express the themes of victimhood and subjugation. Certainly, it has long been the precedent within U.S. literature that elite economic or social status does not disqualify great writing, and yet it seems that Latina/o scholars are almost embarrassed to find that its earliest writers have had some privilege but it is this very privilege that allows Ruiz de Burton the leisure, the education, and the resources to write and to get her work published.¹ As Emma Pérez notes in *The Decolonial Imaginary*, “the colonial imaginary in the United States, specifically in the Southwest since the sixteenth century, has been constructed by the imagination of contemporary Chicana/o historians” (110), and so it is no surprise to find what one might not imagine at the beginning of a discipline dedicated to the marginalized—that there is in the history of this literature a body of writing that does not grow out of complete abjection.

What is important and what has not been understood by many scholars is that Ruiz de Burton's central purpose and motivation for *Who Would Have Thought It?* was to confront the injustices that newly incorporated Mexican-Americans experienced with the effects of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and to challenge the idea of Manifest Destiny. She especially demonstrated concern regarding its moral justification for the atrocious treatment of its new citizens in the law and in the land. What is easily lost or misunderstood in scholarship regarding Ruiz de Burton is that her confrontation with the legal and hegemonic injustices of U.S. policies is synonymous with her moral criticism. In doing so, she attempts to bridge metaphysical realities with material realities, believing that high metaphysical reality should manifest justice. Thus, in exposing the corrupted discourse

of the bigoted and avaricious Mrs. Norval and the corrupt protestant preachers, Ruiz de Burton addresses the logical and semantic inconsistencies and deteriorates the doctrines of a violent expansionism. For Ruiz de Burton, a high moral foundation could not support the actualities that occurred with regard to land appropriations.

Philosopher, linguist, and scholar J.L. Austin argued in *How to Do Things with Words* that “Performatives make explicit the contrast between reference and performance: they look like referring expressions but they create the very event they describe” (79). Austin’s strategy is to start with constative uses of speech in which there is a clear distinction between language and reality, and to gradually introduce the role played by the circumstances of utterance in determining the force of a speech-act. In so doing, Austin reverses the priority held by language as truth and correspondence over language as action and creation. Ruiz de Burton’s complaint regarding the discourses of Manifest Destiny is that the *Americanos* semantically imbue this phrase with deific or perhaps performative powers that make what was legally defined in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as the property of newly-incorporated Mexican-American citizens into a sacred ground of conquest that should be absorbed by American citizens while simultaneously subjecting Mexican-Americans to epistemologies and hegemonic forces not articulated in the Treaty. Manifest Destiny, as she defines it, creates a popular rhetoric that powerfully appropriates the land and subjects the people on it. Suddenly, these lands no longer belong to the Mexican-American grant-holders because of a *discourse*, because of *words* and not *laws*. Thus, the sacred promises of the Treaty are broken on the authority of mere utterances. Furthermore, Ruiz de Burton’s contention that the conquest has an epistemological aspect is made clear in her next novel, *The Squatter and the Don* when her character, Mrs. Darrell criticizes the injustices of squatting:

those laws which authorize you to locate homesteads upon lands claimed as Mexican grants, those laws are wrong, and good, just, moral citizens should not be guided by them. [...] I love my country, as every true-hearted American woman should, but, with shame and sorrow, I acknowledge that we have treated the conquered Spaniards most cruelly, and our law-givers have been most unjust to them. (255)

Ruiz de Burton's work especially interrogates the concept that providential authority is on the side of the conquering Americans and has abandoned the Mexican-Americans who remain north of the border. Her startling 1869 letter to Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo emphasizes the point very well:

I feel [...] a true hatred and contempt (as a good Mexican) for this certain "Manifest Destiny." Of all the wicked phrases invented by stupid ppl, there is not one more odious for me than that, the most offensive, the most insulting; it raises the blood in my temples when I hear of it, and I see it instantly in photographs, all that the Yankees have done to us, the Mexicans, suffer: the robbery of Texas, the war, the robbery of California, the death of Maximillian. If I were to believe in "Manifest Destiny," I would cease to believe in justice or Divine wisdom. No friend of mine, this Manifest Destiny is nothing more than "Manifest Yankee trash." ("MARB to M. G. Vallejo" 218–221)

