

Writing on the Edge: Impressions of a U.S.–Mexico Border in Rolando Hinojosa's

Estampas del Valle

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages in a critical reading of Rolando Hinojosa’s early fiction in *Estampas del Valle* as an example of a unique border literature that highlights the multiplicity of elements that exist along the Rio Grande. By using the work of an author that has direct experience with life along the U.S.-Mexico border the aim of this study is to look at how the border region and its cultural and spatial manifestations impact on writings concerned with memory, the personal and the self. Authors such as Rolando Hinojosa live within the blessing and terrors of multiplicity; a culture that splinters and fragments into multiple perspectives, identities, voices and discourses. This analysis attempts to locate the place of the border and its people as a vital locus of enunciation in contemporary cultural and literary studies and simultaneously show how Hinojosa forged new ground in this literary publication by creating an idiosyncratic form of fragmentary writing. The unifying elements which render Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* as a novel are a particular historical period, a geographical stage, and the collective characterization of a distinct brand of Mexicans: the *gente del Valle* de Rio Grande.

This work also examines the way in which this regional border area covering South Texas and Northern Mexico shapes his writing. My focus on *Estampas del Valle*, is to demonstrate the importance of this work as an individual novel, standing on its own, apart from the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. *Estampas del Valle* has been overlooked and overshadowed by the large composition of work that has become the *Klail City Death Trip Series* for which Hinojosa claims international recognition as a Mexican-American writer. Returning to his early writing we will explore elements of an ingrained multifarious border identity and how his early work is representative of his close ties to Mexico, Mexican literature and other Latin American forms of writing. In this study I will analyze how Hinojosa incorporates Mexican cultural and historical elements covering an array of topics from religious folk tales to the Mexican Revolution along the Rio Grande border. My aim is to provide the reader with the sense that although

Hinojosa's identity and writing are dialogic, he does not choose to be Mexican or American, but internally lives his Rio Grande Valley identity. This identity consists of a border culture with close cultural and linguistic ties to northern Mexico.

Hispanic theoreticians and literary critics of the border like Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar have reconfigured previous conceptualizations of the borderlands by discovering in the fluid hybridity characteristic of border population and culture an archetype with which to interpret America and even the world. Using space as a constant metaphor and agency for his writing, Rolando Hinojosa constructs an original framework for the Mexican American novel within the perspective of American regionalism and within the Mexican *norteño* space and imaginary. Rolando Hinojosa, who won the Quinto Sol Prize in 1972 was representative of the Quinto Sol writers who often rejected Anglo-American literary models and instead did what writers of Mexican heritage in the Southwest had done traditionally: they turned southward and did their literary apprenticeships in the works of authors such as Rulfo, Borges, and García-Márquez. In "The Evolution of Chicano Literature", Raymond Paredes writes that the new school of Chicano writers not only reaffirmed its cultural ties to the cultures of contemporary Mexico and Latin America but also rediscovered, as Mexican artists had earlier in the century, their aboriginal heritage. Just as literary and cultural critics have raised the issues of multiculturalism and identity politics, these minority writers have embraced the perplexing question of identity – of how group identities contribute to the self an essential quality, a crucial part of self-definition. Rolando Hinojosa tells the history of a community intermingled with his own.

In *Estampas del Valle*, Rolando Hinojosa confirms that the wall or border is not the impenetrable ring of protection that creates a metaphysics of the pure, but a site of a constant crossing, of conjunction and disjunction. The threshold of unpredictable dynamics, as actual crossings collide with maps as spatial and national demarcations, demarcation becomes, in Hinojosa's work, part of a dialectics, not of confrontation, but of interaction. The crossing of one culture to another, of one language to the other and of one way of living to the next, is only possible if the boundary ceases to be so and behaves more like a permeable membrane in a living organism such as the Rio Grande Valley Border that Hinojosa highlights in this oeuvre. My analysis considers contacts and crossings across the lines and within the lines as crucial sites to investigate and generate identities and the different manners of living and leaving, of rooting and routing. As a site of representation, the Rio Grande Valley is a palimpsest of routes, histories, and images distinctly traced in Hinojosa's novel. Finally, there is the basic principle: that for many Chicanos, the political boundary between the United States and Mexico has no real significance, that it is an impertinence arbitrarily separating people of a common cultural heritage. The point is simply that the Chicano in no sense lives in isolation; culturally and physically, he receives constant reinforcement from Mexico.

In this dissertation I will show how Hinojosa has mastered the vernacular of the people of the lower Rio Grande Valley that his text sounds like a metrical litany of colloquial expressions and local oral traditions. In this respect, it is not significant whether a sketch is rendered as monologue or dialogue. That Hinojosa has a keen and sensitive ear for the cadences of spoken language is illustrated by the fact that the majority of selections are recorded in the first person. But the fact is that even those selections recounted by nameless narrators share this remarkable oral quality. Once

more, the importance of this study lies in calling attention to Hinojosa's earliest novel, *Estampas del Valley* and its contributions to border literature simultaneously breaking away from concepts that generalize border crossings.

Significantly, Hinojosa demonstrates how, border location, specifically the Rio Grande Valley, becomes an intimate feature of identity and thus of the similitude between and among neighboring things; for, as Foucault explains in *The Order of Things*, "their edges touch, their fringes intermingle, the extremity of the one also denotes the beginning of the other. In this way, movement, influences, passions, and properties too, are communicated. So that in this hinge between two things a resemblance appears" (Foucault, 106). *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa proves, is a prime example of this composite multifaceted resemblance along the border's physical national boundaries. In addition to what has already been mentioned, my dissertation aims to examine the multiple voices and identities of the Rio Grande Valley in *Estampas del Valle* and their direct relationship to Mexican history, culture and heritage. The author's linguistic and literary techniques function to give this work a social realism in order to attack the political, social and economic problems of the Chicano on the border.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Valentín Cantú and Fernanda Cantú who have patiently stood by me, teaching me to love what I do, and providing me the emotional means to do it. I dedicate this to my sisters Belinda, Veronica, Fenny, my brother Vale and my fiancé Renato for their humor and their endless love and support throughout this process, and for always keeping me close though geographically apart. Vale, you are so special and I love listening to your fascinating stories. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my lovely nephew Tiago Tucker who has brought tremendous joy to my life since the day he arrived. Alejandra, Monica and Melisa – you are also family. Finally I dedicate this work to my mentor Professor José David whose unwavering support and words of inspiration have made my life infinitely richer. I owe you my academic and intellectual growth. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to dedicate my work to Rolando Hinojosa, thank you for your kind words of wisdom and support throughout my academic career. Your enthusiasm for my work is unparalleled.

The future of Chicano literature is bright ... *veremos*.

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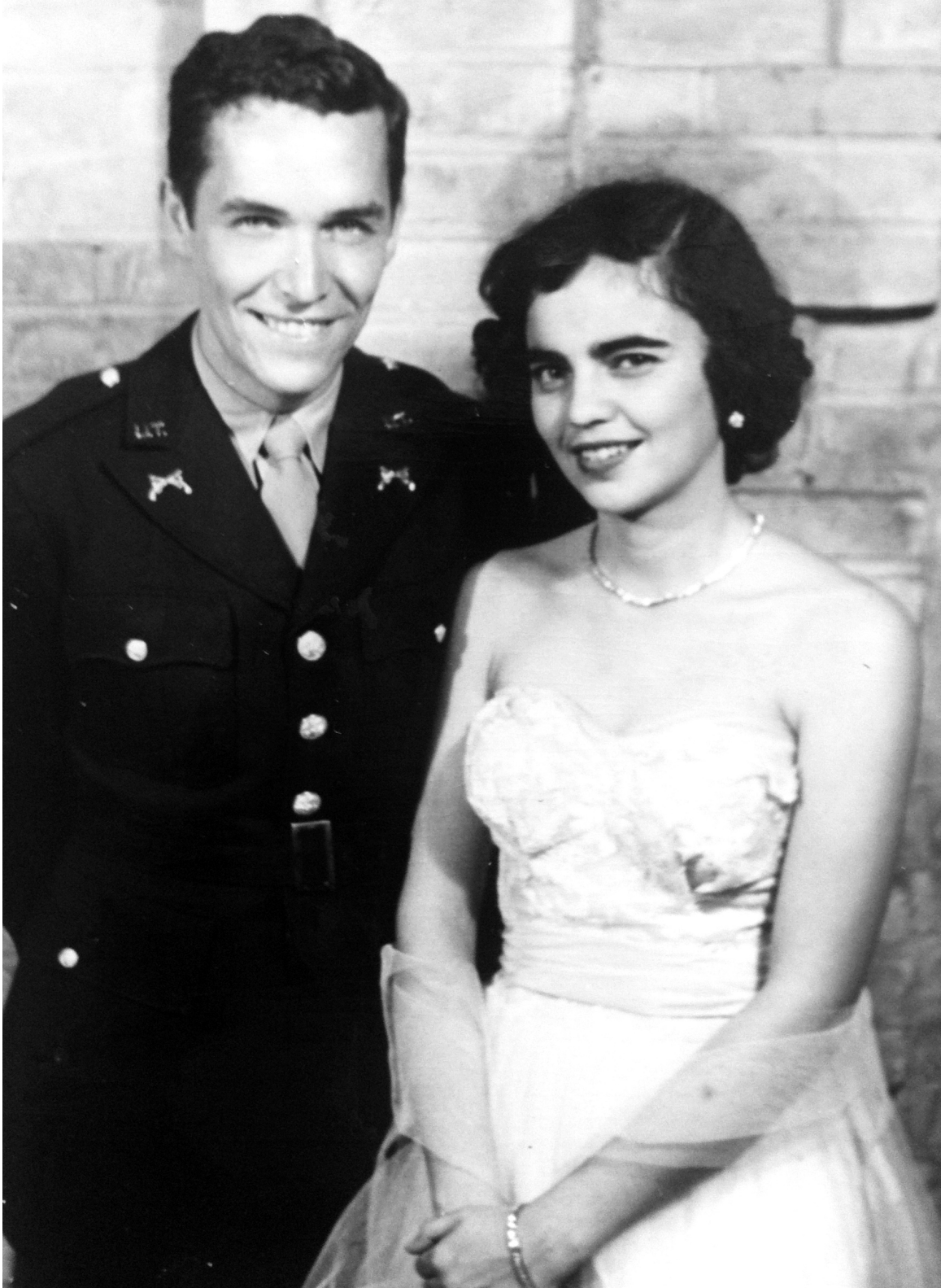
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Rolando Hinojosa at the University of Texas at Austin
November 29, 2011 by María G. Cantú



Rolando Hinojosa, Formal Ball
Courtesy of Rolando Hinojosa

Introduction

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

-Dylan Thomas

Shifting Territory: The Early Years

Rolando Hinojosa was born on January 21, 1929 in Mercedes, Texas. At that time Mercedes, Texas was a small agricultural community situated in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, three miles north of the Rio Grande. The Valley, a fundamental space in Hinojosa's narrative is a rural zone with a strong agricultural presence because of its semi-tropical climate generating a perennial year-round *cosechas*. Centuries before this site had been part of the Spanish colony known as Nuevo Santander, but was later annexed to the United States as part of the state of Texas. As a result, citizens in this region, Spanish, Mexicans and Texans were soon converted to citizens of this new Confederation. The arrival of Anglo-American settlers in the early nineteenth century initiated a period of gradually intensifying racial disharmony that reached a first climax with the settlers' rebellion against the Mexican government, resulting in the independence of Texas in 1836. The subsequent incorporation of Texas in the United States of America gave rise to the Mexican American War, after which the victorious United States annexed about half the original Mexican territory that today is known as the American southwest. "The signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which converted the descendants of the early Spanish colonists into U.S. citizens, marked the birth of a minority and the beginning of its subjugated existence" (Zilles xi). The Mexican people of the Valley became foreigners in their own land.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the North American presence in the region established a new social class amidst the older and more historic Mexican society. The new North American inhabitants, mostly lawyers and businessmen, situated themselves in the already established hierarchy. They placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy and joined forces with some of the wealthier Mexicans of that area. In fact, mixed marriages between those that had just arrived and those that had been established in the area for decades were not uncommon. The Mexican elite was seeking military status to add to their name and the ambitious Anglo was seeking greater capital and landownership. This area attracted the new inhabitants not only for economic reasons, but also because of the landscape, the climate and the simplicity of rural life. To some degree, it was an easy transition for the Anglos. Furthermore, mostly everyone in this area still spoke Spanish and the majority of business transactions were still conducted in Spanish.¹ Saldívar states:

The land grabbing, intermarrying and alliances of families, nevertheless, form a historical backdrop to the narration as this historical thread appears and reappears, intersecting various sketches. Of course life in Texas during the

¹ See David Montejano 1948-. *Anglos and Mexicans in the making of Texas, 1836-1986*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987. Print.

last part of the 19th century and early 20th century went beyond competition for land. Mexicans were murdered in cold blood by Anglos suspecting them of cattle rustling or merely for being Mexican. Racial friction as well as economic rivalry continued despite economic changes, which brought a shift from subsistence agriculture to commercial farming in south Texas. These animosities and antagonisms were faint associations made from a distance by the older members of the community. (Saldívar 82)

The history of the Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley, before it can be seen as exotic, must also be seen as a vacuity in a socio-historical perspective. Much to our dismay, there exist only limited accounts of the Mexican perspective of Texas history.

Shary Land Excursions

The following photograph is from the Shary Collection at the University of Texas Pan-American archives and published in the collector's edition book *El Valle: The Rio Grande Delta* by Seth Patterson². This colorful book provides an array of photographs and a brief history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as well as the Rio Grande Delta's land, people, flora and fauna. I had the honor of speaking to Seth Patterson, the author of this book about his project to document the history and the wildlife of the Valley. His project began when he came across a series of important archived photographs that represented Texas and border Valley history that were not readily available to the public. During his research, he came across this particular image in the archival collection at the University of Texas Pan-American and felt that it was a telling image of the history of the Valley that has not been talked about much in history books or amongst Valley natives.



This particular photograph was provided courtesy of the University of Texas-Pan American Library Archives; it dates back to March 10, 1916.³

This image, captured by John H. Shary, “Father of Texas Citrus Industry”, portrays an excursion of prospective land buyers along the Rio Grande River on March

² Patterson, Seth, and Lawrence V. Lof. *El Valle: The Rio Grande Delta*. Brownsville, Tex: Gorgas Science Foundation, Inc, 2010.

³ Murff, J.C.. *J. H. Shary excursion*, Photograph, March 10, 1916; digital image, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph17260> : accessed February 15, 2011), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting The University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas.

10 1916. Originally from Nebraska, John. H. Shary made his way to the Rio Grande Valley in 1912 because of the areas agricultural possibilities. Shary was the purchaser of the First Lift Station which irrigated more than 15,000 acres of land from the Rio Grande River and eventually built the United Irrigation Company and developed commercial agriculture in citrus, onions and cotton in the Valley. Shary was an extremely wealthy man ready to expand his economic capital in land appropriations and agriculture. According to the Handbook of Texas Online, Shary bought and subdivided more than 50,000 acres of land in the Rio Grande Valley. He also formed part of the Intercoastal Canal Association and the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway Company.⁴ Because of his prosperous agricultural developments and large land acquisitions, John H. Shary is known to have “built the Valley”.⁵

After his arrival in the Valley, he organized excursions for other potential out of town buyers interested in local lucrative business deals mostly in the field of agriculture. These land-buying excursions happened frequently from the 1910s to the 1930s along the area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, especially the land along the river, which is rich for its crop growing nutrients. The excursion meetings were held at the historical Shary House in Sharyland, Texas where future investors took field trips to agricultural sites, newly appropriated land or land for sale, or to the local Yacht Club. The photo above was taken next to the Río Grande River at a time when it was still free of clutter, borders and patrolled fences. The photograph depicts over fifty older men with strong capital dressed in Sunday attire including canes and top hats. The photograph also depicts ten women dressed in their elegant gowns with their matching scarves and summer hats to protect them from the Valley heat.



These excursions, such as the photo above⁶, were thought of as a form of extending family riches for the wealthy and as a consequence brought about the exploit of

⁴ See Brownsville *Herald*, May 10, 1936. *John H. Shary, Seventy-Second Birthday Anniversary, March 2, 1944*, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Vertical Files, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

⁵ John H. Shary’s biography can be found online in the University of Texas Pan-American Library Archives website. The Shary collection of photos is also available.

⁶ Murff, J.C.. John H. Shary excursion, Photograph, September 8, 1916; digital image, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph14480> : accessed February 15, 2011), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting The University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, Texas.

those selling their land for a less than suitable price. Although this may not have been the first intention of these potential buyers, their land needed tending to. These prospective landowners were, judging from the photograph, of Anglo descent and of strong economic force. José David Saldívar affirms, “Again and again in *Estampas del Valle y otras obras*, a historical materialism is dramatized, and the land grabbing by both unscrupulous Anglos and Mexicans is spelled out” (Saldívar 51).

The Valley did not quite take the same course as elsewhere in Texas. Among the tide of farmworkers and day laborers were numerous Mexican nationals from across the border. As a result, the Valley remained predominantly Mexican, along the Río Grande border; the struggle between old-timers and newcomers took on a racial character. For the farmers of the North, Mexicans were Mexicans, and the differences between Mexican landowners, independent vaqueros, and laborers – a hierarchy understood by the old timers – meant nothing to them. “Suddenly the peace structure that had made *compadres* of old American and even older Mexican families broke apart and left the Valley with only two major classes: Anglo farmers and Mexican laborers. The consequences for the Mexican population were disastrous” (Zilles 160-1).

Hinojosa writes of injustices such as the lack of education for the Mexican population in the Valley and the segregated schools, essentially Mexican town versus Anglo town. Segregated schooling meant substandard education for Mexican children, who were frequently taught by grudging, badly paid Anglo teachers who openly considered their Mexican students academically inferior, unclean, and linguistically inadequate. “Most teachers, principals and education administrators admitted that these were excuses for a general lack of interest in educating Mexicans” (Zilles 171). David Montejano sites an example of the kind of injustice and negative frame of thought that Mexican children endured. As one superintendent of a segregated school district stated: “So you see it is up to the white population to keep the Mexican on his knees in an onion patch or in new ground. This does not mix very well with education” (Montejano 193). The Valley became a tug of war lost by the Mexicans, some of who were in the area before the Anglos arrived. The history of this border region is complicated, fragmented and divided. Hinojosa lived these experiences growing up on the border.

Brief History of *los Hinojosa*

Manuel Guzmán Hinojosa, Rolando Hinojosa’s father, was born in the *Campacuás Ranch*, some three miles North of Mercedes, down in the Valley. Hinojosa’s grandfather and great grandfather were born in the same ranch. The Hinojosa family arrived in this region around 1740 with the José de Escandón expedition. The Spanish colonizer’s expedition brought numerous settlers from Querétaro and missionary communities to the Valley. He named the territory Nuevo Santander, present day Tamaulipas. When Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, the Hinojosa’s were united to the cause and became faithful Mexican citizens. Since they were part of Mexican territory, the families here lived a Mexican lifestyle and identified as such. After the Treaty of Guadalupe, the people of this area remained faithful to their Mexican roots, hence the Valley people’s affinity to Mexico. When the land settlers of the early 1900s appeared, Mexicans still populated the area. Due to his family’s history in the area, Rolando Hinojosa identifies as a Mexican although he is half Anglo.

This bicultural circumstance was not uncommon since a percentage of the new Anglo settlers that came to the area looking for land and agricultural opportunities married Mexican individuals. After 1848, the Smith-Phills decided to migrate to the Valley bringing with them their six-month-old daughter, Carrie, Hinojosa's future mother. Carrie Smith was raised among Mexicans and lived a bicultural and bilingual life in the Valley. She was able to read, write and speak in Spanish like a native. The fact that she spoke Spanish was not an uncommon occurrence in this time period. As a matter of fact, Anglos in the area used Spanish for their business affairs. Carrie Smith became a teacher and Manuel Guzman Hinojosa had multiple jobs as a farmer and a policeman. He also spent time in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and supported the cause from afar when the Revolution was in its last phases. Carrie Smith and Manuel Guzmán Hinojosa married shortly thereafter in the Rio Grande Valley. The Hinojosa-Smith matrimony remained in the Valley where they raised their five children. Rolando Hinojosa was the youngest of five children. He grew up reading and writing in both Spanish and English after spending some of his summers in Arteaga, Mexico and going to *escuelitas* where the classes were taught by Mexican exiles in the Valley.

After his educational years in the Valley, Hinojosa enlisted to serve during the Korean War. In his posts he wrote literature and journalistic pieces and participated in the dissemination of information through the airwaves as a radio deejay. These experiences would inevitably affect his style of writing. After his service in the war, Hinojosa enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin with the help of the G.I. Bill. He studied literature and history and held a part time job at the local library. Hinojosa graduated in 1953 with a B.A. in Spanish and a minor in History. Ten years later, Hinojosa begins his doctoral studies at the University of Illinois in Urbana. He works closely with professor Luis Leal to elaborate his literary projects. His dissertation *Money in the Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós*, finished in 1969, was closely related to his previous Master's thesis on *El Quijote*. Hinojosa followed his mother's footsteps dedicating his life to teaching. It was not until the 1970s that Hinojosa began writing at a professional level. At the time, he was teaching at Texas A&I University in Kingsville. Hinojosa met Tomás Rivera in 1971. The two became close friends and academic confidants. It was Rivera who encouraged Hinojosa to write *Estampas del Valle* and submit it to Quinto Sol. Hinojosa's literary career takes off at this time. He continues his literary career after *Estampas del Valle* publishing *Klail City y sus alrededores*, *Korean Love Songs*, *Mi querido Rafa*, *Rites and Witnesses*, *The Valley*, *Dear Rafe*, *Partners in Crime*, *Claros varones de Belken*, *Becky and her Friends* and *The Useless Servants*. Hinojosa's literary career continues as a Professor at the University of Texas at Austin where he teaches creative writing and attends multiple conferences a year. His passion for Chicano literature and for the Rio Grande Valley remains as vivid as the sketches we see in *Estampas del Valle*. His sketches depict the proximity of the Valley to the border and the cultural customs of the area.