Who Would Have Thought It? was published in 1872, and this letter further underlines Ruiz de Burton's passionate interrogation of the devastating effects of Manifest Destiny.² Her novel presumes a recognition of false consciousness originating in New England protestantism, and the seeds of this line of thought are rendered visible in her letter. But not only does she reject the Americanist discourse of Manifest Destiny in her letter and in *Who Would Have Thought It?* but throughout the novel, she sustains the argument that Californios should retain their elite status as white Europeans. She does not want to be regarded as a new immigrant, like the Irish maids who must work as servants in the Norval household. Metaphorically and rhetorically speaking, her aims are for citizenship in the dominant culture, not absorption into the common populace. The sense that she and her contemporaries sought better treatment and assimilation rights than those received by European immigrants who were arriving on the Eastern shores has been argued by a number of scholars. For example, Jesse Alemán informs us that

Much like the Irish, Californios had to reposition themselves as white in Anglo America to secure the country's

real and imaginary citizenship rights. They did this by distinguishing themselves from Indians and blacks, whose status as indentured servants or slaves left them with no rights in the United States. Californios also brokered on their class status, hoping that their material and cultural capital would buy them entry into the emerging Anglo nation. This class hierarchy ultimately informs the racial hierarchy that distinguishes Lola from the Norvals and the Irish maids. (104–105)

In the scene where Lola is left weeping outside of the bedroom where the Irish maid snores loudly, we get a very tangible vision of the unworthy maid who enjoys employment and better privilege than the sweet little girl who clearly deserves adoption rather than rejection. The image, of course serves as a metaphor on many levels, but her effort to redress racial and class hierarchies is certainly at the top of the list.

In addition to the racial and class hierarchies, however, we find Ruiz de Burton struggling to establish the privilege to be heard as a citizen (and not a subject) of the U.S. Despite her movement and reputation on both sides of the continent, Ruiz de Burton was hesitant to name herself as the author. She hoped that if she could distance herself from her work, *Who Would Have Thought It?* might be better received as an orphan than if her authorship were known. However, her authorship was revealed, and her identity as a Mexican-American Catholic certainly shaped the reception of the novel. Sánchez and Pita note in the Introduction that despite the adopted penname “C. Loyal,” her authorship became known and the novel did not circulate as well as Ruiz de Burton might have wished. In this way, her own text is very much like the protagonist in the novel, who must be separated from her mother in order to increase the chances that she might survive and prosper within a newly circumscribed context.

The work opens with Lola Medina, who allegorically represents the high moral character and refinement of the Mexican landowners of the newly-incorporated territories. We learn of her unfortunate birth in Indian captivity which leads to her rescue by the benevolent Mr. Norval, who represents the hope of just treatment. He promises Lola’s dutiful but tragically heroic mother (read Mexico) that he will make sure that Lola will receive her inheritance. Mr. Norval also promises

her mother, Doña Theresa, that he will pass on the bulk of her wealth, educate Lola as a Catholic, and seek her father. Meanwhile, Lola grows up in New England with the Norvals and must suffer the capricious treatment of Mrs. Norval, the religiously bigoted lady of the house who abuses Lola, endeavors to usurp her wealth, and allegorically represents the moral hypocrisy inherent in expansionistic doctrines. While Mr. Norval is away, this avaricious lady eventually conducts herself into an immoral and illegal marriage with the corrupt Reverend Hackwell. This illicit affair eventually makes the cruel woman insane and sick with brain fever. The characterization we see of the Norvals and the East-West movement represented in the novel is mimetic for how Ruiz de Burton reformulates the national narrative, which is set during and after the Civil War and Reconstruction era, but also encompasses the U.S.-Mexican war and the problematic consequences of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Lola's surprising and unusual presence in the East places the treatment of newly incorporated Mexican-American citizens in sharp contrast with those arriving from Europe. European immigrants are accepted more quickly and easily than the increasingly disenfranchised Mexican-Americans in the West, and Ruiz de Burton's text puts forth the argument that many Mexican-Americans are unjustly stripped of their lands and wealth because, even though the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promises greater claims to citizenship, the U.S. government, in its corruption and hypocrisy, discursively undermines those claims through corrupt officials and a questionable legal system. On a symbolic level, the novel presents her readers with a moral conundrum: it is difficult to understand how a sweet, well-mannered, wealthy child could be rejected and considered less acceptable than an uneducated, unpropertied immigrants arriving from Europe. When Lola first arrives in the Norval's New England household, she is painted dark because the Indians who had held her captive feared that she would be rescued if her white skin were visible, but in fact, she is as white as any European. This is an obvious allusion to the assumption that all Mexican-Americans are non-European, or as in the view of a Mrs. Norval, tainted with the blood of Indians. In time, Lola's true, white European nature becomes evident, and her assimilation becomes easier and in the end prosperous for all.

The setting of the novel in the Northeast rather than in the Southwest underscores the importance of representing the New England

household from the Mexican-American subject position. In *Who Would Have Thought It?* New England is the cultural center of the new rulers, but Ruiz de Burton's text makes it possible to turn the lens and represent the dominant culture through Lola's wise, innocent eyes. Lola is naturally blameless in her observations and in a better position to offer a scathing social critique as a victimized subject. At the same time, Lola finds herself in a world that Mexican-Americans are obliged to address and understand because of their subordinated status in U.S. culture after 1848, and it is important to Ruiz de Burton to emphasize to her Californio audience that this is precisely their position: the newly conquered need to be better informed of the social and political conditions on the other side of the continent.

In contrast to Mexican-Catholics who cling to their land and record their cultural memories, Catholic Europeans arriving from the Old World have left everything behind, including sacred ties to their lands and histories. Early Mexican-American figures such as Lola Medina are ontologically grounded in their Spanish-colonial history and identity while conflicted with the ever-present British colonial history in the U.S. Because their lands have been sanctified, their claims to the Southwest remain as strong as the claims made by the U.S. discourses of Manifest Destiny, thus creating works that are saturated by tremendous conflict. The early Mexican-American knew and identified her land by worshipping upon it, building churches, and cathedrals, and evangelizing natives (Eliade 47). This conflict is what most defines early Latina writing and explains Ruiz de Burton's outrage at the idea that God might have chosen "the Puritan code" over the cultures and traditions established by her own people.

Despite her increasing whiteness, her capital, her Christian piety, and her European education, the epistemic violence³ that works against Lola throughout the novel cannot be transcended through exemplary moral conduct or by the romantic affirmation and acceptance that she ultimately receives from the heroically open-minded and rational character, Julian Norval. Like Mr. Norval, Julian allegorically represents the potential for genuine justice as well as the appropriate incorporation of the Californiana into the U.S. ruling elite. Lola must assert her own identity in the narrative and make her subjectivity irrefutably clear in order to maintain her eligibility as a citizen in the U.S. Lola's own rational identity can be observed in her initial silence, which according to Sánchez and Pita, makes it possible to read the

early signs of having “her own class/cultural identity, even as a child, seen ostensibly in her notions of cleanliness, her repugnance at the thought of sleeping with the Irish maids, and her unshakable faith” (“Introduction to *Who Would Have Thought it?*” xx). Clearly, Lola’s superior character is what Ruiz de Burton intends to represent as the ignorant Norval women rudely discuss her appearance, her origins, and her future status in her presence without considering that Lola may understand every word that they have said about her. However, it is also telling that Dr. Norval interprets Lola’s behavior for her, which demonstrates that Lola is not a simple child. Even when she is directly addressed and her ability to speak has been affirmed, Lola has already discerned the epistemic violence in play and determined that her voice will not be honored by her auditors:

“I suppose her name is Rabbit, or Hare, or Squirrel. That is, if she is an Indian,” said Ruth, laughing.

“You ask her,” the doctor said.

“What is your name?” asked Ruth.

The child looked at her, then at the doctor, and went on eating her supper silently.

“She doesn’t understand,” said Ruth.

“Yes, she does. But, not liking your manner, she disdains to answer your question,” replied the doctor. (*Who Would Have Thought It?* 20)

Lola thus asserts herself by not answering, or choosing not to engage the violent discourse that can have no other result than her permanent erasure in the world that she has entered. Here we find that Linda Martin Alcoff’s discussion of subjectivity in “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics,” is notable because she makes it plain that one’s internal sense of identity is profoundly affected by external conditions but not entirely dependent upon those external conditions.⁴