Hinojosa identifies as a Mexican and is influenced by his time spent in Mexico and by the education he received from the exiled individuals fleeing from the hardships of the Mexican Revolution. In Hinojosa's multivolume *Cronicón del condado de Belken/Klail City Death Trip*, his Korean war experience is crucial for the reconstruction of Texas as the Land of Our Fathers, the land defended by Mexican *revolucionarios*. In 1859 don Juan Nepomuceno Cortina was the first to rise up and defend his rights against

Anglo-Texan authority. At his family's Rancho del Carmen, Cortina fought the Brownsville Rifles and Tobin's Rangers. The fictional don Jesús Buenrostro, the unifying element in Hinojosa's vast cronicón, also defended his own land at his own Rancho de Carmen. From Hinojosa's 1973 *Estampas del Valle* to his 1998 *Ask a Policeman*, the site of Mexican resistance maintains its rich symbolism as the locus of identity for the Buenrostro lineage" (Calderón xvii).

Hinojosa's family history and his own personal ties to the Rio Grande Valley are vibrant and are a vivid example of the kind of history and the experience that is lived on this specific border. Hinojosa's ties to Mexico and to the Spanish language are intricately involved in the creation of his fictional work and fictional world that his characters inhabit. As a matter of fact, "as well as selecting a Spanish narrative form, Hinojosa chose to write three of his four books in Spanish, in colloquial northern Mexican Spanish, revealing both the cultural enmity between and fusion of Mexicanos and Texas Anglos" (Calderón 140).

Present Rio Grande Valley

Possibly nowhere else in the United States is the Mexican quality of Chicano life purer or more intact than in the Rio Grande Valley. This quality may result from proximity of the area to the border and the consequent reinforcement and interaction with Mexico; possibly it results from the Chicano's alienation from the impermeable Anglo society and culture. In any case, life among Chicanos in the Valley has a strong Mexican flavor. So much so that authors such as Rolando Hinojosa paint their literature with cultural essence. Family structures, social relations, cuisine, clothes, and music – all are predominantly Mexican in character. Spanish is the first and usually preferred language. It is into this *mexicano* world of the lower Rio Grande Valley that the sketches of *Estampas del Valle* draw the reader. To give that world depth, width, and vitality, Hinojosa pans his narrative view across numerous lives indigenous to the area, zooming in now and then for a close-up of a particular personality within his sketches.

In this dissertation, we will focus on Rolando Hinojosa's first work, *Estampas del Valle*, published in Spanish in 1973. In *Estampas del Valle* Hinojosa establishes a sense of place and personifies the lower Río Grande Valley molding it as a protagonist that defines the community of fictional Belken County. We will also analyze the close connections, historically, culturally and linguistically that this regional space shares with rural Northern Mexico. Hinojosa's fictional work is not one that is lost in translation. In this work he succeeds in demonstrating that they Valley is indeed a meeting place of languages and culture. Despite the Anglo land settlers, Mexican culture remains vivid. *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa's literary foundation has been overshadowed by his *Klail City Death Trip Series*. Through this study, it is my intention to shed light and bring into focus Hinojosa's early work as a foundational fiction of border literature.

His sketches or *estampas* can be seen as a series of narrative post cards that introduce the reader to life in this area. Hinojosa's sketches are particularly brief, sometimes no more than two or three paragraphs. In this regard, he seems a kindred spirit of Julio Torri (1899-1970) who, in popularizing the *estampa* in Mexico, argued that the greatest defect in literature was excessive explication. In an opening *estampa*, "Nota que sirva para despabilar," Hinojosa writes, "la gente que aparece y desaparece en estas Estampas, así como los sucesos que en ellas surgen, bien pudieron ocurrir o no. El

escritor escribe y trata de hacer lo que puede; eso de explicar es oficio de otra gente. Uno cumple con escribir sin mostrar la oreja” (Hinojosa 25). Hinojosa employs a common Mexican expression “sin mostrar la oreja” that is synonymous with the saying “sin mostrar la pierna”. In other words, the literature that Hinojosa writes is meant to be informative without revealing it all or without communicating too much information. Literature, according to Torri and Hinojosa, need not be explained. The act of explaining belongs to someone else, not the author. The sketches are meant to be short and to the point like a series of detailed still shots.

The Rio Grande Valley is a unique border area. The lower tip of Texas extends south from a line between Laredo and Corpus Christi to the Rio Grande River, which cuts an irregular border with Mexico. The general area of the lower Rio Grande Valley is roughly one hundred miles in width and slightly less in length. The names of the counties, like the names of the towns, bear testimony to the mixed history of Anglo and Mexican settlers who colonized the Valley: counties like Cameron, Starr, and Jim Wells, as well as Hidalgo and Zapata; towns like Falfurrias, Vidoras, La Joya and Alamo, as well as Edcouch, Kingsville, and Pharr. To those familiar with the names and ways of south Texas, Hinojosa's sketches of the valley are precise in detail and accurate in tone. Hinojosa's depiction of the tip of Texas is a unique ethnographic literary discourse within the Chicano literary sphere.

The lush valley near the river and the rough rangeland spanning the wide expanses northward are home to both Chicanos and Anglos, who for generations have lived side by side. With their mores dependent upon small town life, agricultural work, and ties to nearby Mexico, Chicanos over time have so little changed their ways of life that their style of existence in the Valley is now seen to be unique. Despite mobility as seasonal farmworkers, most Valley residents maintain strong familial and communal ties. Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer articulates this very idea when she states, “Commitments to family, home, community, along with alliances and animosities, are transmitted from one generation to the next. For the Chicanos who live there, life in the Valley progresses slowly, following the unhurried rhythms of small towns everywhere” (Dwyer 43).

Hinojosa has so mastered the vernacular of the people of the lower Rio Grande Valley that his text sounds like a metrical litany of colloquial expressions, vulgarisms, and even names themselves. That Hinojosa has a keen and sensitive ear for the cadences of spoken language is illustrated by the fact that the majority of selections are recorded in the first person. But the fact is that even those selections recounted by nameless narrators share this remarkable oral quality. *El pueblo* becomes the central character; it is the anonymous and collective voice of the people that we hear. Chicanos of the Rio Grande Valley live relatively close to the Mexican border so that cultural transfusion occurs regularly. There is also the intensive legal and illegal immigration from Mexico to the U.S. that influences border areas.

Finally, there is the basic principle mentioned earlier in this essay: that for many Chicanos, the political boundary between the United States and Mexico has no real significance, that it is an impertinence arbitrarily separating people of a common cultural heritage. The point is simply that the Chicano in no sense lives in isolation; culturally and physically, he receives constant reinforcement from Mexico. In “El Paso del Norte”, a remarkable essay about the durability of Mexican culture in the United States, John Rechy believes that only geographically does the Rio Grande divide the United States

from Mexico. The Mexican people of El Paso, for example, more than half the population and practically all of Smelertown, Canutillo, Ysleta – are all and always completely Mexican, and will remain that way. The Valley and Belken County are no exception. Hinojosa captures the essence and history of the Chicano community.

“Así se cumple”: Analysis

Chicano writers strive for the capturing of a fast-disappearing past, the conserving of past experiences, real or imagined, through literary articulation. Rolando Hinojosa’s novel demonstrates that life and ways of life experienced by Chicanos of the Southwest have been moved toward the dimension of art by contemporary Chicano authors. *Estampas del Valle* portrays the regional and aesthetic geographical elements of the Valley and gives a glimpse of this community’s lifestyle on a local and international scale. For Hinojosa, it is important to denote this space as rural, yet with the capabilities of living outside of the region. The *estampa*, “Así se cumple” details the life of Viola Barragán and Pioquinto Reyes of Belken County. Hinojosa demonstrates that although Viola lives an international life, her experience in the Valley and in northern Mexico have not escaped her. The story of Viola Barragán begins with the mysterious depiction of a Mexican cemetery on an ominous day in Belken County.

The opening of the *estampa* describes the cold desert-like cemetery during the burial of a local townsman, Pioquinto Reyes:

No lejos de Bascom está el cementerio mexicano; allí en un octubre más frío de la cuenta enterraron a Pioquinto Reyes. Fue una cosa escueta y como el tiempo no daba para más, la gente acurrucada en grupitos y con la cabeza agachada defendiéndose contra la llovizna, se desparramaba con prisa hasta abandonar el lugar para otra ocasión. En el Valle, como en todas partes, el frío y la muerte suelen venir a deshora. (Hinojosa 87)

These telluric images give the reader an impression of a cold, lonely and solemn place. Hinojosa fixates on an image of frigidness and death. His depiction of the natural elements coincides with those of the lifeless body of Pioquinto Reyes. The author describes multiple cultural elements that encompass the Valley such as the Anglo influence that has reached some of the Mexican community’s religious rituals. He describes Pioquinto’s religious affiliation as Presbyterian and not Catholic like the majority of Belken County inhabitants. On this exceptionally cold and rainy day, the people at Pioquinto’s funeral hurriedly paid their respects. Hinojosa’s descriptions are not written in vain. Every word in his sketches has a deeper and multilayered meaning. The rushed nature of the community’s participation in the funeral will come into play as the sketch progresses. Hinojosa’s writing is full of contrast and irony.

Hinojosa also gives an insight into Pioquinto’s untimely death. Known as a serious man, Pioquinto “En su juventud había sido demasiado serio y luego, más tarde, se hizo viejo antes de que llegara ni a los cuarenta” (Hinojosa 87). Pioquinto Reyes faces an unlikely and untimely death that does not coincide with his serious and quiet lifestyle. Hinojosa uses irony and humor to lighten up the gloomy day and burial taking place at the local Mexican cemetery. It appears that Pioquinto, to everyone’s surprise, died at the local Holiday Inn in the outskirts of town. The locals knew Pioquinto as a successful and

respected accountant and family man. The way in which Pioquinto lives his last moments at the Holiday Inn is a testament to Hinojosa's use of irony and humor surrounding dark and serious events such as a burial. "El Pioquinto cuando oyó el trompetazo anunciando su día de juicio, estaba montado sobre Viola Barragán, mujer que, hace veinte años fue carne de cañón de lo mejor, y, ahora todavía da qué decir. El Pioquinto estiró la pata, es un decir, en plena acción, entregando el arpa como cualquier hijo de vecino" (Hinojosa 87).

Hinojosa's use of local phrases in his writing demonstrates a mastery of oral and colloquial linguistic traditions. Phrases, also known as *dichos*, such as using "el" before Pioquinto's name for familiarization and "estiró la pata" to signify that someone has "croaked" or died are terms generally used in oral speaking. In this dense and precise *estampa* the infamous trumpet of death has called upon this decent townsman at his moment of weakness. Just like any other man, he too has sinned "como cualquier hijo de vecino". Ironically, he was called to the pearly gates to "turn in his harp" as he was having extramarital sex with the infamous Viola Barragán. His death is a culmination of the type of life that he did not lead or the type of life that people in town thought he was incapable of leading. Hinojosa contorts Pioquinto's image with his last physical act. Perhaps he became his true self at the culmination of his death. Pioquinto was "montado" on Viola ensuing an animalistic and carnal act at the time of his death. This act is a contrast to Pioquinto's reputation. It pushes the reader to ask deeper questions such as "who really was Pioquinto Reyes?" Hinojosa provides a detailed insight into the life of Viola Barragán and her personal history with Pioquinto and the other men in her life.

A marking quality of Rolando Hinojosa's writing is that in this short sketch he manages to speak of numerous families and individuals of Belken County. His capsule-like writing is meticulous and thorough. For example, in this particular sketch, Hinojosa mentions Pioquinto, Viola Barragán, Rafa Buenrostro, Víctor Peláez, Gela Maldonado, don Javier, Telésforo and Felicitas Barragán, Blanca Rivera and the religious *hermano*⁷ Limón. Rafa Buenrostro relates his childhood account of the burial of Pioquinto and chronicles Viola Barragán's early life in Belken County. It is through Rafa's observations as a child that the reader learns of the secret relationship between Viola and Pioquinto Reyes. Rafa's ingenuous observations at the burial reveal the closeness and intimacy between the secret couple. Memory plays a significant role in Hinojosa's *estampas*. Rafa is telling the story as he remembers it. The narrator must constantly rely on his memory to build the narrative. Memory is accrued in layers. The narrator recounts the story and relies on the narrative he heard from Rafa Buenrostro. Rafa witnessed the scene as a child and added other elements that he heard from other community members himself. Through memory, Rafa preserves the history of the Belken County community. As we read the sketch, the reader too becomes entangled in this web of preserving a storytelling tradition. Rafa Buenrostro recounts:

Secede que después del entierro y cuando la gente ya se había colado, una mujer con su buen abrigo de gamuza y sombrero de piel con velo de

⁷ *Hermano* or *Hermana* is a term commonly used amongst religious individuals. It is a form of respect as well as a religious mark of solidarity amongst churchgoers.

oreja a oreja se dirigió al montón de tierra donde descansaba el Pioquinto. De su bolsa negra de charol extrajo un pañuelo del cual estuvo deshaciendo un nudo hasta desatarlo para producir un anillo de oro que ni ancho ni grueso. Tuvo que ensuciar los guantes al enterrar el anillo al pie del montón de tierra, pero ni pareció darle mayor importancia al lodo que se formaba entre el tejemaneje de los terrones y la llovizna persistente. Nada de rezos ni lloriqueos sino, más bien, una mirada resignada con la frente alta, la vista despejada, y sin la menor mueca traidora en la boca. (Hinojosa 88)

This account, although meant to be an innocent observation from the point of view of a child is a remarkable example of Hinojosa's rich style. His writing reveals multiple layers of interpretation and illustrates that his words are chosen carefully and meticulously to demonstrate double entendres.

In the passage cited above, the author reveals a layer of secrecy, ritual, memory, the carnal, sacrifice, and the importance of a strong bond. The image describing Viola on the wet ground unraveling the ring from her delicate handkerchief to bury at the feet of Pioquinto is set to the backdrop of a rainy and cold day in a local abandoned Mexican cemetery. Her ritual, performed secretly, is synonymous to the relationship she had with her lover. The ring she offers at her lover's grave symbolizes dedication and honor while its circular shape signifies an eternal cycle that breaks with chronological and linear time. Viola, believes Rafa Buenrostro, is an eternal widow. The loss of her secret lover has brought her to a place of mourning, yet again. Hinojosa's writing and choice of words contain religious undertones and double meaning. Viola honors Pioquinto on her own, apart from the others, "cuando la gente ya se había colado" further evincing that her performance is meant to be witnessed only by Pioquinto and God. Her sacrificial burial of the ring goes beyond the superficial and material. "Tuvo que ensuciar los guantes al enterrar el anillo al pie del montón de tierra, pero ni pareció darle mayor importancia al lodo que se formaba entre el tejemaneje de los terrones y la llovizna persistente" (Hinojosa 88). In this scene, Viola has become entranced in her ceremonial offering. She is not bothered that her delicate mourning attire demonstrating her daintiness and economic status is saturated with the wet dirt that envelops her late lover. She moves the wet cemetery dirt on and about as if making love to Pioquinto one last time. She surrenders at the feet of her lover relinquishing one last token of affection and finally, marrying him on his permanent deathbed. She leaves her ring with Pioquinto as a sign of devotion, but also as a sign of detachment. This will be the last night that Viola spends by Pioquinto's side.

Dark Irony in "Asi se cumple"

Hinojosa chooses the vocabulary in his sketches with much thought and rigor. The word *tejemaneje* describing the way in which Viola delves through the wet ground has two meanings that can help the reader understand the rich use of layering and double meaning in the *estampa*. Hinojosa simultaneously paints two distinct pictures with the use of the word *tejemaneje*. One definition of the word relates to the pictorial telluric image describing the physical and tangible contact of Viola Barragán grappling with the wet dirt at Pioquinto's gravesite. Viola and Pioquinto's relationship was a forbidden one.

They muddled from place to place in secrecy. This impression focuses on tainting the image of the ritual for their affair, just like Viola's muddy gloves, symbolized something "dirty". Viola's gesture at the cemetery, although romantic and evocative, also represents a less noble affair in the eyes of the Belken County community, particularly the Presbyterian Church to which Pioquinto and his wife belonged. *Tejemanaje* also implies a questionable matter with an unscrupulous or dishonest purpose.

Hinojosa's playful description of Viola's sacrifice displays an array of contrasts regarding Viola's integrity and moral strength. Hinojosa both mocks and admires Viola for her moving gesture of the buried ring. The title of the sketch "Así se cumple" demonstrates his admiration for her deed at the cemetery. Now this type of act, Rafa explains, is how one complies or makes good with the universe. Viola's last act of redemption proves that her love life was more than a simple adventure. Hinojosa describes her as a strong woman with a weakness for love, adventure, travel, money and men. Viola is a poised woman even at her lover's grave. Like the author of these sketches, her mannerisms demonstrate that she also operates in a way that is concise and to the point. "Nada de rezos ni lloriqueos sino, más bien, una mirada resignada con la frente alta, la vista despejada, y sin la menor mueca traidora en la boca" (Hinojosa 88). Viola does not let her emotions get the best of her. With dignity, she resigns to her (bad) luck with men and accepts her unfortunate loss in solemn and silence.

Hinojosa uses the voice of Rafa Buenrostro and his knowledge of the townspeople to recount the tale of Viola's love life in and outside of Belken County over the years. Rafa, in this case, becomes the storyteller highlighting the importance of oral tradition in Rolando Hinojosa's writing. The narrator, then, forms a second narrative layer retelling the reader the story he originally heard from Rafa Buenrostro. "Según Rafa Buenrostro, Viola, viuda por primera vez a los dieciocho años poco antes de la segunda guerra mundial (en lo que va de siglo) tocaba el piano bastante mal y cantaba canciones que nadie conocía. Se había casado con un nacional de Agualeguas, Nuevo León, expatriado medico-cirujano que vino a morir a manos de un boticario que ejercía sin título" (Hinojosa 88). Viola, underlines Hinojosa, has not had the best luck with men. Similarly, the reader can discern the ironic nature with which Hinojosa composes his sketches. The surgeon Viola was married to ironically dies at the hands of a pharmacist practicing without an adequate license. In a clever and ironic twist of fate, the medical field kills the mighty doctor. It is also important to note how Hinojosa subtly inserts the Mexican cultural paradigm into his writing. The cemetery where Pioquinto is buried in Belken County is strictly Mexican. Through the detailed description of Viola's love life Hinojosa demonstrates the close ties that Belken County has with northern Mexico. Hinojosa creates a metaphor in which the cultural ties between Belken County and Mexico can be seen as Pioquinto and Viola's tumultuous love affair.

The reader can believe that there is something special about Belken County. No matter how far Viola traveled with her companions, she, like others, unfailingly returned to Belken County. Seven months after losing her first husband, she gets together with don Javier Leguizamón, a powerful local landowner that ends up leaving her for another woman. Viola's sentimental misadventures can be translated metaphorically. The following passage describes her second marriage and the misfortune that carried her abroad to an out of the ordinary (for Belken citizens) near death experience in a concentration camp. Interestingly, Hinojosa intermingles Belken County with world

history:

Después de lo de don Javier, Viola se volvió a casar; esta vez con un alemán agregado al consulado general en Tampico, Tamaulipas, que había cruzado la frontera a Estados Unidos en plan de paseo y que volvió con Viola cruzados de brazo. De Tampico la pareja zarpó para la India donde el esposo iba como primer secretario al embajador alemán. La guerra mundial, como ya se sabe, echó la cosa al traste y así fue como Viola Barragán, muchacha originaria de Ruffing, Texas, hija de Teléfono Barragán y Felicitas Surís de Barragán, fue a parar en un campo de concentración inglés en las afueras de Calcutta. Me la tuvieron en la sombra al lado de su señor esposo hasta que se les trasladó a Pretoria en la república sudafricana donde les sorprendió la rendición del coronel-general Jodl en una escuela de primaria de aquel oscuro pueblecito francés.

El esposo de Viola no perdió ripio; se volvió a Alemania y, ni corto ni perezoso, en menos de cinco años ya estaba de nuevo en Pretoria como funcionario de la Volkswagon Werke y, por supuesto, con Viola a su lado. Andando el tiempo, el alemán muere de repente, le deja a Viola sus buenos pesos, ésta vuelve a Estados Unidos y, como los mismos pararitos a su nido, cae en Belken County. (Hinojosa 88-9)

Viola has lived an adventurous life outside of Belken County. Hinojosa feels a conflicting attachment to this character. He loves her and he loves to see her suffer for she does both wholeheartedly. Hinojosa is an admirer of her devotion to her situation and the dignified manner in which she handles difficult circumstances. The author feels *cariño* for Viola when he states, “me la tuvieron en la sombra...”. This phrase shows ownership and affection and is usually used to describe loved ones. Viola is one of them; she is an insider and the narrator feels an affinity to her. The author creates a close-knit tie between Viola Barragán and Belken County. Belken County raised Viola and does not want to see her suffering in a concentration camp. The *cariño* demonstrated in these words touches on the intimacy between the author, Belken County and its community members. Close ties are forged through shared life experiences.

Viola's turbulent personal life is a testament to her character. She is quick to love and makes rash decisions leading with her instincts and intuition. Even after her successive losses Viola does not hesitate to take on a new romantic adventure; she is not afraid to take risks. The characters of Belken County are strong and relentless. Viola's return to her native Belken County surprised the other community members. This sketch gives us a lasting impression of a small border town where everyone knows everyone else. *La gente*, or the townspeople, Hinojosa shows, hold an important place in his narrative. What they say matters, for it keeps the tradition of an oral culture present within the community. It is a form of preserving the history of the locals. Hearing about Viola's “retirement” from her “adventurous” life, the people of Belken County were baffled and taken by surprise. So much so that the only thing they could say about Viola, her travels and her love affairs was that after being gone for so long she had not forgotten her roots and her language. “La gente, maravillada, no hallaba por dónde empezar y lo único que podía decir era que a Viola no se le había olvidado el español” (Hinojosa 89).

No matter how far Viola traveled, she steadily returned to the Valley and quickly found a way to make herself at home. Analogous with *Estampas del Valle*, the preferred and primary language of the townsfolk is Spanish. Rolando Hinojosa once again reminds us that Belken County is a border city with a strong Mexican influence culturally and linguistically.