Although Lola’s identity is threatened by her surroundings, she has the purity and the strength to draw on her mother’s upbringing to console her. Thus, her mother becomes a representation of the purity of Catholicism and its teachings, symbolically validating Mexican-American identity as acceptable even in a hegemonic discourse that insists upon its own Protestant privilege. This enables Lola to retain her identity and her integrity; for Ruiz de Burton, this is the triumph

of the genuine faith and a powerful rebuttal of Manifest Destiny. When Lola finally does name herself in the dialogue, it is at her choosing and because she has already determined that she will not speak until afforded the opportunity to reply and have that reply honorably received. Lola Medina recognizes her circumscribed position and is careful of how she frames her speech so that she may make the most of her opportunity to assert her identity. Upon being asked cordially, she gives her full name and thus demonstrates that even though she is ostensibly only a child, her name is sacred to her and her identity is her own. It is significant that even though Dr. Norval initially speaks for Lola, he is careful enough not to name his ward but that she names herself. Ruiz de Burton thus allows that U.S. law and culture have the potential to permit enough space for Lola to assert her own identity—and the significance of the I AM assertion of the developing child-captive carries through much of the novel despite the continuous efforts at silencing that she must work against because of her outward circumstances. In the relationship between Feuerbach's discussion of I AM in the explanation of identity as subject-being, Althusser's description of interpellation, and the related discussions offered by Austin, Dussel, and Alcoff suggest that the dynamics of identity construction in an oppressive context are not necessarily doomed to a marginalized or abject subject position. Lola Medina's conduct is a case-in-point. Though she finds herself entangled in an oppressive discourse, she does find a way to navigate a space in which she may assert her identity in a positive manner which does allow her to eventually make her presence known and to assert her right to be heard.

Lola's self-naming at the table is an integral moment because it suggests a baptismal moment—a moment when the Mexican-American sustains her identity even in the face of hostile doctrines intended to deteriorate the legitimacy of her faith:

“My name is María Dolores Medina, but I have always been called Lola or Lolita,” she answered in plainest English.

“And have you understood all we said since you arrived?” asked Mattie. Lola nodded her head in the affirmative and stole a furtive look toward Mrs. Norval, which was very piquant. (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?* 21)

Significantly, the baptism ritual of Roman Catholicism takes place in infancy while the baptism ritual in most forms of American Protestantism is interpreted as an assertion of spiritual birth at some point of adulthood. Both rituals signify the moment of salvation and the moment of introduction into the social sphere. In Catholicism, however, the moment of adulthood takes place at Confirmation, where one is (re)baptized and the subject must (re)name herself in the community. Indeed, Lola's adulthood as a member of multiple communities has only just begun. Significantly, adulthood for the Mexican-American in 1872 is certainly a rite of passage into a hostile world where the memory of the U.S.-Mexican war is not distant but ever-present, and the border wars of the early 1900s are yet to come.

The dehumanization of the newly-incorporated Mexican-American goes hand-in-hand with Mrs. Norval's attempt to racialize Lola as uncivilized and unacceptable for membership in her household. For Mrs. Norval, Lola's putatively Indian identity means that she is not entitled to citizenship in the U.S., nor may she retain her property, claim civil rights, or exercise freedom. If Lola Medina cannot assert her identity as a civilized and rational human being, then she cannot be accepted as a full member of the metaphorical U.S. household. Instead, she will be defined as sub-human; a piece of chattel subject to the capricious powers that rule over her and define her identity. If Lola successfully asserts her identity as a white, civilized, Christian child fully endowed with a fine moral sensibility, intelligence, and an excellent European heritage (as well as surpassing beauty), then she can claim the rights and benefits of U.S. citizenship as well as her rich Mexican inheritance.

Mrs. Norval's contestation of Lola's legitimacy in her household is based upon the claim that only her own belief "is a rational one." But her assertion is confounded by her husband's reply that Catholicism "answers the purpose of all religions as well as any other" (66). This objectivist stance signals Dr. Norval's rationalistic position and represented at least a segment of the U.S. population which was at this time much more in favor of humane and civil treatment of newly incorporated Mexican-Americans. Dr. Norval therefore becomes a model whom Ruiz de Burton wishes to promote in the public sphere: he is conscientious that most people require a belief system even if he does not subscribe to one himself. He makes these allowances because they create a coherent national identity that can define social

and political positions, but he remains supportive of the American doctrine of freedom as established in the early colonies. Through a culture of dissent, the separation between church and state becomes an imperative for civil freedom because in U.S. culture, the subject who is unable to engage the freedom of expression cannot become a full citizen, and because she fails to assimilate, her civil rights are as truncated in the material domain as they are in the spiritual one. In the discourse between Mrs. Norval and Dr. Norval, the expense of Lola's Catholic education underwrites the relationship between Lola's status as an adopted daughter of the family who is entitled to autonomy and the material demands that a European convent education entails. The economic and historical contest syncretically forms an epistemological standoff in the Norval household, and the stakes become the social and economic status that will define Lola Medina's future—Lola Medina, or allegorically, the Mexican-American ruling elite.

The struggle thus continues throughout the novel between those who welcome Lola into the Norval household (such as Dr. Norval and Julian), those who are willfully ignorant in their xenophobia (such as Mrs. Cackle and Mrs. Norval), and those who are maliciously acquisitive, understanding the situation, and cynically exploiting and even creating mystifying ideologies designed to deprive the helpless Mexican-Catholic child of her wealth and to gain possession of it for themselves. For Ruiz de Burton, the first is a noble citizen of the world, the second a morally depraved dupe who ironically gains comparatively little for her sins, and the third a purposefully wicked ideology for exploiting the ignorant, cheating and undermining the justice of the good, and exploiting the helpless. In parsing these differences, Ruiz de Burton contests popular anti-Catholic discourses in the U.S. surrounding Christian identity, citizenship, and democratic ideals.

According to Jenny Franchot, Catholicism in the nineteenth century American novel is centered upon suffering, endurance, and martyrdom. Prosperity in the present moment does not necessarily signify divine election as it does in the Weberian paradigm outlined in *The Protestant Ethic*. In fact, a Catholic epistemology suggests that the sufferer is the spiritually superior subject, thus underwriting the feudalistic economic structure of the hacienda system and explaining why Ruiz de Burton did not necessarily find herself in a contradictory position if she disregarded the peonage (or Irish maids) as low-born and not necessarily entitled to the same privileges that she claimed.

Just as the Weberian protestant ethic enabled capital to establish its ideology and grow, the Catholic sensibility that informed Ruiz de Burton's ideology readily accounted for the master-servant relationship in an inherited and stratified class system.

The literary context that Franchot and Griffen describe also suggests that the figuration of a protagonist like Lola Medina is a socially symbolic act, for it stakes the claim that the history of Mexican-American identity is integral to political and economic domination: Lola's identity has now been complicated by her incorporation into a new and different culture, and her ability to fit into the new dominant culture will have significant implications for all involved in the new world that has developed. It is on these complex grounds that *Who Would Have Thought It?* appeals to Protestant configurations of justice as her narrative attempts to uphold the democratic right of freedom and individuality for the new Mexican-American subject. For Ruiz de Burton, such injustices and acts of inhumanity call for immediate redress and many changes must follow in order for the marriage between Lola Medina and Julian Norval to succeed.

A naïve reading of *Who Would Have Thought It?* would merely suggest that Mrs. Norval's hypocrisy is a metaphorical critique of Northern racism following the rampages of the Civil War and reflects the desire for appropriating formerly Mexican wealth. According to Sánchez and Pita, "Whatever repugnance Mrs. Norval might harbor towards the dark Lola, the horrible little negro girl" ("Introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?*" xxv), it does not however extend to the wealth that accompanies her person. In fact, Mrs. Norval comes to see Lola's fortune as rightfully her own, as "part of her [personal] manifest destiny, she being of a superior race" (xxi) and religion and thus entitled to what has come into her possession. However, it is also important to note that Dr. Norval's "geological expedition" in the beginning of the novel hearkens back to the Spanish quest for gold in the New World, and his extended absence from the Norval household is what makes Lola's captivity narrative possible. He is not the perfect hero by any means. Dr. Norval may be a kind-hearted philosopher and a well-meaning man of science, but he lacks influence in his community because he is not socially connected to either of the churches in the small Massachusetts town, and he is considered to be a bit of a freethinker. If Aranda's estimation of Ruiz de Burton's intended audience is correct, the Californios who find themselves counting

upon kind-hearted liberals are to be warned against their naivete (the enemy is “us”) while the white-liberal readership that Ruiz de Burton has captured in her romance are warned against their own ineffectual positions in the New England social sphere.

Mrs. Norval’s strong representation of the family identity as a Protestant matron seems to make up for Dr. Norval’s aberrant intellectual position at the beginning of the romance, and his inattentive absences make it possible for the Norvals to become more easily ascendant and prosperous in the New England community. However, without the liberal voice of reason that Dr. Norval represents for Lola’s sake, all rationalistic restraint is removed from Mrs. Norval’s repressed desires as she asserts her domestic power (Kaplan 590). After Dr. Norval has taken leave of the household, there is an interesting interplay between the hypocritical and corrupt Presbyterian Reverend Hackwell’s psychological analysis of Mrs. Norval’s disposition for his own exploitive purposes and the succession of the seven deadly sins as her former household virtues of prudent spending and good stewardship turn to avarice and lead to overweening pride, envy, covetousness, wrath, gluttony, sloth, and of course, lust.