Harmonizing Polarities

Hinojosa's writing is rich in dichotomies. He presents Viola as a strong character that is capable of surviving a concentration camp and yet also depicts her as an individual that is morally weak or susceptible to enamored enchantments. "Pasando el tiempo, el diablo, ese amigo del débil, le deparó una sorpresa más a Viola Barragán en la figura de Pioquinto Reyes" (Hinojosa 89). The devil, states the narrator, is a friend of the weak. Viola is strong, but there is no doubt that her weaknesses are manifested loud and clear in this *estampa*. Hinojosa is a bearer of truth. His depiction of border natives is not idealistic. He is adamant about demonstrating real traits and real character flaws that are more closely related to actual life experiences. He does not romanticize the image of the borderer; instead he provides strong points and weak points and gives the reader free reign to interpret.

The world of Belken County is not perfect; it is realistic and susceptible to human error. Viola is portrayed as a woman that knows what she wants and goes after it. She is depicted as both a predator and a victim of her circumstances. Her ritual with Pioquinto presents her as devoted, yet her secrecy is perfidious. The reader feels both sympathy and discontent for her actions. When Viola first laid eyes on Pioquinto, she deemed him hers. She was out to conquer him. Viola states, "'Este es de los míos; ahora hago lo que hago porque me da la gana y no por comer caliente. Y así fue como el diablo los juntó hasta que Dios, meses más tarde, los separó en el motel'" (Hinojosa 89). The religious contrariety in the passage above demonstrates the multiple and sometimes contrasting narrative layers present in the text. In this case, the devil unites this pair of lovers, but ultimately it is God who dictates the future of the couple. The devil brought this couple together in love and adventure and it is God, ironically, who brings the terror of death. God, Hinojosa shows, can also be a destructive and unforgiving force. In a lover's world, Viola is viewed as a bad omen, but to her avail, Pioquinto was an unsuspecting bystander. In this *estampa*, death becomes her.

Pioquinto loses his life in a humorous and humiliating fashion. Hinojosa's irony focuses on portraying his characters' multifaceted personalities. Pioquinto is a serious and quiet man with a calm temperament. He was married to Blanca Rivera and was often seen as a pushover. The author presents a sketch where things are not always what they seem. In a small town, anything and all is possible if the devil and God are scheming their rivaling plots. Hinojosa alleviates his authorial responsibility by using religion to expose accountability. Experience did not permit Viola to be alarmed by Pioquinto's death at the Holiday Inn. Life no longer fazed her. "Cuando el Pioquinto patateó en el Holiday Inn, Viola (que ya no se asustaba de nada) se vistió sin prisa, desocupando el cuarto para salir gallardamente rumbo a Edgerton donde se desentendió del caso como si tal cosa. Al Pioquinto se lo encontró una secatrapos que avisó al gerente que etc. y etc'" (Hinojosa 89). Viola's calm predisposition after Pioquinto's death demonstrates that she has resigned to what life brings her way. She is no longer surprised and she is no longer

afraid; instead, she is complacent and accepting. Death as a form of separation between her and her lover at the Holiday Inn did not give her the opportunity to say goodbye to Pioquinto. She was not able to act accordingly on the matter because she had to flee the scene of her lover's death. In a sense, she abandoned Pioquinto at the Holiday Inn. She could not reveal his death to the appropriate authorities in order to spare Pioquinto, his family and most of all his reputation in Belken County. She detaches herself from the situation wholeheartedly and waits for the proper moment to make peace with her deceased devotee.

Given the circumstances, any person would be shocked, scared and overwhelmed with grief and sadness. Viola, however, manages to transform her semblance in the span of a moment. Viola is described leaving the Holiday Inn *gallardamente* meaning gracefully and nobly. Hinojosa's irony captures the essence of this character's contrastive personality. The circumstance of Pioquinto's death calls for a melodramatic reaction of a lover who suddenly loses her partner and is unable to speak of it or find consolation. This gloomy circumstance does not provide her with closure. Viola, nonetheless, is able to separate from the dramatic turn of events. Viola manages to compose herself and moves on with her life. If a concentration camp did not terminate her, the simple death of a quiet lover will not make a dent on her conscience. Hinojosa's derisory humor shines in this example. Even though Viola's role as a secret lover is not dignified or noble, she does not care to dwell on the past. It is evident that the storyteller admires her strength and resilience in the face of tragedy. She moves forward and waits for the right moment to pay proper respects to Pioquinto.

Pioquinto's fate ends in the local Mexican cemetery where his wife and his family plead for his soul. Hinojosa does not explicitly state that Pioquinto's family knew about his love affair, but the reader can only imagine that after he was found dead at the Holiday Inn, the townspeople and his family would assume a conceivably questionable scenario. In the closing paragraph of the *estampa*, Hinojosa poses questions that are connected with a narrative that will develop the sketch's plot. "Viola? Regular, gracias, y ahora a los cincuenta y pico de años todavía se defiende bastante bien contra el tiempo. Lo del anillo, ni para qué decirlo, fue un gesto de primera, un gesto de desprendimiento digno de enseñanza a los de poco corazón" (Hinojosa 90). The narrator actively includes the reader and the listener to the story by answering "supposed" follow-up questions about Viola's current whereabouts. Hinojosa tames our curiosity by clarifying what has become of Viola in her ripe years. Once again, he commends her grand gesture at the cemetery. Viola, the narrator believes, is a dignified woman that is capable of teaching thoughtless individuals how to face a difficult situation with solemnity. Ultimately, Hinojosa believes that an individual will show his or her true colors in times of adversity.

Hinojosa combines humor, sarcasm, and irony and amalgamates those qualities with a unique narrative approach. Often enough, the author portrays death in a humorous fashion. Pioquinto did not simply die in "Así se cumple", Pioquinto "patateó en el Holiday Inn". Hinojosa uses colloquial language to make his work three-dimensional. The colorful form in which he relates a simple occurrence adds texture and cadence to the rhythm of this writing. He is also keen on reminding us that although his *estampas* are dense, they are not overflowing with unnecessary details or explanations. The reader must constantly remember the introduction to *Estampas del Valle* in the "Nota que sirva para despabilar". Hinojosa's word choice could not be more precise. The word

despabilar, for example, means to increase someone's intelligence, mental agility or capacity in relation to a certain topic. It means to clarify, to awaken. In "Así se cumple" Hinojosa does just that; he awakens the reader to a new form of narrative that is flexible and allots a creative space. His pictorial and precise approach captures the essence of a picture postcard.

For instance, in the phrase, "Al Pioquinto se lo encontró una secatrapos que avisó al gerente que etc. y etc.", Hinojosa allows the reader to become part of the creative process. He proactively includes the reader in his narrative. The reader, then, becomes the individual that writes the message on the postcard. The reader becomes an indispensable element in Hinojosa's fiction. His compendiousness chronicling eliminates the need to explain what the reader already knows or what the reader can deduce from the sketch. His conciseness, invariably, carries another peculiarity. By weaving flexibility and interpretation in the narrative, the reader inevitably becomes part of the creative process. The reader becomes a community member that participates in fabricating a small-town story or gossip. Each interpretation will be distinct with each reader. The text becomes a form of writing that preserves oral history and the act of storytelling, for the reader, through his interpretation, becomes a storyteller. Belken County becomes a shared experience. In his sketches, Hinojosa grants the reader autonomy to believe and to create; he directly connects them with Belken County and inserts them into his imagined community.

Community Imprints

What may seem like a simple sketch at first glance, our analysis proves that Hinojosa's narrative is interwoven with distinct qualities that empower him as a unique border writer. Furthermore, Hinojosa sweeps over a broader range of Chicano experiences speaking through the voices of numerous characters, some named and others anonymous. Always in the background are the sounds of community living: family gossip, conversation about Anglos and the Mexican Revolution, and children chanting Mexican rhymes. In the *Estampas*, Hinojosa examines the manifestation of fatalism among his people, a quality widely considered to be intrinsic to Mexican and Chicano culture. Hinojosa finds that fatalism is indeed a characteristic of Chicano life but not in any sense a defeat. The lives of Chicanos along the border are difficult, marked by relentless economic and political oppression, yet they accept these conditions, knowing that in the world of Belken County, man is not the keeper of his destiny. It is not fatalism that defines his characters, but the will to confront their adversities with dignity such as Viola Barragán. Compared to other Chicano writers like Tomás Rivera, Hinojosa seems more the stoic, writing about human dignity in the face of calamity. This is not to say that Hinojosa's Chicanos do not struggle against capricious fate, but that they recognize their human limitations. The sketch entitled "Así se cumple," analyzed above is a clear example that Hinojosa's characters aim not to conquer but to endure. And in the act of endurance, as we have seen in the character of Viola Barragán, there is accomplishment, satisfaction and a quiet courage. It is this quiet courage that Hinojosa exalts. "Así se cumple" resonates Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night".

Hinojosa employs his work with considerable skill. He embraces current Latin-American literary principles and techniques, and reinforces the cultural ties between Chicanos and other Latinos, while simultaneously rejecting the archaic romanticism of

earlier Chicano writers in Spanish. Hinojosa's major achievement is to affirm the primacy of the common people as the guardians and purveyors of Chicano cultural values. In communicating this idea to the reader, Hinojosa infuses his sketches with folkloric qualities. His use of ordinary and proverbial language, his focus on commonplace experiences, his technique of using alternating and anonymous narrators, and his deliberate de-emphasis of authorial participation give his work a spontaneous, proletarian quality, with a distinctive ethnic consciousness.

Chapter Designation

The focus of this dissertation is to highlight Hinojosa's distinct qualities as a border author. In my study, I examine Rolando Hinojosa's sense of place in relation to theories of space and memory. *Estampas del Valle* builds on a *norteño* consciousness and imaginary. The section titles of each chapter were kept short to emulate Hinojosa's narrative style in his *estampas*. The first chapter studies Hinojosa's notion of sense of place and identity formation theory in the Rio Grande Valley. The duality of the border will be explored in the analysis of "Coyotes". Furthermore, this analysis will attempt to clarify Hinojosa's narrative style and demonstrate how he portrays the Rio Grande Valley as a protagonist of *Estampas del Valle*. In chapter two I analyze the multifarious hybridity of Hinojosa's writing and his double voice as a border author. According to postcolonial and ethnic criticism, "frontier" is the space that separates the zone of civilization from that which is beyond, while the Spanish word *la frontera*, as used by Hispanic writers such as Hinojosa, conveys the idea of the borderlands as a positive enriching zone of cross-cultures, contact and interaction. This chapter constructs the history and culture of the Valley through these contacts and interactions along the *frontera*. I will also examine the social reality if Hinojosa's border and the image of perception through memory.

Africa Vidal in *Border Transits: Literature and Culture Across the Line* believes that there are authors, who, because of their particular cultural situation, are always travelling, both literally and metaphorically, and, therefore their work always resides in the *in-between* – between two cultures, between two languages, between two ways of seeing life; these writers consider that doubleness to be enriching. I argue that Hinojosa lives this doubleness. He is not captured in between, but embraces both influences. These authors conceive "dwelling as a mobile habitat, as a mode of inhabiting time and space not as though they were fixed and closed structures, but as providing the critical provocation of an opening whose questioning presence reverberates in the movement of languages that constitute our sense of identity, place and belonging. The aim is to move backwards and forwards between two cultures in a continual coming and going. Hinojosa lives both cultures internally; he is a product of hybridity, not a product of division. The border becomes a series of cultural and linguistic variations and amalgamations.

Chapter three examines the *estampas* or sketches as a postcard or form of travel literature. This section focuses on authors such as Hinojosa, Paredes and Martí and interprets travel literature as a cultural tie for transitory identities such as the Mexican revolutionaries on the border. The metaphor of the postcard employed here is similar to that of an establishing still shot. Postcards are meant to be unobtrusive objects, passed around, sent to friends, fitted in an album. Often they reduce the complex realities of a

place to a set of markers creating a further distance between the object viewed and the viewer. The establishing shot functions as a foundation for approaching a particular place like the border, for instance. Hinojosa's *estampas*, however, bring the reader closer to the vision and experience lived through the postcard. This approximation to an idea such as the postcard, that is known to impart distance, is what sets Hinojosa apart. The postcard creates a narrative as an always-becoming entity. I will be analyzing the sketches of Rafa Buenrostro's life that are not necessarily postcards, but serve in the establishment of a particular place – a narrative postcard of the Rio Grande Valley through the imaginary Belken County. In this chapter I will analyze rural space and Chicano hybrid identity formation including Américo Paredes's notion of Greater Mexico. The Mexican Revolution in *Estampas del Valle*, for example, forms an essential element in Hinojosa's transnational imaginary. I will demonstrate how Chicano diasporic consciousness is capable of establishing a transnational connection and simultaneously adopt the contemporary reality of the Mexican border experience in the service of cultural and political agenda. The U.S.-Mexico border cuts both ways as remaining a dividing line that Mexicans and Chicanos cross in opposite directions with different purposes and cultural locations. Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* is a vivid example of a narrative representing the theory of Greater Mexico.

Quinto Sol writers who published in Spanish such as Rolando Hinojosa, often rejected Anglo-American literary models and instead did what writers of Mexican heritage in the Southwest had done traditionally: they turned southward and did their literary apprenticeships in the works of authors such as Rulfo, Borges, and García-Márquez. This new school of Mexican-American writers reaffirmed its cultural ties to the cultures of contemporary Mexico and Latin America. In chapter four I examine the way in which *Estampas del Valle*'s Mexican cultural heritage is exemplified through Hinojosa's fragmentary novel. I will analyze Hinojosa's work through the journalistic influences of Spanish language newspapers such as *La Prensa* in the Rio Grande Valley border area. In this chapter we will also examine religion and Mexican oral tradition through storytelling. According to Derrida, the customs, the police, the visa or passport, like the traveler's identification, are based upon the initial premise of an indivisible line. However, built into the fantasy of stoppage is its opposite. The line itself is threatened on its double face, for the indivisibility of the line is undermined from its very tracing. In Hinojosa's writing we will analyze how the border divides itself from within, fragments itself, and establishes within itself a difference within identity. In *Estampas del Valle*, I will demonstrate how borders cannot be presumed indivisible, for they capture a marked physical and psychological line subject to the graze of imbricated cultural cultivation.

Chapter five examines the way in which religion, folklore and death are present in Hinojosa's narrative. Folklore, believes Gramsci, functions as a form of counter-hegemony. In this chapter we will explore the spiritual world of healers and *curanderas* through the figures of Jehú Malacara and Rafa Buenrostro. We will also explore the notion of the traveling storyteller through the *maromas* troupe. Hinojosa criticizes society's hypocrisies, especially religious ones. In this chapter we will explore the sketch of Bruno Cano and his unfortunate encounter with the town priest.

Chapter six focuses on the hybridization of the Southwest Texas border. Belken County's richness encompasses folkloric elements such as rituals, rites and superstition. To conclude my study, I form an analogy between *norteño* music and Rolando Hinojosa

as an *hijo del pueblo*. I examine the *raíces musicales mexicanas* present in Hinojosa's writing and in the Rio Grande Valley. Border writers such as Hinojosa and Rivera are seen as modern troubadours of Chicano culture. Through Chicano literature we participate in a dialectics of a borderer. It begins with Rolando Hinojosa as the artist and as seen in "Así se cumple", it is completed with the reader and the critic.

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Chapter One

Writing is something one acquires
by reading; there's no other way to
write or to begin writing.
- Rolando Hinojosa

Sense of Place

In the *Rolando Hinojosa-Smith Reader*, edited by José David Saldívar, we find a 1984 essay written by Hinojosa entitled “The Sense of Place”. Hinojosa’s fiction springs from the rich oral history tradition of the Rio Grande Valley. “The Sense of Place” declares a position of reinstatement within this community and nostalgia for its stories. “But a place is merely that until it is populated, and once populated, the history of the place and its people begin” (Saldívar 19). The consciousness of this nostalgia for his community and the sense of a border identity are best expressed in the words of Hinojosa in his *Estampas del Valle*.

“For me, then, part of a sense of Border came from sharing: the sharing of names, of places, of a common history, and of belonging to the place; one attended funerals, was taken to cemeteries, and one saw names that corresponded to one’s own or to one’s friends and neighbors and relatives” (Hinojosa 19). For Hinojosa, fiction provides a path to relive his family’s experiences, but more importantly a way to contribute to the preservation of this rich oral border history in the form of fiction. The Rio Grande Valley, especially smaller cities along the border have stronger ties to Mexico because of their seclusion from bigger urban cities and because of the ethnic makeup of the area. In “The Sense of Place,” Rolando Hinojosa takes stock of his career as a writer by pinpointing the juncture at which he discovered that the complexity and heterogeneous nature of his subject would not permit the application of conventional practices in novel writing. *Estampas del Valle* provides a unique form of narrative. The sketches are short, but dense. They incorporate specificities about the regional characters that develop Hinojosa’s sense of place.

In his writing, Mexican-American writer Rolando Hinojosa continually expresses the need to develop a sense of place. For him, it was the development of his sense of place over time that enabled him to write of, about and for the Río Grande Valley of South Texas. Luis Leal believes that:

The verbal structure of *Estampas del Valle* reflects the regional nature of culture that still prevails in the Valley. This verbal structure describes life, customs, mores, and traditions in Belken County, a county representative of those along the Rio Grande in the State of Texas. The images, metaphors and similes around which the novel is structured give the work its validity, for it is a satisfactory set of verbal symbols for the world it describes. By means of these verbal symbols Hinojosa *ha rescatado* the regional culture of the Chicano of Klail City, Condado de Belken, Valle del Río Grande, y sus alrededores. (Saldívar & Leal 108)

His return to the Valley happened through his writing and this became his sense of place or the place that he knows most about and feels would aid him navigate through his experimental creative fragmentary novel. Hinojosa's literature draws the reader towards a chronicled narrative account comprised of a multitude of fictional characters that bring to life a series of small Mexican towns on the South Texas border.

Space & Global Positionality

Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* provides cultural agency given the geographical specificities of its location within globalized Transamerica. In "The Space and Times of Globalization: Place, Scale, Networks, and Positionality" Eric Sheppard examines space theory and the importance of the global economic position of territorial spaces. He asserts that although globalization may have well eliminated space, it has by no means undermined the significance of location, of place or positionality.¹ Sheppard looks at positionality as a situated position from which subjects come to know the world and as a relational construct. The possibilities for agency or representation depend on the subject's position with respect to others. These subjects, such as Rolando Hinojosa and his *estampas*, challenge preexisting configurations of hegemony and territoriality.

Positionality can also be seen as a way of capturing path-dependent ways in which the future of places depend on interdependencies with other places, proposing "wormholes" or connections that seem out of the ordinary (more common in colonial times) as a way of representing the specialty of a global economy. The border space, or third space that Hinojosa creates in *Estampas*, is dependent on both sides of the border and is dependent on the cultural amalgamation of both national territories. Technological advancements have placed the world at the reach of our fingertips. Spaces are now easier to reach and global economies have become more pragmatic. Places, and in Hinojosa's case, borders, are usually represented as territorial spaces, and debates about place and globalization have focused on how territories, especially regional territories such as the Rio Grande Valley border, still matter in a space of flows. Hinojosa recognizes the importance of space in his essay "Sense of Place".

Belken County is an imaginary territorial space in Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*. This border space is embedded between two national territories, making it a transnational enclave. Sheppard states that local trajectories depend on how places are embedded in a range of territorial scales, from the local to the global. In both cases, the conceptualization of space and time can be characterized as territorial. "The prospectus of localities depend on place-based processes and both shape and are shaped by the regional, national and global territories in which they are embedded" (Sheppard 310). The combination of regional, national and international territories and demarcations make Belken County a border space that is sculpted by both Mexico and the United States. It is a space in which congruence and collision mingle. The significance of place highlights smaller-scale territories or places – located within, but occasionally seen as crossing national boundaries. This smaller-scale territory, in comparison to other border spaces such as Juárez and Tijuana, demonstrate the importance of the *estampas* as way of shedding light on areas that history has left behind.

¹ For a complete study on the economic reverberations of global positionality, please see: Eric

Hinojosa challenges space and hegemony in terms of positionality by creating an ambiguous border space in which the reader can theoretically be on Mexican or American territory. In “Al pozo con Bruno Cano”, Bruno Cano is a native of Cerralvo, Nuevo Leon. The reader is presented with an *estampa* about a townsman’s encounter with the local priest leading to his death in Belken County. In “Así se cumple”, Hinojosa focuses on presenting Belken County as a multifarious space that can be located on either side of the national boundary. Belken’s Mexican cemetery confirms the transnationality of the area. It is unclear whether the space in either sketch is on the Mexican or the American side of the border. Hinojosa creates an alternate space in which these territories combine to further evince that national boundaries in terms of positionality, drawing on Deleuze and Judith Butler, creates room for occasional dramatic and unexpected reworkings of positionality and power. Sheppard believes that any “attempts at transformation often founder on the difficulties of overcoming a disadvantaged positionality. Yet such positionality creates conditions for resistance and struggle, and it is remarkable to see seemingly unassailable positional hierarchies sometimes collapse overnight, as in Eastern Europe in and after 1989” (Sheppard 321). The citizens of Belken County resist assimilation into the Anglo community. Texas-Mexico history shifted national territorial boundaries multiple times. Chicano literature of Hinojosa’s generation calls attention to the displaced communities that were affected by treaties, wars and revolutions.

Border spaces are places of uneven development in which there are preexisting inequalities as a consequence of local conditions. Efforts to resuscitate local approaches to social change in positionally marginalized places both “fight the idea of neoliberal globalization and seek to distance peripheral peoples and places from globalization and its locally deleterious influences” (Sheppard 322). Proffering attention to positionality develops strategies of resistance. Hinojosa’s oeuvre and its focus on positionality is key for building the transnational activist alliances that are necessary to “match the transnational reach of globalization” within the literary realm”(Sheppard 326). The space of Belken County as Hinojosa’s sense of place develops the literary means by which the author imagines his heterogeneous and transnational identity on the border. This space, apart from regional, becomes a territory that envelopes northern Mexico cultural influences.