Thus the irrationality of *The Protestant Ethic* is exposed as the seven deadly sins overtake Mrs. Norval, whose identity becomes quite separate from that of her husband as the novel progresses. But Ruiz de Burton is also taking a broad retaliatory shot back and perhaps avenging the Latin world for the dirty and evil portrayals of nuns and priests in captivity narratives and escaped nun’s tales. She does this by holding up a mirror through reverse characterization and perhaps her intention, besides exposing the hypocrisies within U.S. society itself, is also to remind them of the not-so-distant atrocities regarding the Salem Witch trials and other manifestations of hypocrisy:

It was the anniversary of some great day in New England when the Misses Norval were to make their farewell appearance in church before leaving for Europe—some great day in which the Pilgrim fathers had done one of their wonderful deeds. They had either embarked, or landed, or burnt a witch, or whipped a woman at the pillory, on just such a day. (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have Thought It?* 62)

Thus she is attempting to completely spoil any justification for Manifest Destiny, even if such a thing does exist; her argument is that New England and Protestant society does not fulfill the divine requirement.

Ruiz de Burton intends to expose protestant skeletons and also the elusive epistemological undercurrents that trace back to the protestant reformation itself. There is a sublime intent to define and discuss the source of the problems, and the characters are simply representations of those unconscious currents of history and change. In a nation that prides itself on the tenet of unmediated freedom, there yet remains an inherent opposition to all things non-Protestant. Ruiz de Burton will not acquiesce to Manifest Destiny or the superiority of Protestantism because of its history of violence and because even in its meekest and most liberal forms, it is not superior to the religious identity that she already has. However, Ruiz de Burton cannot reasonably argue that her European history is the same as that of her conqueror-captors even if she considers it just as worthy. Instead, her narrative asserts that her characters are well-educated, articulate in English, and bred according to the highest Eurocentric standards. Likewise, her narrator's examination of the dominant culture strategically reveals an uncivilized and idolatrous culture in the New England household that possesses a baseness of its own. Thus, Lola finds herself having to cope with the capricious and extremely materialistic behavior of her keepers while she finds her strength from within.

Through the narrator's discourse, the text reveals a desire for the author to make a strong intervention in her historical moment: ethnic identity has been articulated in a way that insists that for mainstream nineteenth century U.S. culture, the Mexican-American is regarded as non-white and thus incapable of full citizenship without a great deal of money, cultural, and socially strategic alliances. However, she still insists that race and identity ought to be regarded as separate categories and posits that when more rational minds prevail, the U.S. will benefit both culturally and economically. Her demand for wisdom and justice is not based on race or class but upon the hope that rational minds may transcend the influences of cultural history by considering the rupture of the Reformation and European Enlightenment as something that can now be reconciled in the U.S. The narrative thus becomes an appeal for a civil dialogue (figured in the romantic plotline and eventual marriage of Julian Norval and Lola Medina) that can

result in cultural transformation and rationalism as they are united in the democratic experiment.

In Sánchez and Pita's Introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?* we learn that Ruiz de Burton originally wished to remain anonymous for fear that readers "would be more inclined perhaps to find fault with the text" (vii). This small detail confirms an important principal in the relationship between understanding how subjectivity informs reading. Despite Ruiz de Burton's preference, the newspaper correspondent who learned of her authorship did publish her name with his review. Thus we can see that in order to bring forth the unconscious currents of a text, one should consider not only the traditional close-reading of the text itself—its internal points of reference, its historical and cultural allusions, the protagonist's relationship to others in the narrative—but also its relationship to other texts. For example, María Cristina Mena also finds herself criticized and framed by editors in a way that trivialize and work the technologies of epistemic violence against the text, making Ruiz de Burton's position as an author in 1872 not unlike Mena's in 1914.

Ruiz de Burton locates herself and her heroic figurations as conquered, persecuted people who are in the process of being displaced and who are suffering injustice while her former position in the Californio ruling élite had been quite similar to those who now oppress her. Her sympathy for those she viewed as non-whites has been noted as almost non-existent, and her solidarity with them is lamentably unimagined. Some have noted that Ruiz de Burton, in her discourse as a victim of history has forgotten that she once enjoyed the privileges that only those who have been victorious in the historical process can know. Her narrative survives only because her decline in economic and cultural status had been significantly slowed as a result of her former glory; her educational privileges made her exceptionally literate and capable of marrying well enough into the new dominant culture to make her voice heard before she died in obscurity. Regardless of this ironic historical turn, it marks the literary and historical record that a conquest was made in 1848. Despite all of the strategic forgetting and remembering that has followed, it was not a bloodless event for Californio élites or for those of lesser degree who may have suffered less astonishment because they were more accustomed to surviving on the wrong side of power. Nationhood requires violence, and as Ernst Renan noted in 1882, it is usually only "a few

(wo)men of culture” who remain aware of the cultural value of such historical moments.