Structure of *Estampas del Valle*

The organization of the novel follows Rolando Hinojosa’s formation of sense of place. The fragmentation is representative of different stages in the characters’ lives as well as Hinojosa’s life. The novel is organized in a manner that allows flexibility and malleability for the reader. The first of the book’s four chapters consists of twenty-two fragmented narrative pieces or portraits of members of the Mexican-American community that make up Belken County. This part of the book is titled “Estampas del Valle.” The second chapter, “Por esas cosas que pasan” contains various sketches as well as an introduction to different characters that will make up part of the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. The third part of this novel, “Vidas y milagros” is made up of seven *estampas*, which reflect the personalities that make up Belken County. *Estampas del Valle* consists of four discontinuous parts: twenty portraits of the Valley and its people by Jehú Malacara; six documents describing Baldemar Cordero’s fatal stabbing of Ernesto Tamez; a chronicle of brave, craven, loyal, and treacherous Texas Mexicans; and Rafa

Buenrostro's remembrances of his primary and secondary school days, and of the Korean War. Hinojosa provides us, like most of his works, with the transitory lives of Belken County citizens and the specific history of the Lower Rio Grande Valley border area in relation to Mexico and to Texas. Culturally and linguistically speaking, *Estampas del Valle* represents the close cultural ties with Mexico that exist in this specific border. Hinojosa does not aim to glorify one culture or another, but instead to provide insight of both the good and the bad of Belken County. He writes of Chicanos who side with Anglo land grabbers like los Leguizamón, Texas-Mexicans who fight in the Mexican Revolution like *los revolucionarios*, or Chicano men who take advantage of gullible Chicanos struggling with the Anglo bureaucracy like the Coyotes. The cities of Belken County encompass an array of distinct personalities. Hinojosa does not romanticize the population of Belken County; their true spiritual and emotional qualities are revealed.

The last section of the book is a dedication to the life of Rafa Buenrostro. It is written in thirty miniatures that present the reader with short episodes of Rafa's childhood and adolescence in Belken County until his departure from the Valley as an adult. *Estampas del Valle* has well over a hundred characters by name in separate vignettes of varying length. The links among these characters are established gradually, "by reiteration, allusion, and simple juxtaposition, for the narrative rarely names these links directly. The two axes along which the texts develops, a metonymical linear one of time and geography, and a metaphorical one of associative substitutions, for the narrative loom upon which Hinojosa's at first unnamed narrator weaves his tale" (Saldívar 138-9). As the narrative begins, it turns again to pictorial script to instantiate past and present time. An acute example of Hinojosa's pictorial script is the sketch of Viola Barragán analyzed in my introduction. The sketch brings to life present characters and those who are absent like the figure of Pioquinto in "Así se cumple". Hinojosa's description of the Mexican cemetery weaves the tale of a woman presenting an offering to her lover. Viola's story is an anecdote from the past. The narrator is retelling the story to his audience. "Así se cumple" forms layers of the present and past intertwined with layers of present and absent characters.

In Bruce-Novoa's "Interview with Rolando Hinojosa", Hinojosa explains the nature of his writing and the objective of his fragmentary form. This is important to the reader because it presents the Rio Grande Valley in a panoramic view. He states:

In *Estampas* I wrote a novel – in four parts ... each part has a different title and all three of the parts are different in structure from each other. [...] I still hold to the word *novel* in the original intent of *novella*, *algo nuevo*, something new, something dynamic, ever changing ... and yet I hear *Estampas* is referred to as *cuentos* as *vignettes* or *short* pieces or as a *new* genre, for crying out loud. *Estampas* is a novel and that's it. There's a bit of fooling around with the time and space, but the plots are there – there's no novelistic statute that says I have to end a novel in one tome or two ... I have just finished another novel – you have the manuscript – and I'm starting another one – I use epistles, dialogues, monologues, a prologue here and there at the beginning of each division and anything that can help me tell my story – and that is it – anything that can help you tell your story is one of the keys to writing. (Bruce-Novoa and Hinojosa 110)

Hinojosa values the use of other forms of narrative to complete his sketches. He uses other genres that would help him deliver the message in his writing more effectively. Hinojosa assures the reader that although *Estampas del Valle* is fragmentary and unique in its composition, it is a novel, nonetheless.

Systematical Disorganization

The word fragmented is a complex term; it is the process or state of breaking or being broken into small or separate parts. Fragmentation is often viewed as a weakness. The lack of uniformed constant unity can be a gruesome contrast to that variable and sustained shifting. Hinojosa's work provides a glimpse into the Valley as a fragmented entity. Not a weak fragmented entity, but an entity with the possibility of change and continuous adaptation. The characters are presented in their multiplicity of language and culture. The fragments and sketches should be read as a whole to appreciate a view into the lives of the population of Belken County. Hinojosa's work opens up the possibility of a diverse world within one space. He demonstrates the complications of generalizing the Mexican-American experience. *Estampas del Valle* does not generalize, but instead provides a colorful array of characters and experiences that comprise the Valley.

The preliminary note in *Estampas del Valle* compares the estampas to Mecho Saldaña's *greñas*. "Estas estampas son y están como las greñas de Mencho Saldaña: unas cortas, otras largas y todas embadurnadas con esa grasa humana que las junta y las separa sin permiso de nadie" (Hinojosa 15). Note that the author uses the word *greñas* and not *cabello*. He describes something that is tousled, tangled and disheveled. His writing takes the shape of Saldaña's hair that lacks uniformity or conformity. The narrative structure of his sketches, like Saldaña's *greñas*, cannot be contained. They are made to rebel against the norm. Any other form of narrative structure would subdue or restrain Hinojosa's fiction. Hinojosa does not conform to other conventional forms of writing; he creates something new and unconventional. It cannot be contained; it is something that cannot be restricted. His writing must be allowed to flow freely at its will. This writing separates and comes together without anyone's permission or approval. Hinojosa's narrative literary sensibility, notably expressed in his novel can be described as aphoristic, brief expression of ideas, yet expressive in form and encompassing of the community it aims to represent.

Hinojosa represents juxtaposition at its finest. Paradoxically, he uses change as a constant in his narrative. The five books by Rolando constitute a macro text – one novel chronicling the lives of several generations of Chicanos in the Valley of Texas. Hinojosa's novel functions as a unitary text with macrostructure within which are articulated the microstructures or individual volumes. *Estampas del Valle* is dynamic and reflects the various transformations in the history of the community. As individual works the texts appear to be fragmented, static, and monocentric developing on one plane with heterogeneity of characters and events. "It is the fragmentation and brief "capsule" style of each account reducing different phases and periods of time into one plane which decontextualize events so that the impact of history or social change on individual lives and on particular social classes is not evident" (Saldivar 76).

Belken County, a county on the Mexican border and alongside the Río Grande River is a county inhabited by Old timers and new timers, by working-class citizens,

revolutionaries, women, children, and Anglo-Texans, to name a few. Hinojosa details the human experience on the border by producing assertive images of reality:

The task of contemporary Chicano narrative is to deflect, deform, and thus transform reality by revealing the dialectical structures that form the base of human experience. In opting for open over closed forms, for conflict over resolution and synthesis, in proclaiming its very difference, the function of Chicano narrative is thus to produce creative structures of knowledge to allow its readers to see, to feel, and to understand their social reality. (Hinojosa-Smith 7)

The narrative “capsules” in *Estampas del Valle* are microstructures of individual lives that make up the community of Belken County. Although history and social change are not narrated in a linear fashion, the impact is detailed in the individual lives of these characters, each reconstructing their experience according to their surroundings. Belken County, above all else, learns to adapt while maintaining cultural and traditional ties to Mexico. With a fragmentary novel as a production of culture, Rolando Hinojosa is committed to recounting the history of the community. This novel keeps the secrets of the Belken County experience. The work acts as a transmitter of knowledge using literature as an instrument to display a social reality. Hinojosa shapes the individuals of Belken County, just as *El Valle* has shaped Hinojosa.

Literary Critics in Chicano literature such as José David Saldívar and Ramón Saldívar have strived to include Chicano literature in the theoretical cosmos of academia. By applying these modern modules such as subalternist theory, the critics of Chicano literature have put this fiction on the world map of literature. The role that the Saldívar’s have played in the dissemination of Chicano literature and in showing the importance of this literature on the world map has been valuable to the Chicano community. Rolando Hinojosa’s novel *Estampas del Valle* is a unique visionary style.

Although his writing has been seen in the past as fragmented or lacking order, this novel is written in this fashion for a specific purpose. The reader can begin to think of these “fragments” as a form of unification. A fragmentary style is flexible and is able to contain diverse material in one space. Just as border identities are multifarious and transitory, we can interpret Hinojosa’s writing in this novel as a form of showing the diversity of the region through his writing, literally and in abstract. Fragments permit flexibility and also allow for the dissemination of more information in less space – fragments are efficient for the reader does not tire upon reading and does not lose his place – it is a form that allows a wider range of readers of literature. The author can include more in less space; it is pungently efficient. Fragments represent a fragmented community that in the end will form a unity – an array of a multifarious community within a community – an imaginary meta-community through fragmentation. Rolando Hinojosa’s personal life, we can interpret, was also lived in fragments, some longer than others, some more memorable than others.

Belken community is a fragmented community, but not a divided one. On the contrary, it is these fragments, or *estampas*, that created a collective community. “In the year 2000, Hinojosa reflects on land, family and two hundred years of Mexican culture that have produced an identity with place: “La economía del Valle, en su gran

proporción, basada en lo agrícola y eso, la tierra, es lo que ha llegado a cimentar una querencia al Valle. Importante también es que esa larga estancia de más de dos siglos y medio en el mismo sitio, ha establecido la estabilidad que se necesita para identificarse íntimamente con el lugar” (Saldívar 150).

Tousled Border Spaces

The focus of this section, which does not intend to belittle the groundbreaking fundamental qualities of the *Klail City Death Trip Series*, is to highlight the initial writing stages of Rolando Hinojosa as a Mexican American author. His writing establishes close ties to Mexican culture, art, folklore and literature, especially in relation to the *norteño* border atmosphere. In his first novel, Hinojosa establishes close ties to the Mexican community in the Lower Rio Grande Valley with his choice of language and with his choice of this specific imagined geographical location. Belken County and its surroundings, the place where most of Hinojosa’s fiction takes place in *Estampas del Valle*, are representative of a double reality. By double reality I maintain that Belken County and Rolando Hinojosa’s “sense of place” constitute multidimensional and multitudinous elements that allow the reader to imagine Belken County as a meta-space. It is a figurative and imaginative space within a palpable consciousness. In other words, Belken County demonstrates historical accuracy. It represents the actual Rio Grande Valley, Hinojosa’s home.

To write within the narrative now, Hinojosa must adopt a specific form of writing that would capture his experiences in the Valley, yet serve as a creative outlet for writing and criticism. Using space as a constant metaphor and agency for his writing, Hinojosa constructs an original framework for the Mexican American novel within the perspective of American regionalism and also within the Mexican *norteño* imaginary. Hinojosa uses the notion of space as an agency and as a point of arrival. For Hinojosa, a sense of place was not a matter of importance; it became essential. “And so much that my stories are not held together by the *peripeteia* or the plot as much as by *what* people who populate the stories say and *how* they say it, how they look at the world out and the world in; and the works, then, become studies of perceptions and values and decisions reached by them because of those perceptions and values which in turn were fashioned and forged by the place and its history” (Saldívar 21). Hinojosa values the colloquial conventions of Belken County. The narrative structure of *Estampas del Valle* relies on the individuals who populate the sketches. They are as important to the author as his focus on recreating an authentic panorama of the South Texas border.

Space – real or imaginary – is essential for the development of a novel.² In the case of Rolando Hinojosa and his *Estampas del Valle*, space – real *and* imaginary – are of essence. My focus on *Estampas del Valle* is to demonstrate the importance of this work as an individual novel, standing on its own, apart from the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. *Estampas del Valle* has been overlooked and overshadowed by the large composition of work that has become the *Klail City Death Trip Series* for which Hinojosa claims his international fame as a Mexican-American writer. Hinojosa’s sense of place can be

² For a detailed description of the *norteño* imaginary space, see Lee A. Daniel. ““Norteño” Imaginary Spaces: A Typology of the Fictional Towns of Guillermo Arriaga, David Toscana, and Alfredo Espinosa.” *Hispania* 88.2 (2005): 257. Print.

described as Mencho Saldaña's tousled hair. This novel marks the essence of Hinojosa's literary career. For Chicano literary critics it signifies a point of departure. One cannot entirely value the Hinojosa's late works without knowledge of his initial stages as a border author. This novel is an introduction to the world of Belken County. Hinojosa's literary creation serves as an accurate historical and cultural account of a border community. He puts the Rio Grande Valley on the literary map as a space that is nationally American, but culturally Mexican. *Estampas del Valle* embodies the ethnological multiplicity of the border.

Estampas del Valle shows a constant change in narrative to show a true fluidity of movement within the community. These shifts make Hinojosa's writing more realistic and precise in the chronicling process. Hinojosa chooses to call his form of narrative a fragmentary novel. Although some critics have called his form of writing vignettes, poems, and short stories, Hinojosa wants the reader to be sure that his *Estampas del Valle* is a novel. This analysis is important because it is a complete work and faithful view of the Valley from the eyes and experiences of his people. Hector Calderón states, "Readers of *Estampas del Valle* and *Generaciones y Semblanzas* were hard pressed to find a clearly outlined plot. Instead, plots were given to the reader as a series of brief sketches in a variety of forms outlining characters and their traits, a literary portraiture of people dealing with the everyday problems, the inner history of a people necessary to develop the larger history of Texas" (Calderón 157). The distribution of information through various genres does not presuppose that the novel lacks a plot. The form of *Estampas del Valle* seems to reflect the author's literary agenda, suggesting that all textual fragments are parts of a greater design.

Personifying Places

I will now discuss how Rolando Hinojosa makes the South Texas geographical area the true protagonist of his work. In his writing, especially that of *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa portrays the Rio Grande Valley as the protagonist along with characters such as Rafa Buenrostro and Jehú Malacara. Although he does create a multitude of characters to represent the Valley, in actuality, his characters give shape to the true protagonist of his work, the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Klaus Zilles confirms:

Against this historical backdrop, Hinojosa charts the lives of his two protagonists, Rafa Buenrostro and his orphaned cousin Jehú Malacara, who are born into the rigidly segregated world of a South Texas farming community during the 1930s and 1940s. With each new serial text, the lives of Jehú and Rafa come to represent a new stage in the constantly changing racial order of South Texas, until they eventually reach the still conflictive, but largely integrated world of Belken County in the 1990s. Besides Jehú and Rafa and their families, friends and enemies, Hinojosa populates his Belken County with a cast of over a thousand characters that appear, disappear, and reappear in disjointed episodes that may or may not have a bearing on central plots. (Zilles xiii)

The physical and emotional elements of the region help shape the characters of this novel just as they shaped Hinojosa. The author's naturalist literary creation exemplifies a

network of individuals intersecting lives and experiences. In his “Chicano Literature and Ideology: Prospectus for the 80’s”, Ramón Saldívar states, “*Estampas del Valle* virtually collapses the metaphorical and metonymical axes of narration, leaving the figurative possibility of identity undistinguishable from the literal one of difference within the narrative line. With the introduction in succeeding episodes of this section of the novel of a whole community of intersecting lives and histories, Hinojosa’s narrative begins to create less a history of individual lives than a history of community life” (Saldívar 39). This imagined community is shaped first and foremost by the characteristics of the region and secondly by the characters that inhabit the region. The characters, then, are shaped by the space in which they reside. Belken County citizens are psychologically and culturally shaped by their surroundings creating interdependence between the people and the place.

The space dominates the plot, the fiction, and the dynamic of the community that he has created through his writing. The way in which Hinojosa protagonizes the Rio Grande Valley can be compared to that of other literary cities in such as Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Comala in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*. Belken County is a metafictional space, a founding imaginary city along the border. “But in the writing of the novel a clearing has been reached, a metafictional space, a razing that becomes a starting point for the new Latin American narrative; the clearing for the building of Comala, Macondo, Coronel Vallejos, for the founding of the imaginary city containing all previous forms of Latin American narrative as well as the origins of the novel; a space for the Archive” (González Echevarría 17).

Synthesized Cultural Cognition

Although more than often Hinojosa’s work is compared to Faulkner’s literary style, I find that for literary analysis of the space and in particular the author’s first novel, it is equally as important to examine the similarities between Hinojosa and his Mexican, Hispanic and Latin American counterparts, especially those whose writings approximate the climate and feel of Belken County *y sus alrededores*. In *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa creates a *norteño* imaginary space that is based on an actual and historical community of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. The space and its inhabitants become a fictional representation of reality. Whether it is a metropolis of more than a million people or small shantytowns near the Rio Grande River, novels require a physical space that characters will inhabit. The Valley as a space is transitory because it navigates from one side of the river to the other. More importantly, the novel calls for a psychological space that will develop the creative process of the characters. It is this space that will ultimately shape its inhabitants and vice-versa, the novel is dependent on the space, therefore the novel is dependent on Hinojosa’s “sense of place”.

In the article “Sense of Place”, Rolando Hinojosa is preoccupied with the idea of finding his sense of place for and through his writing. Let us begin with some questions. What is a sense of place and how do we determine a sense of place, space and position in relation to our individual circumstances or settings? Is a sense of place an identity, a locus, a way of living, or a specific form of fiction? What does the author mean by sense of place and how does his writing advocate a literary specificity for his personal and historical background? We can begin by exploring a definition that depicts the author’s intentions. The author provides a dialogue between the reader, history and the writer.

Hinojosa does not focus on delivering romanticism or sentimentalism that would deter him from providing a candid literary version of the Rio Grande Valley, or of his experience and his place in the Valley – these things, for him, corrupt clear thinking. Rolando Hinojosa is born *of* his writing; he is an *hijo del pueblo* in the sense that his community helped create him. His position as a writer is born from the geographical ties that enable him to view himself within the local and global economy of culture. He was born of his *pueblo* and his *pueblo* is born of him. Literary critics such as Ramón Saldivar and Héctor Calderón have studied the notion of “sense of place” as a form of postulating a new form of regional identity in the geographical space of the Valley. Hinojosa’s work develops a regional identity, but it should not be seen as a simple identitarian account.

Hinojosa’s work is often analyzed for its expertise of the Rio Grande Valley. Notwithstanding, I believe that his work and his sense of place go beyond the physical and geographical by using literature as a vehicle to articulate border culture. Hinojosa’s sense of place is a sense of responsibility. Asserting his literary position signifies insight of cultural, geographical and linguistic elements that bring him closer to a true representation of himself through his writing. It is a form of returning to one’s past to find what needs to be created in the future. *Estampas del Valle* preserves an image as a memory. Hinojosa’s memory is connected to his creative capacity producing an alternate realm in which he feels that what he has lived will bring him closer to what he has written and what he is to write.

The author of *Estampas del Valle* values experiential time. Hinojosa’s shifting passages flowing in length and cadence are reminiscent of a poet whose feelings develop into images, and the images themselves into that obey the laws of rhythm. The *estampas* allow the reader to see these images pass before our eyes and we in turn experience the feeling, which was, so to speak, their emotional equivalent. His experience is in tune with his creation, thus bringing about his ability to develop a sense of place in his literature. That being said, it is through Hinojosa’s fiction, that an understanding for this regional space is fomented. The artist provides a foundation for his work. It is built on a shared premise of exploring and understanding the border. The artist aims at give us a share in this emotion, so rich, so personal, so novel, that he enables us to experience what he cannot make us understand.³

Rolando Hinojosa breaks down the barrier often interposed by time and space between his consciousness and the reader’s consciousness – the richer the sensations and emotions the deeper the artist brings us into his expressed emotions through art. Hinojosa is making sense of his own past and quantifying his own identity by documenting, chronicling and ordering his experiences through writing. Hinojosa states, “It was the proper historical moment, it came along and I took what had been there for some time, but which I had not been able to see, since I had not fully developed a sense of place; I had left the Valley for the service, for formal university training, and for a series of very odd jobs, only to return to it in my writing” (Hinojosa, 23). The proper time and the proper historical moment collided to encourage his return to the Valley and his self-discovery as a border cultural agent. Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle* fosters an absolute

³ To read about the theory of experiential time, see Henri Bergson 1859-1941. and Frank Lubecki Pogson d.1910. *Time and free will : an essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. 2d ed. London :New York,; G. Allen ;Macmillan, 1912. Print. .

understanding of the South Texas Valley. The sketches produce a genuine sensation of understanding the hybridity of border culture through thought, experience and intuition. Border culture, Hinojosa asserts, synthesizes the twofold transnational cultural experience.

Doble Imaginaria

Artistic tradition in Hinojosa's writing can be expressed in the form of cultural impressions of the border. Belken County forms a hybrid imaginary that delineates multiple expressions of identity. The community on the American side of the border becomes intertwined with that of the Mexican side and vice-versa. The fluctuating exchange personifies the *norteño* imaginary in his writing.

In his "*Norteño Imaginary Spaces: A Typology of Fictional Towns of Guillermo Arraiga, David Toscana, and Alfredo Espinosa*" Lee A. Daniel expresses the literary territories within the poetic imaginary. "En esto de los territorios literarios, el atlas es inagotable, porque los escritores tienen dos geografías: la real y la doblemente real, la imaginaria" (Daniel 258). Lee A. Daniel studies the *norteño* imaginary and the typology of a denominated space. Imaginary towns such as Belken County and the cities and comprise Belken County fit the description of imaginary towns that can be clearly distinguished. "The three types of imaginary towns can be clearly distinguished within the following categories: 1) a town that doesn't exist in the real world either by name or by location, that is, of pure fiction; 2) a town that exists, but with a name change and other modifications, and 3) a composite of several existing locales, similar to but different from any real town" (Daniel 258). In *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa has successfully employed all three categories in the creation of his imaginary space by helping us delve into the world of Belken County closely sheathing that of the Rio Grande Valley. "For me and mine," writes Hinojosa, "history began in 1749 when the first colonists began moving into the southern and northern banks of the Río Grande. The river was not yet a jurisdictional barrier and was not to be until almost one hundred years later; but by then, the border had its own history, its own culture, and its own sense of place: it was Nuevo Santander, named for Old Santander in the Spanish Peninsula" (Hinojosa 142).

The spaces on both sides of the river come together in his writing to form a *norteño* consciousness within a regional American paradigm. This work constitutes a regional space in United States literature and exemplifies how several towns in Belken County are comparable to countless other similar *pueblos* scattered all across the Americas. An overriding trait for these *pueblos* is their overwhelmingly realistic depiction. Further characterizing the archetypal Hispanic literary towns are the telluric rural elements presented in the sketches. Spanish American territory and Latin American imaginary allow us to comparatively study authors such as Hinojosa, Rivera, Gabriel García-Márquez and Juan Rulfo. Thus, defining commonality of the imaginary town, which generally holds true for isolated places scattered along the Americas, is the town's loneliness as a solitary community, economically under-developed and seemingly suspended a bit in time – the place is not fully in the past, but it is not yet quite in the present. This view is supported by Eric Sheppard's focus on globalization and the cultural makeup of border towns that are underdeveloped. Positionality, believes Sheppard, is important to focus on discursive understandings of development in the literary sphere.

Space and time rifts can be seen as proximate cause of underdevelopment and destruction of indigenous life worlds in the global periphery, border literature being a prime example of a literature and a place in the periphery of two nations and in the global economy as a whole. Texas and Mexico's unique history of land acquisitions makes the Rio Grande Valley a space that is continually restructured and produced under capitalism. Conflicting developing economics tug on both sides of the border a spatial fix for the crises of capitalism. "If the global economy is to be understood as a set of interlocking [networks] of economic activity, then we must be prepared to ask who is excluded from such networks, and why" (Sheppard 318). Belken County is a place that has its bearings in the past while living in the present. The towns and cities of Belken County are rural; the perception of space becomes warped providing a multidimensional existence for the characters as well as for the reader. The characters live in a fictitious, yet realistic world due to the incorporation of components such as archives, chronologically correct dates, newspaper clippings, journal entries and legal depositions. The reader, then, like the characters in the narrative, is enveloped into a multidimensional space and navigated through a succession of events that enables his/her understanding of the key people and events that take place in Belken County reminding us that the Valley is an *imaginaria doblemente real*.

In the conclusion to his study on *norteño* town and the *norteño* imaginary, Lee Daniel explains, "In Spanish American literature, an imaginary town is a place where anything is possible. It can be a social laboratory for the author to study societal ills of a given country or region; it can be a "no-place" where the author can criticize freely both institutions and individuals; it can offer escape to vicarious existence and show the reader that a better life is possible, thereby perhaps giving hope to the subaltern, the powerless, and the dispossessed" (Daniel 265). Hinojosa's *estampas* are a symbol of perseverance. Individuals in the narrative demonstrate that Belken County brings hope and recognition to those who would otherwise be overlooked. The duality and hybridity of the border bring dilemmas to the citizens of Belken County. The author produces scenes of reality. In "Coyotes", Hinojosa reveals the cruelty and exploitation to which immigrants are susceptible. In this sketch, a young Mexican-American takes an older Mexican immigrant. Belken County unveils the good and the bad with authenticity.

Coyotes: Analysis

Rolando Hinojosa's perception of space is a tool for proscribing the racism and difficulties that Mexican immigrants endured along the border. It is also a way to showcase a space that has many times been forgotten in national discourse. This vacuity in national discourse is challenged in Hinojosa's portrayal of the Rio Grande Valley. An example of struggles that borderers encounter are seen in the *estampa* "Coyotes". Hinojosa's "Coyotes" proves that no one is safe from deceit in their community. The word *coyote* is usually used for a person that illegally transports Mexican, Central and South American immigrants into the United States. The detrimental conditions that these immigrants suffer in the hands of the *coyote* are well documented. These individuals also charge a hefty amount for their services. Often the immigrant is abandoned, starved or left in an unidentified location. In his story, Hinojosa gives the word *coyote* a new spin. What the author is trying to convey is that these 'types' of people can be found inside the local community and in distinct settings and atmospheres. Hinojosa documents that

coyotes have now expanded their profession to the American side of the border. Immigrants can no longer escape the wrath of the community swindler. The *estampa* cleverly starts by using the title as part of the first sentence, thus establishing the position of the coyote as more powerful than the immigrant. Immediately the author demonstrates his disdain for the *coyote* by creating distance between the *coyotes* and himself.

“Coyotes se les llama a esos que se dejan ver en la sede del condado, el county courthouse, como quien dice” (Hinojosa 104). By stating “se les llama”, the author distances himself from the subject and retrains from granting the *coyote* moral validity. He describes them as a form of inhumane creature as if they are different species. The Spanish word for an individual that preys on the innocent and takes advantage of other immigrants is a *coyote*: an animal that shifts his hunting techniques in accordance with their prey. When the prey is located, coyotes stiffen and pounce on the prey in a cat-like manner. Coyotes, like the men and women in Hinojosa’s sketch are persistent hunters, with successful attacks sometimes lasting for hours. The coyote is a consistent hunter and hardly ever gives up in the hunt for his prey.⁴ Hinojosa uses his writing to transform the meaning of the word and also to speak about the injustices that take place in these communities. He explores both the negative and positive aspects of the Mexican communities in his writing. In this *estampa* the *coyote* spends his or her day at the local courthouse attempting to hoodwink unsuspecting and uninformed vulnerable immigrants for their cash. Hinojosa demonstrates that there is no gender bias in trickery and evil. Appearance plays an important part in this narrative. A book should not be judged by its cover emphasizes Hinojosa. Performance also becomes a key element of this sketch. In this case, the art of deceit is performed in a manner that is socially acceptable. The *coyote* prioritizes his appearance to look like a polished professional. Hinojosa paints a vivid picture of a coyote in sheep’s clothing. “No son empleados aunque lo parezcan: se visten de camisa blanca y corbata o, si son mujeres, de zapato con tacón alto y de media larga.” (Hinojosa 104) Good and evil live on bot sides of the border. Only on the American side evil is esthetically pleasing.

The *coyote* in Hinojosa’s work unofficially reads letters at the local courthouse for the Mexican people around town that do not know how to read English or interpret the judicial language in these letters. He takes money from them by rendering his services that are not necessary and inventing fees that they must pay him for this unsolicited service of letter reading. He sees this helplessness of older and less educated working-class community members as an opportunity to make money and live off of exploiting them. A linguistic barrier serves as a bridge for corruption and exploitation. The *coyote* takes advantage of people in his own community because of their inability to communicate in English. The letter reader claims to provide a service that helps his community. Instead, he robs them and steals their hard earned money.

For the immigrant it is comforting to see someone that looks and speaks like them in an unfamiliar and very formal environment such as a courthouse. Hinojosa portrays the coyote as a charming figure that is capable of talking people into what he needs them to believe in order to embezzle their money. Ironically, as is common in Hinojosa’s style, the coyote is ‘fooling’ people in a place that stands for the epitome of justice in the United States. Although other people that work in the courthouse see this man do his

⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coyote>

dirty work on a daily basis he is never asked to leave the premises because he dresses sharp and pretends to be at the service of others. Hinojosa tells us that in this case, justice does not speak Spanish. This sketch highlights the difference in socioeconomic classes between the community members. Hinojosa shows how access to an education can sometimes be used in a manner that is not positive for the community. The *coyotes* use their basic knowledge of reading, writing and speaking both English and Spanish can be a springboard for corruption.

Coyotes: Sinful Duality

The *coyote* travels up and down that courthouse searching for its prey. Hinojosa “animalizes” the human into the actual wild beast. The author paints a picture of these “hunters” moving about their marked territory and hounding their victims. The visual effect is uncanny: “Afanan en los pasillos diariamente y viven de lo que suelten al pobre que se asome en la corte con algún negocio” (Hinojosa 104). Rolando Hinojosa’s vocabulary, as we saw in the sketch of Viola Barragán is chosen carefully and intentionally. For example, the word *afanar*, used to describe the *coyotes* about their daily hunt, in Spanish means to harass, bother or pilfer. It also means to walk hurriedly from one side to the other as if awaiting crucial news at the hospital. *Afanar* describes the *coyotes*, animals and humans, in a nervous and impatient fashion waiting anxiously for its kill. Their daily bread depends on the small misstep of the lost or curious immigrant that appears at the county courthouse. Hinojosa makes it clear that these immigrants need only poke their heads into the courthouse to become “food” for these *coyotes*. The author does not explicitly state his disdain for the *coyotes*. Instead, he sketches a vivid picture of their actions. The author presents the reader with an image and hands the image over for further interpretation. These *coyotes* live off of what they shamelessly steal from these immigrants. They have made a profession of their dishonesty.

“Tampoco son abogados, pero como hablan inglés, claro es, ya tienen ventaja” (Hinojosa 104). Linguistic barriers become a form of vulnerability. The sketch plays on fear of the law and the willingness of the immigrant to blindly obey whatever the government may ask of him. When a person receives an official letter from the courthouse the normal reaction would be to comply with the demands of the letter and stay within the bounds of civil responsibility. This task becomes difficult when the letters on the page are blurred by the inability to understand the written language. Curiosity, fear, insecurity and vulnerability become ground for this linguistic barrier. The immigrant becomes dependent on someone who would be willing to help him comprehend the letter. The *coyotes*, then, have the upper hand in this situation. Although they are not officially lawyers, they are perceived with authority because of their attire and because they speak English. The ability to speak English on the American side of the border gives them superiority over the immigrant. This *estampa* also highlights the fact that not all immigrants on the American side speak English. Hinojosa makes it clear that for unofficial matters such as home and community life, Spanish is the dominant language in Belken County. It is only when having to deal with formal or official matters that language becomes an issue. The *coyotes* use the vulnerability of the immigrants to create a profession out of swindling unsuspecting and trusting individuals in need.

The *coyotes* are always ready to make the “kill”. “Están al tanto de cualquier runrún en la corte y como desconocen la vergüenza, se ponen las botas con cada inocente que les caiga. La gente que no sabe nada de nada se asusta de cualquier sobre con sello oficial y pore so es ganado bastante fácil para los coyotes” (Hinojosa 104). Hinojosa’s use of colloquial language flourishes with phrases like “están al tanto”, “se ponen las botas” and “la gente que no sabe nada de nada”. The *coyotes* are always informed of incidents or functions occurring at the courthouse so that they may seem more knowledgeable to their victims; it helps give them credibility. They take advantage of any person that looks naïve or lost. “La gente que no sabe nada de nada”, or the people that know nothing about nothing, Hinojosa proclaims, are afraid of official seals and letters that they cannot decipher. He does not mean that these immigrants know nothing about life, but instead that they lack the proper knowledge of how the system works on the American side. Official seals are used more frequently on the American side for simple matters such as jury duty. The unfamiliar can be daunting for individuals that do not speak English and believe that they have been summoned to the courthouse for an important matter.

Making the Kill: Esthetics & Performance of Deceit

In “Coyotes”, Hinojosa shows how a simple affair that can be resolved quickly turns into a day of feasting for the *coyotes*. The lack of information on the part of “la gente que no sabe nada” becomes an invitation to be “ganado bastante fácil para los coyotes”. Hinojosa chooses the words for his sketches carefully. The double meaning of *ganado* saturates this sketch with layers. *Ganado* can mean two things: a monetary gain or to make money and a herd of animals such as cattle or sheep in a farm or ranch. Hinojosa’s double meaning in this phrase is key to understanding the multiple layers of narrative intertwined in this sketch. The victims of the *coyotes* become a source of easy money. At the courthouse, the *coyotes* answer questions and lead them through unnecessary formalities to take their hard earned dollars. In the process, the immigrant becomes prey, like unprotected *ganado* in a ranch. The *coyotes* hunt their *ganado* and in turn make an easy dollar. The immigrants turn into a herd to be hunted and preyed upon by the *coyotes*. There is no one to protect this herd. The farmer, or in this case the legal system, does not protect the immigrant. Instead, they lead it to the mouth of wolf, or in this case the coyote. This analogy demonstrates Hinojosa’s carefully chosen words and the manner in which he employs them with certainty and perfect timing in the narrative. As an artist, he paints a vivid scene of injustice and the unethical. The unperceiving immigrants at the courthouse become a source of easy money and an easy feast for the *coyotes*.

Hinojosa highlights the importance of performance. He also highlights the position of the immigrant that is being taken advantage of as a double subaltern figure; he must beware of the Anglo as well as the Mexican-Americans that are within his own space and taking advantage of his small town blind faith. These men and women come to the courthouse on a daily basis and adhere to a performance that will legitimize their claim to knowledge or the ways of justice. It is the ultimate performance of deception. Trust becomes a hurtful factor. The immigrants trust these *coyotes* because they are also of Mexican descent. The immigrant does not believe that their Mexican “friend” would take advantage of him like the *gringo* or the Anglo American. They trust the clean and

polished esthetic image of the *coyotes*. They also inspire trust because they speak the immigrant's language. In the eyes of these innocent people, the *coyotes* become figures that inspire comfort and relief in a stressful situation and an uncomfortable location. "Adrián Peralta, coyote, es de Edgerton y viajaba de allí a Klail de diario. Trigueño, sombrero de petate a la moda, camisa blanca y corbata con ganchito de donde salta un pez vela, sonrisa en la boca no en los ojos, bigote fifi, con ese par de ojos mencionados que si no han visto todo poco les falta" (Hinojosa 104).

Adrián Peralta is an expert at scamming people. His clean appearance, hat and tie included, give him a vote of confidence and officialdom; he appears as a figure in authority. He is *trigueño*, which means that his appearance is stereotypically Hispanic-like. Immigrants instantly feel more comfortable seeking help from someone that looks like them. He carries himself with grace and charm to deceive those "needing" his services. The smile on his face and his "helpful" gaze make people liable to trust his opinion and the information that he provides. Hinojosa makes it a point to mention that although Peralta has a smile on his face, that smile does not transfer to his eyes. He is putting on an act and his smile is not sincere; he is merely performing to make a buck or two. The author focuses on Adrián Peralta's eyes. There is a common saying that states, "The eyes are a window to the soul". Hinojosa focuses on revealing the true nature and character of Adrián Peralta by focusing on his eyes, his soul. Peralta's eyes have seen it all. He is *una persona lista*. His daily performance at the courthouse proves that he is an expert at deceit. At what point, however, does this performance stop becoming an act and instead becomes a reality? Peralta's eyes speak with experience. He is ready to plot a scheme at the first glance of an immigrant. Adrián Peralta has become his own performance. He has turned into a bloodthirsty and money hungry *coyote*.

Adrián Peralta is described as democratic; he does not discriminate in choosing his victims. "Como tiene la piel curtida ya no le entran ni indirectas ni insultos" (Hinojosa 104). The *coyote* is shameless. He no longer has the capacity for sensibility. His sly ways have thickened his course skin so that he does not feel insulted by those that criticize his line of "work". He is no longer prone or vulnerable to critiques and insults because his earnings depend on his ability to trick others. "Tiene buena representación y mejor voz ya que hasta la fecha nadie le ha rompido las narices" (Hinojosa 104). Hinojosa demonstrates his disdain for the *coyote* with his subtle phrases and choice of words. He sarcastically compliments Peralta's voice while claiming that he is surprised that no one has broken his nose for being so crooked. Peralta is described as being a democratic schemer. He does not discriminate victims based on age or gender; all of them are just as profitable. "Es muy democrático, según él, y allí se le puede ver saludando a todo mundo, altos y bajos, hembras y machos, jueces y reos, putas y queridos, etc" (Hinojosa 104). He forms an indiscriminately social web to enhance his performance as a "friend of the people". He has become the politician of the courthouse. He speaks to people of the highest rank like the judge and to those of the lowest rank like the prostitute. He knows the guards as well as the convicts and vagabonds. He builds his social circle as a form of business partnership. He shares the courthouse space with these individuals so he acts as a coworker. Hinojosa highlights the saying "it is not what you know that matters, but who you know". Adrián Peralta knows all the right people to be able to maintain his unethical habits afloat without legal complications.

It does not take long for Adrián Peralta to find his first victim of the day. He approaches his first victim with a servile attitude. He calls himself the man's *servidor* or server – he pretends he is there to do nothing more than to assist this man instilling in his victim confidence and relief for having found someone who speaks Spanish. In a way, Peralta acts as if he is the courthouse's concierge approaching only those that he believes will bring him profits. “¿En qué puedo servirle? Psss, verá usted, aquí traigo este papel ... me cayó por correo y como dice Court House ... aquí estoy, ya ve” (Hinojosa 104). In this passage, Hinojosa gives the reader a taste of rural colloquial speech in the figure of don Marcial de Anda, the *coyote*'s first victim. This information allows the reader to deduce the generational gap as well as the socioeconomic condition of don Marcial. This should inspire Adrián Peralta to have some sympathy and not take this old man's hard-earned money. The author shows that Peralta has no moral principles or dignity. He does not have sympathy or mercy for his victims. He is a bloodthirsty *coyote* ready to make a kill at any point and at any cost.

Hinojosa points out that “Don Marcial debe tener unos 70 años: es dulcero de profesión. Tiene cuatro hijos: Juan, Eduardo, Marcial hijo, y Jovita, la que se tuvo que casar con Joaquín Tamez. De esto ya hace tiempo”(Hinojosa 104). Don Marcial de Anda is a 70-year-old family man. He is a street vendor who must not have a heavy cash flow of earnings. This, however, does not deter Peralta from taking what he wants. To further connect the reader to don Marcial, the author makes it a point to mention the names of the old man's four children. His personal life is no longer anonymous to the reader. This information generates an emotional attachment and ties the reader to don Marcial's struggle. Peralta proceeds to take charge of the situation by instructing don Marcial to let him read the “official letter” in order to help him solve his problem. Don Marcial feels that Peralta is sincerely helping him:

Primero, un mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm largo, reservado y lleno de misterio. Luego una mirada a don Marcial y, al momento, otra al papel. Le toma el sobre, introduce la carta en él, lleva a don Marcial del codo y se presenta en una oficina. Nada. Luego a otra donde también pregunta port al y tal; no, no está aquí. Gracias. Entran a la tercera y aquí es donde te quiero ver, pichón. (Hinojosa 104-5)

Adrian Peralta wants don Marcial to believe that he is lending him a helping hand and going out of his way to accommodate his needs at the courthouse. Peralta looks at the letter with a reserved air of mystery and concentration as if the task at hand is difficult, but not impossible. He makes his services seem indispensable to the old man. He even goes an extra step by physically leading him through the courthouse. He holds him by the elbow similar to the way in which one would help an older family member or friend in our care. Peralta performs several measures that he thinks will legitimize his position of authority at the county courthouse. He takes him from room to room asking impertinent questions in English knowing that don Marcial does not understand what he is saying. He pretends that he is asking essential questions that will help don Marcial resolve the issue of the letter. His performance is flawless. After a long walk through several offices in the courthouse Peralta finally directs don Marcial in the right direction, but not before asking him to pay him for his services.

Peralta abuses don Marcial's vulnerability by calling him *amigo*. He falsely warms up to don Marcial making the old man believe that Peralta is his friend and that he really did take care of him. Don Marcial believes that this man helped him resolve his legal issues even though Peralta has not explained to him what the letter entails. "Amigo de Anda, voy a arreglarle este asunto en un dos por tres. Hablando de un dos por tres, me puede pasar un par de dólares para hacer andar la maquinaria? Ya sabe que sin grasa no se puede caminar" (Hinojosa 105). Adrián Peralta tells don Marcial that he will fix issues within no time. The phrase "un dos por tres" is a colloquial phrase meaning in a short time span, faster than you can count from one to three. Peralta is an expert performer. He changes his form of speech to match that of don Marcial. He meets him in a linguistic territory that will make the old man feel more comfortable and at ease. He makes an analogy to a machine. He knows that he must create an analogy that will help don Marcial understand that the resolution of his "official" case depends on the money that he gives to the *coyote*. He explains to don Marcial that machines could never run without gas and now don Marcial must give Peralta some "gas money" to keep the machine running. Without some cash, his "problem" will not be solved. The reader, like don Marcial, still does not know what the letter is asks of him.

Lawlessness Creed

Peralta believes that don Marcial should pay him for the "services" that he has provided. He is not regretful about swindling this old man. Hinojosa makes the analogy of don Marcial having to grease Peralta's "machinery" or business to the greasy and tasteless behavior he exemplifies at the courthouse. Don Marcial hands over some money to Peralta because he truly believes that this *coyote* has assisted him. Peralta "Coge el dinero, le vuelve el sobre y antes de despedirse le señala una ventanita. Allí mero, dice, pregunte por Miss Espinoza, una muchacha bien peinada. Como es raza y no tiene pena de serlo, Miss Espinoza sonríe a don Marcial y le saluda en español" (Hinojosa 105). Peralta directs don Marcial to Miss Espinoza's window for instructions on how to deal with his official letter. He tells him that she is also "one of them" and can speak to him in Spanish. Hinojosa makes it a point to say that Miss Espinoza, unlike Adrián Peralta, is not ashamed of being Mexican. Peralta chooses to take advantage of his own people and by doing this dishonors his own culture. At this point in the sketch, Miss Espinoza becomes part of the narrative. Hinojosa adds another narrator to the dialogue, "Es la oficina de County Tax Assessor y a don Marcial le han nombrado para el jurado; no, no tiene que presentarse ahora; no, que no se reunirán hasta el fin de año; no, no me debe nada que aquí estamos para servirlo ... Miss Espinoza le advierte que no ande dando su dinero a los coyotes" (Hinojosa 105).

In this passage, Miss Espinoza answers questions that don Marcial has asked her about the letter. This is the first time that the author reveals specific information about don Marcial's official letter. The reader is now able to examine the manner in which Adrián Peralta has clearly taken advantage of don Marcial. The old man has been called for jury duty. His official letter summoned his presence in jury duty at the end of the year. He did not have to come to the courthouse to this find out, but since he does not speak English he did not want to take any chances. He wanted to resolve his issue and instead found himself caught in the wrath of the *coyotes*. Miss Espinoza is patient and kind to don Marcial. She answers his questions patiently and warns him not to give his

money to the *coyotes*. She is aware that Adrián Peralta and others like him take advantage of unsuspecting and trusting people like don Marcial everyday. Unfortunately, by the time don Marcial receives this warning, he has already paid Peralta to “get the ball rolling” and so that he could direct him to the proper window. Don Marcial had already given Mr. Peralta two dollars upon request for the letter reading service. Don Marcial, inevitably, feels that Peralta has assisted him and directed him to the right place and the right person. He is overtaken with relief because he does not owe any money to the courthouse. He was afraid that he was going to be charged for something he was not aware of and that he would not be able to afford. More than anything the old man is so happy and relieved that the letter was not a serious matter and that he was not in trouble. He is so pleased and relived with the outcome that he forgets about the money that he had already paid the *coyote* despite being warned not to pay them. “Como don Marcial no tiene que pagar nada se siente feliz – tanto que ni se acuerda ya de los dos billetes que le sacó el coyote; ni por pienso que vaya a seguir el consejo de la muchacha. Don Marcial vuelve a su casa en paz, hasta la próxima” (Hinojosa 105).