In “Canon Formation and Chicano Literature,” María Herrera-Sobek maintains that both the English and American literary canons were established in an atmosphere of epistemic and ideological violence just as Renan might have noted. As she carefully reminds her readers of the violence involved in establishing the Chicana/o canon, she insightfully writes, “The vectors and parameters of minority literatures must of necessity be judged differently because they arise out of a different socio-cultural context, just as English literature emerged out of a particular socio-political context” (217). It is no small wonder that María Amparo Ruiz de Burton twice published books that figured young women thrown into deceptively familiar environments in which they have been rendered strange as a result of historical circumstance. After the struggle of the U.S.-Mexican War began to wane, the epistemological history of Latinos became increasingly apparent as one culture played against another in the struggle for economic power and cultural supremacy. Ruiz de Burton’s writing emerged in this context, and it is saturated with the carnal and cultural struggles that ensued.

Ruiz de Burton’s texts reveal a new Mexican-American subject who found herself in the U.S. as she developed an increasing awareness of the full cultural consequences of what had happened. Even for the former ruling class, the context had changed considerably: they were now confronted with the authority of a new people who had a completely different understanding of the relationship between the church structure, authority, human culture, economics, and government. For newly incorporated Mexican-Americans, this signified a drastic change in how the land would be ruled and how every person confronted by epistemic violence would find herself unvoiced. As Walter Mignolo has explained in “The Enduring Enchantment: (Or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and Where to Go from Here),” the Eurocentric structure of law and economics is based upon a long-standing discourse about its place in history and its relationship between itself and its people. Ruiz de Burton and her fellow Californios found the differences immediately apparent, and it is no wonder that she foregrounds Lola Medina’s character in relation to how the members of the Norval household interpret her race. Nevertheless, in *Who Would Have Thought It?* we certainly feel the rage that comes from oppression.

Ruiz de Burton's entire world had changed, for the new rulers' beliefs about what was moral or immoral had a number of significant consequences. Her most pressing concern, of course, was how the ruling class would be identified and who would be included or excluded from that class. Her own status would be clearly defined in terms of race, economics, and affiliation, and this is reflected not only in her many letters but also in *Who Would Have Thought It?* It is clear that Ruiz de Burton attempts to define herself racially as a European, and her claim to wealth an attempt to force her oppressors to recognize the riches of Spanish colonization, but as self-serving as the novel may seem, it is also one of the strongest artistic refutations of the policies of Manifest Destiny, and it certainly challenges those who used the doctrine to defend the breaking of treaties and the appropriation of Mexican lands and wealth.

It is no surprise to find that the first known Mexican-American novel composed in English included at least some members of the dominant culture as the intended audience can be read in allegorical terms. A number of scholars have identified a complex audience for Ruiz de Burton's original publication. According to José Aranda's research in "Contradictory Impulses," Ruiz de Burton's texts "echo the politics of the Spanish-language newspaper *El Nuevo Mundo* and its Californio readership, who subscribed to a politics of universal democracy that they perceived was in keeping with U.S. culture and ideology" (569). Of course, this is not the ideology or the politics of the Chicana/o movement, which came much later and was much more radical, straightforward, and antagonistic towards the dominant culture. However, Franz Fanon's description of the vexed position in which colonized subaltern intellectuals find themselves explains why Ruiz de Burton might mobilize an oblique rhetorical strategy. She does not attempt to overthrow the new dominant class, nor does she try to interpellate the oppressed to violent resistance. She does, however, appeal to a universalized version of Christianity to call for justice. In his essay "Reason of the Other: 'Interpellation' as Speech-Act," Enrique Dussel describes this form of interpellation for the purposes of demanding or appealing for justice in Latin-American liberation theology. Instead of appealing to the masses to revolt, the subaltern speaker publicly articulates her suffering and appeals to the dominant culture (or members of the dominant culture with the potential to listen to the speaker) on an ethical plane, seeking inter-cultural discourse and

the possibility that a dialogue for justice may be opened (26). In *Who Would Have Thought It?*, Ruiz de Burton strives to open just such a dialogue.

Notes

1. José Aranda notes that “the Recovery Project is not without its critics, and the case of Ruiz de Burton serves as an object lesson in the complexities and contradictions in reconstructing literary history. In recovering the nineteenth century for Chicana/o Studies, the Recovery Project has inadvertently reactivated a long-standing debate about the heterogeneity of Mexican American culture and its relation to left-activist politics and questioned anew the idea that Mexican Americans have always been proletarian in character. To date, treatment of recovered texts has mapped out an uneasy alliance between the traditional working-class paradigms of Chicana/o Studies and the liberal, bourgeois leanings of the individuals who wrote after 1848. Early attempts to identify a writer like Ruiz de Burton as ‘subaltern’ were premature, I argue, because Chicana/o Studies has yet to conceptualize adequately the inclusion of writers and texts that uphold racial and colonialist discourses that contradict the ethos of the Chicana/o Movement” (“Contradictory Impulses” 553–554).

2. This phenomenon that Ruiz de Burton touches upon as early as 1872 resonates strongly with Chicana/o critical discourse that predates the Recovery Project. In 1986, Luis Leal observed that “The Chicano writer has been burdened with the attitudes of the American critic and creative writer inherited from the Puritans who considered the Mexicans as antagonists on religious grounds. The nineteenth century writers assumed an attitude of superiority towards the Mexican, especially after the United States defeated Mexico in 1848. Since that year he became, in the conquered lands, a second class citizen at best” (6). In 1991, Ramón Saldívar further developed the discussion of how American Puritanism comes to bear on the conquest of Mexico when he summarized the completion of that religious and ideological mission in *Chicano Narrative*: “with the signing of The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexico surrendered all claim to Texas and ceded to the United States the territories of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, thus fulfilling the ‘manifest destiny’ of the United States to extend its political, economic, and ideological hegemony over the American continent in the very year of the great European revolutions. That ideology fused Protestantism and American patriotism, capitalist economics, and Christian morality” (17).

3. For contemporary critics, the perceived danger of seizing upon an essentialized version of identity and thus rendering a deterministic reading of

a text on the basis of a reified conceptualization of epistemology becomes a serious theoretical issue because of postmodernist and cultural studies debates about language, religion, identity politics, and the nature of power relations as they relate to the academy. However, the solution to the conundrum in the Southwest is not to avoid the discussion of hegemony or to skeptically bracket epistemology as a temporary historical phenomenon that fades through secularization. Epistemological differences in works like Ruiz de Burton's remain significant, and ignoring the nuances of those differences potentially undermines the significance of the cultural and symbolic exchange that *Who Would Have Thought It?* represents. Enrique Dussel explains the dangers of Modernist and Postmodernist skepticisms in *The Underside of Modernity*, "From the Skeptic to the Cynic," which become fallible on the grounds of infinite regress and lead to cynicism. For Dussel, a cynical position always already privileges the hegemonic position and leaves no room for a fair exchange or for intersubjective dialogue, thus replaying what Spivak describes as epistemic violence and potentially sublimating what Fredric Jameson defines in *The Political Unconscious* as the continuous narrative of the oppressed. In the case of an early Mexican-American novel like *Who Would Have Thought It?*, it is better to view history as a problem of a profound contextual change which dramatically affected individual as well as collective experiences because of its cultural significance. Dr. Norval's wife rejects Lola Medina on the basis of her apparent color, but it is not the sole reason for her rejection of her reluctant ward. The cold-hearted New England matron must shift the reasons for her sustained rejection and persecution of Lola throughout the novel as Lola's color lightens and all outward appearances of phenotypical difference quite literally fade. However, Lola's difference from the dominant culture remains despite the author's sustained effort to create a context in which her protagonist may fit into her new world—for indeed, there is something profoundly interior about Lola's difference in New England.

4. Alcoff states in "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics" that "One makes sense of one's identity based on one's experience, which is itself a function of interpellation. And, against Althusser, to respond to interpellation by accepting the hail, even in the context of racialized identities, is not simply to capitulate to power but to actively engage in the construction of a self. To the policeman I have the option of saying 'You have the wrong person,' of accepting his recognition, or, as in the 'I am Spartacus' variant, reinterpreting his interpellation to accept it in a way he is not intending. All of these options involve my interpretive agency, including the option of acceptance. But the 'I' that chooses among these options is always already socially located" (340–341).

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