At the end of the day, Don Marcial is relieved and feels that the services that Peralta provided for him were an investment for a good outcome at the courthouse. With Peralta’s help, he believes, he was able to find the right person to speak to in a massive official building that intimidated him. His relief overpowered any feeling of negativity towards the *coyote*. Don Marcial returns home in peace until next time. Hinojosa makes the reader believe that Peralta will be seeking out don Marcial next time he comes to serve on jury duty. He has targeted this old man as an easy buck. The interaction between Peralta, the *coyote* and don Marcial is only a glimpse into the daily hunting schemes of all the *coyotes* at the courthouse. They patiently wait and scour the courthouse for their next victim, “Peralta ahora está tomando café en el coffee lounge. Está de pie, por si acaso. Como ya hizo la cruz con don Marcial se siente a gusto y está listo para caerle encima a otro inocente que venga a la corte con ese susidio de la raza tan conocido. Buenos días, señora. Adrian Peralta, un servidor, para ayudarle en lo que se pueda ...”(Hinojosa 105). Peralta stands at the coffee shop rejuvenating and waiting patiently for his next victim or prey. He will be ready for action all day in case someone casually “drops by” the courthouse seeking help. Peralta is just as relieved as don Marcial for having made some money that day. He is satiated with his early morning kill and is now resting up for his next target.

Hinojosa ends this sketch with an ellipsis. The ellipsis carries punctuation, or a grammatical inference that is fragmented. A truth that “should” be revealed is left out, a bodily breach, an infraction. Transgression has occurred and it is symbolized in the ellipsis because although the ellipsis is fragmented, it is nevertheless continuous, circular, it represents infinity. Irony plays a prime role in this sketch. The daily injustices that occur at the courthouse attest to the creed of lawlessness employed in a building that is considered sacred to the law and the nation. Injustice is staged and performed in a place that should be the ultimate representation of justice. The *coyote* will continue to take advantage of other individuals as long as it is permitted. The reader is left with the image of Peralta preying on his next victim. Once again the reader becomes part of the narrative by continuing the story where Hinojosa left off with his ellipsis. The bitter ending demonstrates that injustices do not end because injustice occurs at the foot of justice.

Interstitial Impressions

Perception of space, such as the courthouse in “Coyote”, and memory are indispensable in Hinojosa’s novel *Estampas del Valle*. His creation of Belken County in the Rio Grande Valley establishes the site of narrative that can help us imagine why an innocent victim might need the services of a bloodthirsty coyote. This type of ironic narrative is an apparent quality of the border. Belken County is an important site for the narrative structure of the sketches. Space becomes a defining element because in a border space like Belken County, Hinojosa blends English with Spanish, the old generation with the new generation, and trust with deceit. Belken County on the border becomes a protagonist. The cities along the border are reminiscent of the early Macondo in *Cien años de soledad*, Comala in Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*, Luvina in *El llano en llamas*, or Don Quijote’s *La Mancha*. All of these cities are protagonists in their respective novels. The importance of these places is that they establish a connecting point that will guide characters through their “adventures” or travels or migrations from one space, city or nation to another. In a similar way, Rolando Hinojosa extols the virtues of the home space as he writes. The Valley Border, confirms Hinojosa in his “Sense of Place”, “wasn't paradise and it didn't have to be; but it was more than paradise, it was home” (Saldívar 121). These literary cities corroborate the valued significance of a literary space, whether it is real or fictional or uniquely a blend of both fictional and non-fictional elements like those in Belken County.

Although Belken County *y sus alrededores* are fictional, we can feel the impact of Mexican northern states such as Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Zacatecas, and Chihuahua in the writing of Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle*. The development of his sense of place over time enabled him to write of, about and for the Río Grande Valley of South Texas. The verbal structure of *Estampas del Valle* reflects the regional nature of culture that still prevails in the Valley. This verbal structure describes life, customs, mores, and traditions in Belken County, a county representative of those along the Rio Grande in the state of Texas. “The images, metaphors and similes around which the novel is structured give the work its validity, for it is a satisfactory set of verbal symbols for the world it describes. By means of these verbal symbols Hinojosa *ha rescatado* the regional culture of the Chicano of Klail City, Condado de Belken, Valle del Río Grande, *y sus alrededores*”(Leal 108). The colloquial language demonstrated in the figure of don Marcial, for example, presents an image of the community and the linguistic diversity that it encases. Adrián Peralta’s ability to change his dialect to swindle don Marcial demonstrates diversity in local forms of speech. In a border space, figures like Peralta become linguistic chameleons to take advantage of others.

Hinojosa has rescued regional Valley culture through his writing. The author has often resorted to verbal symbols to enunciate his sense of place. The characters of *Estampas del Valle* speak predominantly Spanish and live in communities where not uncommon to have characters like don Marcial that do not speak English. Some of the characteristics of regional protagonists such as the Rio Grande Valley and Belken County are the feeling of isolation, being suspended in time, and underdeveloped economically. Unlike other cities like Comala and Luvina, Belken County is not a place where silence dominates. Hinojosa’s work aims to create a voice, a loud and clear voice, for the community that he is to represent in his writing. His voice is masked and at the same time unmasked by the multitude of narrators that appear and disappear throughout the

sketches. “Coyotes”, for instance, represents a loud and clear voice of several types of community members both good and bad. The sketches function as interstitial impressions of border life. *Estampas del Valle* can be compared to sunshine filtering through the interstices of arching trees. It cemented the place of Chicano literature of the Valley among other Chicano pieces as well as Latin American works. The importance of analyzing Hinojosa’s sense of place lies in seeing the Rio Grande Valley as a protagonist. Although a handful of characters stand out from the milieu of those present in *Estampas del Valle*, the true protagonist of this work is the Rio Grande Valley, especially Belken County and its surroundings.

Exploring Belken County and its surroundings as part of a foundation for South Texas border writing brings us closer to the idea of Latin American works and scholars that view the specificity and dynamic of regional space as defining the nation. Both Mexico and the United States have been marked with border literature; the writers live multidimensional lives in terms of identity and nationalism. In the sketches, the reader can appreciate a wide range of multifarious border identities shifting from one side of the scale to the other in terms of personality, distinctiveness, and regional dialect.

Multidimensional Belken County

Rolando Hinojosa unfolds the story of the Valley through the weaving and interconnectivity that exists between characters, history, culture and this specific geographical region. In his work, Hinojosa rewrites or retells the history of South Texas or the Lower Río Grande Valley through the eyes of the Mexican community in Belken County. A community outside of Mexico, believes Hinojosa, can still preserve traditionally Mexican customs and values. Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle* proves that history is made up of a series of conventional topics. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria has mapped the new terrain of the historical narrative: "For the modern Latin American narrative is an 'unwriting,' as much as it is a rewriting, of [Latin American] history. The previous writings of history are undone as the new one is attempted. The new narrative unwinds the history told in the old chronicles by showing that history was made up of a series of conventional topics, whose coherence and authority depended on the codified beliefs of a period whose ideological structure is no longer current" (González Echevarría 366). History depends on memory and nostalgia. The history of Belken County depends on codified beliefs passed on from one generation to another.

It was a sense of identity formed at an early age that led Hinojosa to conceive of his fictional world that ultimately constructed his sense of place and the meaning of his writing and his role within Mexican-American literature. As Belken County began to take its place within the literary imaginary Hinojosa appropriated the Rio Grande Valley and positioned it in another dimension. Like Faulkner, Hinojosa is the sole owner and proprietor of Belken County. His return to the Valley after he left it was a way back into the culture of the Valley in a manner that allows him to be an independent part of the place that shaped him. Hinojosa’s presents a new space dependent on his experiences, but independent from that weight which his experiences carry. Hinojosa’s purpose was not to recreate what he had lived, but to live that which he had imagined.

Belken County, then, is figment of his multidimensional and multicultural imagination. “Serious writing is deliberate as well as a consequence of an arrived-to-decision; what one does with it may be of value or not, but I believe that one’s fidelity to

history is the first step to fixing a sense of place” (Saldívar 156). In his map of Belken County at the beginning of the novel, Hinojosa makes it a point to site Belken County as close to the Rio Grande River as he can. This image creates a steady figurative steady flow of culture from one side of the river to the other. There is no bridge; there are no crossing points. The lack of a bridge is a metaphor for Hinojosa’s theory that a physical national boundary does not reduce cultural exchange. Instead there are cities in the American side and cities on the Mexican side, both at the river’s disposal. The Rio Grande River is personified and used as a tool to provide a juncture between two nations that have been politically separated, yet share a common cultural and linguistic space. Hinojosa erases borders and territorial boundaries by focusing on the people that comprise Belken County:

Cuando el sol se baja y los bolillos dejan sus tiendas, el pueblo americano se duerme para no despertar hasta el día siguiente.
Cuando el sol se baja y la gente ha cenado, el pueblo mexicano se aviva y se oyen las voces del barrio: la gente mayor, los jóvenes, los chicos, los perros.
[...] Niños, váyanse a jugar a la calle y dejen a los mayores hablar.
¡A la momita a la momita! Éste poste de teléfono es home-base.
Tules virules, nalgas azules.
Juan Barragán bebe leche y caga pan.
[...] No sé cuñao este de irse con contratista desconocido está arriesgado.
De acuerdo, si hay veces que con los conocidos ...
[...] El barrio puede llamarse Rebaje, el de las Conchas, el Cantarranas, en Rincón del Diablo, el Pueblo Mexicano – verdaderamente los títulos importan poco. Lo importante, como siempre, es la gente. (Hinojosa 61-3)

The passage above from “Voces del Barrio”, make up a series of conversations that can be heard throughout the cities of Belken County. We hear children, women, men, revolutionaries, lovers and laborers speaking about the dangers of work. This sketch provides us with an accurate historical insight through fiction. Hinojosa accounts for what history has left behind and fills this void and provide information from a distinctive perspective, from the side of the Mexican families that are now sharing a geographical space with people of a different culture and with different objectives for who and what comprises the land of the Rio Grande Valley. Belken County is a shared space; it is a space dedicated solely to the community and the multidimensional elements that comprise such communities. The word sharing implies that both parties contribute or take part in this cultural exchange. It is of importance to note, however, that the Mexican people of the Southwest have been forced into a new form of living in their own space. The Mexican-American of the Southwest had to abbreviate his identity only after the Treat of Guadalupe in 1848.

Cultural Infiltration

Hinojosa’s account of the Mexican community living in the United States along the Lower Rio Grande Valley Texas Border is unique in that is a literary creation that gives us a glimpse into a world comprised of many characters that will then give us an

idea of Hinojosa's personal view of the Valley. He is the creator of an imaginary Valley, a Valley that exists through established notions of what the Valley already is as a space in an abstract manner that is unique to Rolando Hinojosa's writing. Rolando Hinojosa's work is also representative of a different image of Chicano literature that he prefers to denominate Mexican-American literature. The Mexican-American experience in the Rio Grande Valley and in Texas in general, in his eyes, is different than that which is lived in Arizona, California or New Mexico. The Mexican-Texan experience in this specific area identifies with Mexico and the Mexican experience differently. The proximity to the border allows for cultural infiltration from one side of the border to the other and vice-versa. In his article "Always Writing: A Chicano Life", Rolando Hinojosa states, "I wanted to write about *my* area, to show the complex nature of Texas Mexicans, their culture, separate from, but occupying the same space as the Texas Anglo one, a life of bilingualism and biculturalism with ties that were at once psychological, commercial, and historical, spanning over two hundred years and over nine hundred miles, from Brownsville-Matamoros to El Paso-Juárez" (Hinojosa-Smith 67).

Hinojosa sees the terms Chicano and Mexican-American as interchangeable within academia because they share lived border experiences. It is important to note that Hinojosa's writing reflects this epistemological difference through experience along the South Texas border. When asked about his relationship to the word Chicano in "Entrevista a Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, desde Corea" by You-Jeong Choi & Claudia Macías de Yoon, Hinojosa states:

Yo los veo intercambiables, es decir, sinónimos. No tengo contra con la voz 'chicano', pero en Texas lo que predomina es mexicano-texano y mexicano-americano. Los jóvenes colegiales de Texas lo usaban tomando su uso de los nuevos mexicanos, arizonianos y californianos. Se burlaban de los otros usos, y ustedes se pueden imaginar qué pensarían los ancianos que trabajaron por muchos años y por poco dinero, que sufrieron discriminación, que, nada raro, no votaban por miedo y por falta de organización y coordinación, y luego encontrarse con jóvenes universitarios llamándolos vendidos porque los viejos prefieren llamarse mexicanos, así, a secas, siendo norteamericanos por ciudadanía, pero mexicanos para identificarse. Por eso no arraigó chicano aunque se oye, pero es rara la ocasión – casi nadie en mis clases en la Universidad de Texas en Austin usa el término de autoidentificación. (Choi and de Yoon 184)

The geographic and politico-social dynamics of this area are different than other Chicano communities. Here, some Mexicans were stripped of their homes after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe. These people were forced to give up their nationality overnight to become something that they were not. When speaking about Mexican roots in the Valley, Hinojosa makes it explicit that he auto-identifies as a Mexican living within the United States and that because of his upbringing and his proximity to Mexico in the Valley, it is natural to feel this way. Hinojosa describes the Mexican roots that exist in the Valley and the way in which others from this region see themselves. When outside of the Valley, there is an identity that goes along with him. Rolando Hinojosa *lives* a multifarious

identity. This area has shaped who he is as an author and as a borderer. The innovative quality of Hinojosa's work demonstrates the ability to create a unified regional identity and in the process break it down into local areas within that region.

By deconstructing the border identity and by obfuscating national borders through literature Rolando Hinojosa breaks through barriers of what border literature 'should' represent. The Valley is a regional space that is comprised of multiple areas and multiple identities. Each city within Belken County has a unique identity, yet still form part of this regional collectiveness that Hinojosa portrays in his work. Most cities are a formation of an array of autochthonous elements. Hinojosa's Belken County, one single county that forms part of the Rio Grande Valley exemplifies the multifaceted experiences, peoples, folklore and culture that can exist in one area of this vast space.

Reading Hinojosa's Position

As a native of the Río Grande Valley in South Texas and a first generation Mexican-American, at a first glance, it was difficult for me to relate to Rolando Hinojosa's work in *Estampas del Valle*. My notion of the Valley was the small town that I lived in. In Rio Grande City, Texas of Starr County, there is a lack of Anglos and also the lack of the "American" experience since I, like many people from my city are first-generation Mexican-Americans or Mexicans that have recently migrated to the United States. My first reading of Hinojosa's work seemed distant from my own reality and my Río Grande Valley experience. My experience in the Valley was watching my family and other families working in grain fields, cantaloupe fields, watermelon fields, onion fields, and cotton fields on the American side of the border as well as cornfields on the Mexican side of the border. His work, I thought, does not show the struggles of migrant workers the way Tomás Rivera does or his work does not make a loud statement in terms of identity the way Gloria Anzaldúa's work does. My initial reading proved to be superficial. *Estampas del Valle* is an array of Mexican-American experiences along the border, mine included. There are cities in Belken County with a large portion of Anglos and others lacking them. Hinojosa wants to convey this heterogeneity.

This is why *Estampas de Valle* is such an important work. It has been overlooked and overshadowed by his *Klail City Death Trip Series*. The *Series* takes the reader beyond the parameters of the Rio Grande Valley and beyond the discussion of migrant workers in the border region of South Texas. *Estampas de Valle* evidences Rolando Hinojosa's relationship to the struggling migrant, the recent immigrant, the poor Mexican that is taken advantage of by coyotes, the abandoned Mexican revolutionary, etc. It is in this novel, his first publication that Hinojosa marks his work with concern for the Mexican and the Mexican-American on the border. More importantly in this novel Hinojosa tells the story of the good and the bad that exists among human relations in this unique border region. At first, my reading of Hinojosa was cloaked with my personal history and background as the eldest daughter of Mexican immigrants in the small border city of Río Grande City, Texas with a population of 11,923 people in the 2000 census. It was also cloaked with a generational difference. According to the 2000 census, more than ninety-five percent of the population in Rio Grande City, Texas is of Mexican descent. The census, however, does not account for the illegal immigrant population living in the area. This background, my background, is significantly different than that of Hinojosa's. My parents arrived in the Valley from Mexico in the 1980s. Rolando

Hinojosa's family history goes back to the 1800s; they were some of the first Mexican and Anglo families to settle in the new established land, border, and the first to experience the new social order, physical and cultural changes of the Valley.

This history, I realized, is what makes the Valley a unique space. These differences are exactly what Hinojosa is trying to tell us through his writing, that the Valley is not one thing, but many things, it does not hold one type of person, but many type of people and that each individual's history is unique. This, however, does not keep the Valley from having a collective identity. This geographical space carries a multitude of identities, personalities, experiences and cultures. Hinojosa's protagonist, the Rio Grande Valley, is infinitely difficult to portray, yet Hinojosa's writing style captures the uniqueness and the intricateness of the Valley and the Valley peoples and cultures. Although at first glance my own history seems far removed from that of Hinojosa, it was more and more evident as I read and reread his work that the history of the Valley is a shared history, my history, his history, their history, it all makes up the personality and culture of the Valley. As I continued to experience Hinojosa's writing I began to appreciate the history that he provides. I became acquainted with and mindful of the struggles his characters encountered in their personal, social and professional lives as I followed their journey through the *Klail City Death Trip* series. As my reading of his works progressed and developed into a more sophisticated analysis, my perception of his writing became more vivid and began to open my horizon to other Valley experiences. Although I was already aware that there are many identities and experiences in the Valley other than mine, Hinojosa's writing helped me accept the fact that although the Valley is collective and unifying on some ground, it is also fragmented and multifaceted.

A multitude of characters, over a thousand different characters in the *Series* and over three hundred of them in *Estampas del Valle* can be found as fictional representations identities can be found in one county, Belken County. Hinojosa's detailed and meticulous writing shows that this is possible and through this possibility also exemplifies a sort of impossibility. Hinojosa shows us, through his writing and his rhetorical style that regionalism and identity is a complicated subject that cannot be generalized.

Inception of Identity

It is easy to get lost in the vagueness of the term "The Valley" in reference to the 65-mile long span of land along the Río Grande River. One generalizing term gives the assumption of one identity, one experience, and one name for large, intricate and diverse Southern Texan geographical space. One geographical space, Hinojosa explains, can be comprised of many identities, many histories, and many subjects in transit. The author demonstrates this cultural and experiential variation in a discreet manner, through the experiences of the characters of Belken County, an imaginary county in the South Texas Valley, across from the Río Grande River. His sense of place, ultimately, is determined by the heterogeneity of his culture and the people along the border.

The Valley has many borders. It is comprised of multiple border crossings each unique in its own way. It is a space that has both created a sense of community and unity in terms of identity, yet also respects the differences that exist within each region, city and county of the Valley. Rolando Hinojosa does not generalize the border experience.

He is specific in his claim and representation. Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* represents an imaginary county that has come to stand for a symbol of a Valley site.

This site in particular is more permeable than other sites. Alejandro Grimson explains the particularities of borders and border areas:

No todas las fronteras son reducibles a un mismo tipo de metáfora”, apunta García Canclini en su trabajo. La frontera de México-Estados Unidos son muchas fronteras, con poblaciones e historias singulares. Esa heterogeneidad, se multiplica cuando incluimos otras regiones del mundo, tiende a ser anulada por miradas generalizantes y deshistorizadoras. Una de las mayores generalizaciones, que vacía de sentido histórico a las fronteras, afirma que todas las fronteras son separación e unión al mismo tiempo. En determinados contextos históricos y en ciertas regiones pueden señalarse tendencias más o menos generales sobre las fronteras. Así, en cada caso empírico, esas dos características de toda frontera se encuentran ordenadas y jerarquizadas. Hay fronteras más permeables que otras; hay momentos de mayor militarización de los cruces; hay personas que cruzan con facilidad, mientras otras son humilladas y perseguidas. (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 23)

The Valley is an identity. It is a geographical space along the Texas-Mexico border, but more than this space it is an imagined community channeling Benedict Anderson's notion of a sense of community. In the *estampa* “Al pozo con Bruno Cano”, for example, the funeral of this man becomes a place where the community gathered to both mourn and celebrate the ability to come together even in the direst times. This identity is multifarious in its intricacy, yet fixative. It is fixative in the sense that one point in space can find its position within and among many other points. Hinojosa's Belken County accounts for one single point in the space of this constructed Rio Grande Valley identity. In his imagined space and imagined community he provides the reader with a point such as Borges' *Aleph*, a point in the universe in which, or from which, you can see all of what his point is comprised.

Hinojosa, in his body of work, and particularly in *Estampas del Valle*, provides the reader with a concise and accurate history of a specific region of the Valley through fiction. His Valley includes perceptions of the many Valleys as well as perceptions of other concepts of the Valley – the work of Hinojosa provides many Valley views within one storyline. Hinojosa's writing reveals the complexity of forming a shared communitarian identity while remaining true to an account of oneself and one's experience. It is not limited by history, but empowered by a sense of representation – his fragmentary writing holds together a community – an imagined community that comes to life, but also undeniably informs the reader of the struggles and hardships that Mexican people endure as they grew accustomed to new order in terms of the racial tensions with the surrounding and land acquiring Anglo community. The Belken County citizen must come to face with new battles as history unfolds and continues to privilege the chosen few. Hinojosa has created the space of the Rio Grande Valley as an important component of the novel. It is the springboard from which he carries the dialogical double voice in his *Estampas del Valle* and in his personal experiences.

Chapter Two

An alternative history? Yes, but also the real history one gathers from conversations, readings, written records; in brief, anything that will help and serve me to write about the Valley.

- Rolando Hinojosa

Peripheral Foundations

If we examine Hinojosa's literary work "as what Dorris Sommer has in another Latin American context termed "foundational fictions", that is, as thought experiments with nation-building templates serving to play out the possibilities of class consciousness and cultural nationalism, or simply as real alternatives to American modernity, then we should understand the nature of those limits" (Saldívar 9). Hinojosa, like Américo Paredes, attains them precisely through his internalization of the community of impulses that originate from that world in that time, contradictions and all. In their moments and most lucid insight, his writings cope with his own contradictions as well. Belken County represents Hinojosa's vision on an elaborate scale. The citizens of Belken County represent a multitude of Hinojosa's overlapping identities as scholar of regional nationalistic culture and as a transnational journalist, soldier and writer taught him to see the struggle for Mexican American social justice as part of a much larger and elaborate geopolitical conundrum. Hinojosa's work is a groundbreaking template of regional border studies in the United States. The transnational imaginary coupled with notions of social aesthetics provides context for interpreting dialectics of politics, racial and gender forms reflected in writing, folklore, popular performance and music in Rolando Hinojosa's sketches.

Chicano Literature in the Transnational Imaginary

Bureaucrats and politicians have continually defined the borderland as ten Mexican and American States that have reconciled as eternal neighbors. The work of a borderer touches on the actual border between these two nations either real or figuratively. The experience of a borderer is an identity in transit and in constant changes of experiences historically, culturally and linguistically. To some, the border experience is the world itself. This hybrid border between the United States and Mexico carries elements from both the Mexican Revolution and the Bracero Program of 1941-1964. The presence of these events, from a historical point of view as well as a cultural one, inevitably permeates the written works of authors like Rolando Hinojosa and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Ramón Saldívar explains, "It is also an experience of *transit*, *transition*, and *transitoriness* from one lived experience in a particular historical place into the experience of a different geosocial structure and its altered social and emotional space. In experiencing that transitoriness, we also experience the way that specific forms of local ideology interact with the social environment of a particular cultural geography. In these transnational cultural and social spaces, we live the complex mix of ideas and locales resulting in the visceral emotional experience of the process of possible political change

and social transformation within a variable cultural milieu that provides an incomparable opportunity of attacking the future with a new key” (Saldívar 435-436). Greater Mexico became a figure of what America is becoming, not a limited nationality, but a “transnationality”, a weaving back and forth of innumerable threads and conceptual boundaries that overlap into each other. All of which become transsentimental locales. The Valley border individual, like Hinojosa and Paredes, carries cultural sentiments from within.

The Rio Grande Valley became an important locale for Rolando Hinojosa the writer. Another locale with equal sentimental value in the development of his writing and in the creation of his border experience is Arteaga, Coahuila, Mexico where Hinojosa spent many summers with his family and wrote his first short story. These two transsentimental locales defy a binary vision of identity and create an awareness of a transnational imaginary that evinces Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia; a heteroglossia of the borderland. “The transnational imaginary”, states Saldívar, “is thus to be understood not only ideologically, but also as a chronotope, a spatial and temporal indicator of a real contact zone that is historical and geographical, cultural and political, theoretical and discursive” (Saldívar 62). Transnational individuals whose lives form an experiential field within which singularly delineated notions of political, social, and cultural identity do not suffice populate the borderlands.

Despite divergences of emphasis about the nature of cultural difference at the border, critics agree that the multidimensionality and non-synchronizing element of border writings emerge from its capacity to see both sides of the border simultaneously and describes a two-way process of borrowing and lending. Its characteristic heterogeneity issues from its ability to configure concepts from within two cultural contexts intertwining in the diverse multitemporal heterogeneity of each nation. As Saldívar explains, multidimensionality, hybridity, and heterogeneity should be added to the watchwords for describing life in the modern borderlands and the border writing that it has occasioned on both sides of the border. Fernando Ortiz’s transculturation is the term that Paredes himself would use later to describe the interactive process by which different cultural groups within Greater Mexico and Mexico proper experienced the pressures and complexities of life in the borderlands and how they negotiated what they absorbed from the dominant culture and why. “Transculturation is not a matter of evading the dominant culture, but of choosing how one must confront it” (Saldívar 196).

The nation-building template of “foundational fictions” provides the possibility for a border culture bi-nationalism in this particular novel. Belken County in *Estampas del Valle* can be seen as an imaginary space that can exist on either side of the Rio Grande. If we look at Belken County as part of U.S. territory we explore the notions of regionalism and minority cultures. If we examine Belken and the cities that make up the area as part of Mexico, then we can explore the notion of rural lands and people that are abandoned by their nation. Either way, when read both ways, separately or simultaneously, the work of Hinojosa offers two distinct views that are unique to the border regions. In such places as Juárez and Tijuana, folkloric elements get lost in the cliché of an exaggerated nationalism. Kitsch becomes the norm. In a more rural space like the Rio Grande Valley folkloric elements are a more integral part of day-to-day life. Although the reader knows that Hinojosa’s Belken County lies on the American side of the Rio Grande River (as shown on the map depicted by Hinojosa at the beginning of the

novel), if one takes into consideration the cultural, linguistic and rural elements of Belken County, then one can surely imagine Belken County as part of the *norteño* states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon or Coahuila or in a place that is rural and deserted in another Spanish speaking territory. Some of the narratives in the novel that do not provide direct contact or a reference to the Anglo community in Texas surely fit this template. The sketch “Así se cumple”, analyzed in my Introduction, highlights the rural areas of a Mexican community and incorporates views from an international scale as well.

Foundational fictions, according to Doris Sommer, establish cultural traditions. In Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle*, the author describes cultural Mexican traditions that make his fiction an archive of cultural agency, in the words of Margaret Cohen.¹ The *estampa* of one of the old-timer revolutionaries is key to understanding the tradition of Mexican culture or the culture of Mexican traditions in the Rio Grande Valley. One of Hinojosa’s main concerns in his writing is the validity of a literary paradigm in the preservation of language and culture in his region. His writing embraces creativity and explores folkloric elements that tie this border region to Mexican culture. Communal customs that fortify foundational fictions form a significant part of Hinojosa’s narrative structure. For instance, Hinojosa begins his novel with the sketch of “Braulio Tapia”. This short piece describes the Mexican custom of asking for a woman’s hand in marriage, in this case, the nameless narrator’s daughter. The nameless narrator in “Braulio” Tapia” remembers his father in law in this sketch. He is basing his own reaction to a marriage proposal on his experience with Braulio Tapia. Usually either parents or godparents accompany the person that is going to ask for the woman’s hand in marriage. In the narrative, the narrator is taken down memory lane by the gesture, not because he is surprised or unfamiliar with this custom, but because seeing his future son-in-law gives him a sense of nostalgia. It helps him remember that not too long ago he was in that same place asking for his own wife’s hand in marriage.

The Crux: Memory & Nostalgia

This nostalgia becomes the preservation of a custom through memory. Hinojosa gives us the tale of this proposal and at the same time builds a topological paradigm. In Hinojosa, a topological paradigm such as the sketch of “Braulio Tapia” becomes key in preserving communal Mexican traditions. The tradition of asking for a woman’s hand in marriage is a traditional practice in Mexico and in the Rio Grande Valley border. In this case, a young man has come to ask for his future bride’s hand in marriage. This ritualistic performance inspires a recollection of thoughts on the part of the father-in-law to be. He remembers what it must have been like for his own father-in-law to watch him ask for his wife’s hand in marriage. The tradition, then, becomes a chain of events and performances tracing this family’s history and their traditions culturally and chronologically. This text holds an interesting element. When the tradition is traced back in memory, we lose spatial boundaries. These events could have taken place on either side of the border, thus giving Braulio Tapia the function of linking the history of Mexico and that of the Rio Grande Valley.

¹ See Margaret Cohen. "Narratology in the Archive of Literature." *Representations* 108.1 (2009): pp. 51-75. Print.

This particular sketch highlights the validity of Hinojosa's topological paradigm in the story of "Braulio Tapia" and the ceremonious and elaborate custom of asking for a young woman's hand in marriage. Roque Malacara has come to ask the narrator for his daughter's hand in marriage. This simple action assumes ritual status when the older man recalls that he had come in the same manner to ask for his wife's hand in marriage. Continued observance of a traditional ritual proves the health of communal customs and keeps cultural memory afloat. When the older man wonders whom his father-in-law Braulio dealt with when he played the suitor's role, we glimpse a ritual as central to communal health as the traditions of marriage:

As the reading progresses, and we realize that at the heart of the testimony-like conversations making up the text lies the matter of genealogies, the original question assumes the significance of primal mystery. It must be answered. The text proceeds to enact numerous oral performances, creating for the reader a role of traditional youth, that is, a listener/rememberer, a future storehouse of tradition. And since in South Texas, of which this and all of Hinojosa's subsequent novels treat, genealogies are often the way one distinguishes between those to be trusted and those who have sold out to the Anglo Americans, the information gathered is of vital importance to communal preservation. Answering the first question symbolizes the community's ability to protect itself from further betrayal and displacement. (Bruce-Novoa 155)

Bruce-Novoa's interpretation of this narrative is focused on the importance of communal preservation in terms of customs, traditions and rituals. Rolando Hinojosa highlights these Mexican traditions in his Belken County community and further establishes its close ties to northern Mexico. In this story, the narrator describes Roque Malacara coming to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage without the presence of his parents or godfathers. He says that Roque Malacara, with a hat in his hand, makes a cara de "vaqueta", which is the common word for leather in northern Mexico. "Chaparro, fornido y pisando fuerte a pesar de venir con el sombrero en la mano, Roque Malacara me pone cara de vaqueta y dice que no es por falta de respeto pero ¿qué le vamos a hacer! no tiene padrinos y por eso viene a pedirme a Tere él solo" (Hinojosa 26). What the older man means is that Roque makes a sour or pitiful face at the fact that he is missing an essential element in his marriage proposal; his parents or his godparents. Even though Roque does not have parents to accompany him to perform this custom he does not let it deter him from performing his traditional and cultural duties. The anonymous narrator's description of his daughter's *pretendiente* is also an indicator of the protective nature of the father with his daughter. He calls him short and mentions that he was holding his hat in his hand instead of wearing it. Roque Malacara takes off his hat as a sign of respect showing humility and sincerity. He is nervous about the outcome of the proposal since he is doing it alone.

Braulio Tapia, the narrator's deceased father in law, as stated earlier, has the function of linking the history of Mexico and that of the Valley. The performance of traditional customs like asking for a woman's hand in marriage preserves memory. The narrator's nostalgic memory of Braulio Tapia give the text cultural unity to that region

found along both sides of the Río Grande River. In this case, the river has not always been understood as a barrier. In this short *estampa* there are various elements that contribute to the presence of Mexican culture in the Valley. If the reader did not know the title of the work or the author of this *estampa* this short piece could potentially be identified as belonging to a rural space in Mexico. The most notable elements are the tradition of asking the parents of the bride for the bride's hand in marriage with the presence of the future groomsmen and his parents or godparents such as Roque Malacara and his family. The tradition of remembering and building one memory upon another is a mode of culture preservation. "Me recuerda que ya hace año y medio que tiene entrada en la casa y que ahora viene a pedir mi consentimiento para casarse. Le digo que sí, chocamos la mano, y le hago pasar" (Hinojosa 26). The narrative makes several chronological jumps. The narrator speaks of allowing Roque to enter his home a year and a half ago and now he was letting him into his home once again as his future son in law. He gives Roque permission to marry his daughter by shaking his hand and inviting him into his home as a sign of mutual respect and acceptance.

The narrative takes another leap in time when the older man pictures Braulio Tapia, his father in law, with his "bigote lacio y patilla larga" reminiscent of a great Mexican figure such as Pancho Villa or Vicente Fernández. "En el umbral de la puerta divisó a mi difunto suegro, don Braulio Tapia, con su bigote lacio y patilla larga, saludándome a mí como cuando yo vine a esta casa a pedirle a Matilde. Para ese tiempo ya estaba viudo de doña Sóstenes como yo ahora lo estoy de Matilde. Don Braulio me dice que sí, me choca la mano y me hace pasar a su casa" (Hinojosa 26). The narrator was once in the place of Roque Malacara when he asked don Braulio Tapia for Matilde Tapia's hand in marriage. At that time, don Braulio was a widow. The narrator describes his own experience and the manner in which don Braulio accepted his proposal. He imitates his late father in law's gestures to Roque Malacara. The narrator, like don Braulio, shakes Roque's hand and invites him into the house as his daughter's *prometido*. Braulio Tapia, remembers the narrator, took part in the Mexican Revolution and the memory of his father-in-law evokes a painted portrait of a brave and masculine Mexican man with features similar to the great heroes of the Mexican Revolution. The sketch is a testament to the traditional values passed on from one generation to the next. In this text we examine three generations and the way in which traditional values and even gestures are being passed down to the younger generations.

Braulio Tapia belongs to an older generation that is becoming less common in the Valley, *los revolucionarios*. The participants of the Mexican Revolution are slowly dying and their presence is being replaced by the younger generations such as Roque Malacara. The presence of his future son-in-law transports him through time and history to a moment that is no longer attainable physically, but only through nostalgia and memory. There are certain elements that trigger an individual's memory. This specific Mexican ritual fosters the ability to preserve culture through memory. The performance and ritual gives the memory of Braulio Tapia cultural validity knowing that Mexican traditions will be preserved in Belken County by the younger generations. All is not lost through time. Hinojosa aims to preserve South Texas culture through the memory of tradition and cultural values in relation to Mexico.

Regional Dialogic Voice

In this study of *Estampas del Valle* we will focus on the condition of the “post-rural” landscape and the paradoxical reemergence of new regionalist modes in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogism. In other words, in Hinojosa’s novel, he manifests another voice inside a given voice, a double voice that can be seen at times as a harmonious element and at others as a verbal discordance. Even in those places where the author’s voice seems at first glance to be unitary and consistent, direct and immediately intentional, “beneath that smooth single-language surface we can nevertheless uncover prose’s three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity, which enters the project of style and its determining factor” (Bakhtin and Holquist 315). A three-dimensional voice carries with it resonances of multiple identities that can be representative of an expression that encompasses both individual and collective thought.

The literatures of Tomás Rivera and Rolando Hinojosa contain this double voice and especially the collective thought. This voice encompasses various perspectives and views of a proliferated community. José David Saldívar writes, “Stylistically, Hinojosa uses the dialogical imagination throughout the project to depict a changing historical materialism in South Texas. His numerous characters reveal themselves to us through what Mikhail Bakhtin called “heteroglossia,” that is, discourses peculiar to a variety of stratum of society. Indeed, Hinojosa employs a multiplicity of characters and storytellers, making many of them recurring personae, because he wants to resist monologism on the one hand and closure on the other” (Saldívar 50). The multifarious elements in terms of culture, language and identity that come with Valley traditions, folklore and customs create this double voice that Hinojosa provides in *Estampas del Valle*. Rolando Hinojosa provides a double voice. He has been attempting to create a voice for a population within two nations, to give the border space a sense of unity and belonging.

The voice of Hinojosa has done what the nation cannot do; Hinojosa’s authorial voice speaks louder than national barriers. Nations along borders divide, they do not unify. Rolando Hinojosa provides a bridge for these two spaces that have been divided from a territorial perspective, yet brought even closer from a cultural perspective. The voice of authors such as Rivera, Anzaldúa, and Hinojosa have come to represent the Rio Grande Valley Chicano culture and have provided a space for this new type of literature. Border literature has become a literature that embraces both oral tradition and the culture of local community. *Estampas del Valle* is an intersection of various styles, modes and language varieties. He is able to authenticate code-shifting in the discourse of characters and narrators. In “Voces del Barrio” the reader can appreciate the genuineness of the interchanging of English and Spanish in Belken County. In this sketch there are a myriad of ongoing conversations. The children in the sketch are playing games and hopping about as the adults around them try to hold a conversation in peace. One of the children exclaims, “Este poste de teléfono es el home-base” (Hinojosa 61). The child switches from Spanish to English without thinking about it. He also translates the word “telephone” in English to its counterpart in Spanish. The telephone pole is the home base for their game. The words run into each other as if they are one: the children in the sketch for example, pronounce “home-base” as one word.

The novel dialogues with other forms of literary and semiliterary styles, folklore, popular culture, and especially with history and geography. Although his work has been written in both English and Spanish and he has received numerous international prizes

such as Casa de Las Américas Prize in 1976 and the Quinto Sol Literary Prize in Berkeley in 1973, Rolando Hinojosa's novels and essays, aside from *Klail City*, have received little attention in the United States. His literature is studied within the Chicano academic community, but has not been investigated in depth as a literature of the U.S. or the Americas. Ironically, the novel lies in a state of limbo between literary categories and canons that, in this case, serve to divide literary creations. The racial, economic and social tensions of the Anglo and the Mexican community are presented well in Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*. Hinojosa's novel stems from an area of cultural trauma and conflict. It is a testament to the differences that exist between the two groups in South Texas. It is also testament in the implementing of an identity on the border. Rolando Hinojosa makes it a point to state that choosing an identity along the Texas border is a personal matter, but there are elements in our social surrounding that affect the choice we make and the way in which we can identify or not identify as a Mexican or Mexican-American. In the quest to make sense of his own self, Hinojosa chooses to mold his own identity in terms of his personal experiences on the Mexican and the American side of the border. In Rolando Hinojosa's article "Always Writing: A Chicano Life" we are reminded of Hinojosa's humor and witty nature about being a Mexican-American and feeling a Mexican identity in Texas.

Border Diaspora

Hinojosa believes that humor is part of life and an important element of survival among borderers. Literature of the Chicano and Border Diasporas emphasize the use of humor as a tool for perseverance. He states, "... humor creeps into my writing once in a while, because it was the use of irony, as many of us know, that allowed the Borderer to survive and maintain a certain measure of dignity" (Saldívar 24). Rolando Hinojosa believes that we don't celebrate Chicano Weeks at many Texas universities, because, according to the author, if you ever forget who you are, your fellow Texans, the Anglos, will remind you in no uncertain terms. Texas Mexicans have endured a long and arduous road to assert an identity that encompasses a myriad of border experiences. The intermingling of border culture from one nation to another is still a common occurrence in the Rio Grande Valley. For example, in Starr County, countless students commute to school. To do so, they must cross the Río Grande City-Camargo Bridge, managed and owned by the Starr Camargo Bridge Company, one of the few existing privately owned and most lucrative bridge crossings. This two-lane, 591 foot bridge crossing was completed and opened in 1966. Likewise, many families that live on the "American" side cross to Mexico for health care services or simply to visit family. Hinojosa's literature gives attention to social, economic and anthropological detail. He demonstrates that a border, not necessarily all borders, but his notion of the border is a form of codependent overflow and influx of culture across the Rio Grande River.

The uninterrupted relationship with Mexico has made it possible for the inhabitants of the Valley to keep their cultural traditions almost intact. One of the most popular forms of unity amongst Border Diasporas is the *corrido*. It reconstructs history and folktales of the local communities and helps preserve oral culture. The *corrido* or popular ballad is seen as a mnemotechnic device to help these communities remember important events, in the absence of a written history. "The novelist makes use of this important source of information to reconstruct the history of the Chicanos in the Valley.

[...] In general it can be said that among the members of this border regional community Mexican culture predominates” (Saldívar 106-107).

The lives of Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa and John Rechy were incredibly different and can give an account for the diversity that exists within Mexican American communities. The Mexican-Americans of Los Angeles, for example, are completely different than communities of the lower Rio Grande Valley. The Mexican Diaspora is diverse. Hinojosa writes *Estampas del Valle* to show how different Mexican-American communities can be from one another. Like the corrido, poetry has an indispensable role in transmitting important cultural information to the communities as well as in academic circles that might not be familiar with Chicano literature

The poem *I am Joaquín* by Rodolfo Corky González in 1967 displays the influence of Mexico and in the United States. The Mexican Diaspora exists in U.S. territory. Although the Chicano community is both fragmented and unified, it is characterized as “prone to stressing in their works the differences in the many Chicano communities rather than the communal essences previously sought by others. Thus, class and gender variations begin to surface in their works” (González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker 561). The importance of this difference is not studied with sufficient diligence. For example, as readers we must take the time to differentiate culturally between a work of Octavio Paz in *Labyrinth of Solitude* and Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* within a national discourse. Regional elements exist. In Chicano literature we have a more complex system. Chicano literature encompasses two nationalities with diverse regional elements depending on the community and the location of the community in the United States. Chicano communities lie within border spheres and outside of them. Hinojosa mirrors the Mexican community of Belken County to that which he knows very well.

The section “Vidas y Milagros”, for example, is dedicated to the people of Belken County. The last phrase in his *dedicatoria* states the following, “Lo que sigue se dedica a la gente de Belken County y a sus espejos que los ven buenos, enfermos, en pelota, llorando, etc. de noche y de día”(Hinojosa 117). What do the *espejos* mean? To what do the inhabitants of Belken County owe their vulnerability? One element that makes the community vulnerable, the reader can assume, is the author himself. He is an omniscient writer and creator; the author has no problem expressing that he has control over his writing and his creation. However, one must remember that that which controls the author is his sense of place, which is the Lower Río Grande Valley. The Valley makes the writer, the writer makes the narrator, the narrator makes the characters, the characters make Belken County and the cycle continues. All of these elements are interdependent in the creation of *Estampas del Valle*.

Hinojosa begins this part of the novel with a bold statement, “A fin de cuentas, este mundo es como una botica: hay un poco de todo. Altos, bajos, llorones, valientes, gordos, flacos, buenos, malos, listos y pendejos, unos enclenques, otros robosantes de salud. El escritor, sin permiso de nadie, se sale a la calle y escoge de todo un poco. No se dude de que de todo haya un poco y no se confunda creyendo que haya mucho de todo” (Hinojosa 116). Hinojosa, like Cervantes, creates an abstract realm for the author; a form of distance that behaves as a zone of hidden authorial approximation. Belken County contains a wide range of characters. The author explains that he is the creator of this community. Hinojosa presents the span of his characters in binaries meaning that he covers one end to the other of these opposing qualities such as cowards and the brave or

the sickly and the healthy. Hinojosa has chosen whom to represent – for each of his characters has a purpose and a place in Belken County. He continues, “La originalidad, metal difícil de asir como el azogue, quizá no toque tampoco en los hombres por aquello de que de barro venimos, etc. A fin de cuentas, otra vez, somos y no somos iguales como han reconocido tantos otros” (Hinojosa 116). His writing, he argues, is original in its sense of creation, but not original within the literary realm. The argument of whether or not this work is original is irrelevant to Hinojosa for he knows that only he can represent Belken County.

Social Reality of Border

Hinojosa confirms that his identity in relation to Mexico comes from his place of being in relation to others around him, specifically the Anglo community. The Texas-Tamaulipas border and the Texas-Nuevo Leon border have a unique form of identification in a communitarian sense. One is from “The Valley” and it does not distinguish exactly what town from the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This, in turn, serves as a reminder that this community is living its experiences on both sides of the border. The people of the Valley communities are borderers, crossers of two nations legally and illegally and bearers of two cultures and two languages. The influx of language and culture flows from one side of the river to the other. Hinojosa states:

That’s true. I was born on the Texas-Tamaulipas border, not far from where the Río Grande flows into the Gulf of Mexico and not far from the last two engagements of the Civil War. The territory was surveyed by the Spanish army and settled by Spanish subjects in the 1750s, and the people who settled there had a sure sense of identity. That self-confidence remains, and the Valleyites, with all their good and bad points, have one reply when asked where they hail from: “I’m from the Valley.” They name no town unless pressed to do so. (Hinojosa-Smith 71)

For Hinojosa, sense of place rests on familiarity and with the people who populate the place and how they are related to the land and to each other. He undoubtedly represents folkloric elements of the Valley with regards to Mexican culture. He is a chronicler of Valley life, a living historical encyclopedia of the U.S.-Mexico tensions of along the Río Grande River, and a preserver of Spanish language and Mexican culture along the border.

In order to create *Estampas del Valle*, Rolando Hinojosa had to leave the Valley so that it could become his subject. His work is about a struggle: a quiet struggle. It is about a struggle to find his personal space as a writer and the struggles of his characters living with the tensions of border life after the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848 and amidst several wars such as the Mexican Revolution in Mexico and the Korean War in the United States. His writing covers an extensive time frame and his characters help develop this time frame with their personal family history, the stories of the elderly in the community, as well as by the progressive aging of a few of his characters such as Jehú Malacara and Rafa Buenrostro. Hinojosa’s introductory novel shapes a new form of perception for Mexican-American literature along the border.

The Chicano novel will continue to embody new ways of perceiving social reality and significant changes in ideology. As ideological force itself, its function will be to

help shape its readers' modes of perception in order to effect new ways of interpreting social reality which might contribute to a general social, spiritual and literary re-evaluation of values. Literature in this sense must serve not only an aesthetic function, but an epistemological one as well. In his article "Chicano Literature and Ideology: Prospectus for the 80's", Ramón Saldívar states, Hinojosa's novel is a rich phantasmagoria of fleeting scenes, thoughts, images, dreams, and actions, which fuse to create a mosaic of South Texas life. As the narrative cuts from one character to another, without apparent logic or motivation, it tends to instantiate places and times" (Saldívar 37). Hinojosa creates Belken County in South Texas to represent an actual part of the Rio Grande Valley. Hinojosa's marking quality as a border writer is his historical accuracy. He recovers the history of the Valley. Belken County is a fictitious place, yet a representation of the reality and struggles of the Mexican-American community in that area.

The sketches become part of the double imaginary and heteroglossia that we encounter in *Estampas del Valle*. Hinojosa's own map of Belken County represents historical divisions marked in the border region of South Texas. He draws the cities on the American side very close to the actual river dividing them from the Mexican cities. The map restricts its represented space to Hinojosa's fictional "Belken County, Texas" with its functional cities and towns of Jonesville-on-the-river, Klail City, Flora, Bascom, etc. Instead of establishing a privileged beginning which could be displaced along a temporal axis following out the linear geographical axis promised in the maps, the narrative unhinges time as it stretches out according to the rhythms of associative similarities. Saldívar notes:

Tied as it is to the realistic details of life in South Texas, the novel proceeds to narrate that reality in decidedly unrealistic ways. [...] The first and third parts of Hinojosa's novel refer to well over a hundred characters by name in separate vignettes of varying length. The links among these characters, however, are established gradually by reiteration, by allusion, and by simple juxtaposition, for the narrative rarely names these links directly. The two axes which the novel has been subtly developing, then, the metonymical linear one of time and geography, and the metaphorical one of associative substitutions, form the narrative loom upon which Hinojosa's unnamed narrator weaves his tale. (Saldívar 37-38)

As the narrative proper begins, it turns again to the pictorial script to instantiate past and present time, absent and existent characters within the narrative. Hinojosa chose the Valley as his subject since he knew it so well, its history, its people, their myths, and their anthropology with all its cultural manifestations. What he needed now was an audience. His writing calls for an audience that can study him as an abstract writer, such as Borges², and simultaneously as a regional border chronicler and storyteller.

² To read more about Rolando Hinojosa Smith and the perception of his works as an abstract form of art and writing please see David E. Johnson's "The Time of Translation: The Border of American Literature". Johnson's argument is based on cultural theory of identity in difference by Octavio Paz, he states, "The Border produces a self-consciousness; it enables the reflection that

Although Glover Lee believes that reading Hinojosa's regionalism and position as chronicler of the Valley reduces him to a "small"³ writer, Rolando Hinojosa's sense of place documents his regionalist experience and knowledge, yet does not limit him to being read only as a Valley writer. His writing stretches as far as Germany where several translations of his work have been made. In a recent e-mail exchange Hinojosa spoke about attending a conference in Germany. At this conference there was an interesting set up of his work: a German scholar read on three of his novels and gave a background of his work. An actor that read Hinojosa's work for fourteen minutes in German followed the literary presentation. Hinojosa followed with his version in Spanish. The actor read again, as did Hinojosa. Hinojosa consciously chooses to read his work in Spanish; this is what feels most natural to him.

Whether others interpret the work as a regionalist oeuvre or not, there are particular and very specific concrete attestations in his writing that make this particular geographical space come alive. In a "Voice of One's Own" Hinojosa states, "I write about what I assume other writers write about: that which they know. I happen to know something about people and about how some of us are. I happen to know some history about the Valley, this country, the state ... Add to this two lifetimes, one of observation and participation, and another of unsystematic, but enjoyable reading, ... and you'll be able to read the personal and public voices of those hundreds of characters who populate the works.(Saldívar 16) Hinojosa feels at home with his narrative. He is able to create something that fulfills him as an author and that allows him to stay true to his person. The characters in *Estampas del Valle* are a creation of a space that knows as well as he knows himself.

The Image: Hinojosa & Rivera

In this section, I will compare some aspects such as the struggles of immigrants, Mexican traditions and customs that persist in the Rio Grande Valley and religious folkloric elements in the works of Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera and Juan Rulfo. These representations challenge hegemonic discourse by postulating an alternate existential stance as the necessary foundation to empower subjects on the periphery of a national literary discourse. I examine space and regionalism as areas of conflict along with disenfranchised and deserted peoples and cultures, both geopolitically and geographically. The arduous space and grueling circumstances and tensions that exist along the US-Mexican Border produce a friction, a need to infiltrate and challenge the hegemonic sphere, both culturally and literarily.

These spaces, composed of telluric metaphors and imagery, create an alternative modernity deep-rooted in the autochthonous. In this research I posit questions of national

translates without remainder: Mexico will know itself, will find itself, will see itself reflected in the mirror of North American life; the United States will present Mexico to itself. Indeed, the United States opens the space in which Mexico gives itself to itself, the space in which Mexico is given to itself on account (*se da cuenta*). Such is the "nature" of the border ... "Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson 1959-. *Border theory : the limits of cultural politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print.

³ Joyce Glover Lee 1954-. *Rolando Hinojosa and the American dream*. no. 5 Vol. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1997. Print.

identity, class and culture and in addition analyze the sphere of epistemological violence within transubstantiate hegemonic circumstances. We will examine “El Retrato” by Tomás Rivera. This short story focuses on producing an image from memory. In “El Retrato”, a swindler must recreate an image of a photograph that he stole from an immigrant family. The traveling carny group must recreate images of community occurrences to transmit them to the memories of others along the way. Creating an image from memory becomes a focal point in these Chicano texts. The characters, like the authors, must recreate an honest representation of history and if the community.

In his article “Contemporary Chicano Prose Fiction: Its Ties to Mexican Literature”, Charles Tatum discusses the similarities between Chicano prose such as Hinojosa and Rivera to the Mexican author Juan Rulfo. Tatum believes that the similarities in these works lie in the cultural aspects, linguistic dialect and the characteristics of the geographical space. Rulfo’s stories, for example, are rooted in Mexican reality: the aridity and abandonment of that forsaken part of the state of Jalisco, his birthplace; the continuing exploitation of the Mexican peasant by post-revolutionary *caudillos*; the deep-seated fatalism and the cycle of suffering, guilt and violence in the lives of his characters. Yet Rulfo transforms this Mexican setting through the accumulation and juxtaposition of details, nuance of language and tone, and many other techniques. “He transforms the specific Mexican setting by obscuring temporal and spatial delineations while at the same time remaining firmly grounded in a Mexican social and cultural context” (Tatum 437).

Mexican literary tradition in the Rio Grande Valley has strong influences from Mexico. Chicano works published from 1910 to 1940 began to reflect the social unrest among one of the country’s fastest growing minorities. During the most violent phases of the Mexican Revolution, large waves of immigrants from northern Mexico walked and rode north to the United States in search of security and employment. The new immigrants brought new blood into the Mexican-American community and also reinforced the Mexican traditions. Mexican traditions continued to flourish and more prevalent in this Chicano community. “The same thing occurred in intellectual circles with the interchange of ideas among writers such as José Vasconcelos, Martín Luis Guzmán, Mariano Azuela, Ricardo Flores Magón and others who lived in the United States” (Tatum 433). These writers wanted to preserve the Spanish language and keep the now “Texas” Mexicans informed of their own land. They continued in the United States a new and vibrant literary movement, which had its roots in the novel of the Mexican Revolution. Mariano Azuela, for instance, published his novel, *Los de abajo*, in 1915 in an El Paso, Texas newspaper.

Tomás Rivera’s role in Chicano literature is important because together with Rolando Hinojosa, he helped establish Chicano literature within academia. These two writers including Gloria Anzaldúa have helped shape the Chicano literary world, which pretty much until the 1970’s was unknown to many even though there were several publications from other Chicano authors such as Ron Arias’s *The Road to Tamazunchale*. Tomás Rivera’s “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” was a milestone in the literatures of the Americas when it was awarded the first Premio Quinto Sol for a novel in 1970. It was an American novel by a Mexican American written in colloquial Mexican Spanish. Tomás Rivera was born of Mexican immigrant parents in Crystal City, Texas in 1935 during the Great Depression. Rivera was raised a farmworker child in labor camps throughout the

Midwest. As elders gathered round after the day's work to tell tales, like Hinojosa, the child Rivera saw and listened. Rivera graduated from Crystal City High School and earned a bachelor's degree in English at South Texas State University in 1958. In 1962 Rivera traveled south to study Mexican literature in Guadalajara under the guidance of Mexicanista scholar Luis Leal. Rivera also learned much from Mexican writer Juan Rulfo's concise, but complex storytelling.⁴ Like no other writer before him, Rivera had transformed the Mexican-mestizo cultural world of Greater Mexico into the beginning of the Chicano narrative tradition.

With the Berkeley Quinto Sol Prize for Literature, Tomás Rivera and Hinojosa were able to assert the importance of Chicano literature within academia and within Latin American thought. The importance of their work lies in the preoccupation with representation – it worried them both not to see their community or their family represented in literature. Chicano literature is, in a sense, an intricate maze to provide either exteriorization or internalization of the human involvement and evolvment. To perceive what people had done through this process and to come to realize that one's own family group or clan is not represented in literature is a serious and saddening realization “The search can only exist if there is an impulse into the labyrinth of the human totality of conditions. Thus, the search and labyrinth complement each other to bring forth a vicarious sensibility to the perceiver” (Olivares 23). The Chicano working class experience remained isolated, retained in the collective conscious, preserved to be sure in its oral literature, yet it had not encountered its external form, a form forged in a written literature.

Perception of Memory

Rivera and Hinojosa wanted their experiences on the border perceived through literature. They wanted to make their mark in history not only for literary reasons, but also in terms of representation of a growing community and the struggles that they have encountered in South Texas with constant shifting of national demarcations. Olivares states, “I believe that whoever proposes to discover his own life through memory will find the volitive strength to invent himself continuously as desiring love for all men on earth” (Olivares 57-65). Tomás Rivera, in the statement above, stresses the importance of reinventing oneself constantly in search of that identity that we long for in our lives. Tomás Rivera was a firm believer that we must ritualize our existence through words.

Insistence on memory and the imagined community is formidably portrayed in Rivera's “El retrato” and Hinojosa's traveling carny group in “Otra vez la muerte”. In these narratives, the authors nurture the idea of memory and trust. They focus on the struggles of immigrants in the hands of Anglo Americans and at times, in the hands of their own people. Immigrants, the authors explain, often rely on a familiar face and trust those that are familiar to them. The immigrant in a rural area such as the Rio Grande Valley is used to a small town mentality way of living. In this small town he knows everyone and trusts people around him. The advantage of knowing everyone is that it creates a familiar and safe haven. These sketches prove that no man is protected, not even in a small town. The authors make an analogy of the unreliable community

⁴ Héctor Calderón. *Narratives of Greater Mexico : essays on Chicano literary history, genre, and borders*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004. Print.

members to the unreliable historical account of the Chicano community. The following narratives show how this type of mentality will inevitably become problematic for some immigrants. Let us begin by examining the work of Tomás Rivera, “El retrato”. What is a *retrato* in comparison to a *fotografía*? A *retrato* paints a reality; it has a stronger presence than a photograph. A *retrato* tells a story; it engages a reality that can cut across the boundaries of the image itself.

Rivera’s short story represents the importance of the image within our culture. This story preserves the image as a memory and converts it into an experiential image that will draw us back to a place in time that we nostalgically desire. However, one can only return to it on the basis of another memory, a *retrato*. Just like the old *revolucionarios* and their bullet wounds in Hinojosa’s “Los revolucionarios”, by looking at and preserving a specific image, the individual keeps the memory alive. The family in Rivera’s narrative is taken advantage of by a local businessman that scams immigrants by promising to convert their personal photographs into three-dimensional images. The photographs that these families choose to convert into three-dimensional portraits are special because they cannot be replicated or replaced. The images that these families choose mean a lot to them because they are paying to have their photo enhanced.

In this story, the families choose a loved one’s photograph, usually a deceased loved one, give it to the businessman so that he can convert the *retrato* into a three-dimensional image. This helps the families feel closer to their deceased loved ones because they are now an image that they can touch. The families believe that their family members look more real, almost alive. In “El Retrato”, an old couple gives the businessman the last photograph of their son that died serving in the Korean War. Their son was a young man when he lost his life. This photograph was the last image that kept his memory alive. The elderly couple liked looking at the image so that they would not forget their son’s face. They were afraid that without this photograph, the image of their son would soon dissipate from their personal memory. The image represented something tangible to hold. It was a way for the parents to imprint on their memory the image of their son on a daily basis. It was a way to fight nostalgia and forgetfulness. The so-called businessman that convinced these families to purchase a three-dimensional image of their loved ones turned out to be a conman stealing their money. Like the *coyotes* in Hinojosa’s “Coyotes”, this man was taking advantage of vulnerable individuals in his own community. The conman went from home to home collecting the families’ photographs and their money promising to return with an image that would bring their loved ones closer. The families thought that the hefty amount of money that they spent months working for would be an investment in order to have a more “lively” image of the *retrato*. They wanted to convert the *fotografía* into a *retrato*. The families thought of it as an emotional investment and a way to bring their loved one back to life, if even for an instance.

After a few weeks, the family had not received the three-dimensional photograph of their deceased son. The elderly couple became anxious because they did not own another photograph of their son. They began to fear that they would soon forget his face. The lost image of their son was becoming a fleeting memory. The father of the young man in the photograph was nervous and asked others if they had received their orders. Other families confirmed that this “businessman” fled with their pictures and their money. To the man’s surprise, some local kids found a bag of pictures that had been

dumped in the local tunnel. Don Mateo is upset that he will not have this three-dimensional picture of his son and that him and his wife have lost the last photograph of their son to these con artists. His worst fear becomes a reality; he is forgetting the image of his son. He desperately wants his “abultadito” or three-dimensional picture. A “bulto” can also mean the dead body or a heavy emotional weight or burden. The flat image that was to be converted to three-dimensional was bringing their son closer to them. He would have significant shape and volume and he would become something more substantial than a simple standard flat image. This “dead” memory does not carry any “life” except for the memory inside their heads. This “dead” image was going to be brought to life in three-dimensional. The picture could have come to life; their son could have come home to them. Very upset, Don Mateo proceeds to look for this con artist all over town; he does not give up on his search until he comes across the young man that has stolen his money and the memory of his son.

Don Mateo forces the con artist to follow him home in order to replace the image of his son that he stole. The young man is baffled because he cannot recall which exact image belonged to this family. Don Mateo agrees not to hurt the conman in exchange for the 3D picture of his son that he was promised and that he paid for. The con artist must create a new *retrato abultadito* for this couple so that they may keep their son’s memory alive. Ironically the thief must now construct a three-dimensional image of the couple’s son from his own memory. The conman does not remember who was their son or what he looked like. He had placed all of the pictures in a trash bag and had gotten rid of them all in the tunnel. Now, he must reconstruct a new image for don Mateo from scratch. He must rebuild this memory that he robbed from the family. The creation of a memory is constructed by using the appearance of the father (Don Mateo) as a point of reference to build a three-dimensional image of his son from scratch, having only seen the photograph once. The young man makes a three-dimensional image from scratch creating the new image of the son to look like Don Mateo. Rivera proves that in times of survival, a person will see what they so desire. They distort reality to conform to their necessities. The memory of their son depends on their acceptance of this three-dimensional image. They cannot remember their son’s exact features so they are happy that the image of their son resembles don Mateo because eventually, they believe, their son would look exactly like his father. The couple has convinced themselves to reconstruct a new image of their son to avoid their ties to him from perishing. Don Mateo and his wife accept this image because they want to believe that the son was looking more like his father more and more everyday. This “new” image brings the deceased son’s relationship with the father even closer because now he resembles his father – he has become the image of his father, he has come to life through this new image.

Image of Perception

Let us examine the notion of the altar and how images are created and placed in a small homage to a specific person. An image, in this case, can serve as a form of altar as in Día de los Muertos. Transforming an image into a three-dimensional wooden painting will embellish the image in a way that will enhance the meaning that it carries; it becomes an offering. The family is making an offering to this image, to their deceased son by wanting to improve the appearance and the way in which it will be permanently preserved. Having a three dimensional image will make their son more tangible. It will

make him feel and look alive so that the family will feel closer to the person in the bulging *retrato*. When the photograph is lost, however, the offering that this family has made to their son is also lost.

The *retratos* that the families were holding on to dearly were lost. What does this mean for the family? How does the loss of an image equal the loss of a memory? Does the memory then become less tangible, less accessible? Does the image cease to represent the son in true life; does their son die for a second time? After the loss of the image, it is like losing their son once again. First the son is lost at war then lost as a memory, a phantasmagoric image that remained part of the family. Without this phantasmagoric image that had a strong presence, what is the family left with? The family is left only with a memory that they are afraid will vanish into the dark with their son. Memory is failed, it withers, and it is insufficient. The couple must then find another medium to remember their son. They must locate another reference in which to pour their emotional necessities.

In the end, it is in the best interest of the conman and the family that the son be recreated as an image of his father. This religious metaphor, creating an image of the father, exalts the memory of the deceased son. The image and the memory become that which we want to see. The memory of the son is distorted, manipulated, but accepted because keeping his memory in existence means that he will remain present in the family. The new protruding image of their son, the *retrato*, replaces the previous photograph. Their desire is to keep his memory alive through a photograph has been surpassed by this new three-dimensional art. They now remember a son that looks more like his father. His image is three-dimensional, making him seem physically closer to them.

Borderlands: Internal Adaptation

The multitudinous voices of *Estampas del Valle* create a vivid memory of imaginary Belken County. Hinojosa's sketches, like Rivera's "El Retrato" are meant to create three-dimensional portraits of an imagined community. Hinojosa creates characters and spaces that focus on the preservation of history and culture in South Texas. The border community is now *engraved* into history. Hinojosa lends his voice to the history and the cultural, geographical and spatial dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley. Belken County lends itself to a multiplicity of readings. In conveying the importance of language and space for the writing of Hinojosa, David E. Johnson states, "But first would have been the place, and that place, which Hinojosa will never refer to as double or multiple, but always singularly as the Valley, will be bordered by languages and lived experience" (Michaelsen and Johnson 149-150). The Valley names the site of specific, linguistically determined lived experiences. These lived experiences become *retratos* in his writing. Hinojosa chooses Spanish to start his journey as an author. His memory and lived experiences are perceived through this language. Spanish enabled him to describe, invent, and live the Valley through his characters. The author displaces singularity of place by making the Valley border a unique expression that multiplies the border imaginary. "Culture will be found within borders, never between them, for what is within borders will in every singular case be determined by a particular configuration of language, space, and time" (Michaelsen and Johnson 153). Hinojosa lives this experience internally. He does not choose his "border" identity, but instead *lives* it.

Language and memory intertwine to keep the history and culture of regional border areas alive. While Hinojosa does inherently take part in two cultures, *he lives them internally*, he does not live between them nor does he flow from one to the other. Hinojosa's dialogic formation of identity encompasses two cultures internally and through his writing and his use of both languages creates his prime and central identity navigating these cultures. Essentially Hinojosa creates another world; a world that is familiar to him and that is able to encompass his self-interpretation, his experience and his vast knowledge of Texas and Mexico history and the dynamic of the two in border life. This dialogism is indispensable when creating *Estampas del Valle*. This was his first publication written in Spanish and it was the commencement of what would become a historical and folkloric account of the South Texas Rio Grande Valley border lifestyle. *Estampas del Valle* is a version like that of the soldier in Rivera's *retrato*. Hinojosa creates, from scratch, a new place and a new form of interpreting a border identity. The *estampas* are a three-dimensional portrait of the space along the Rio Grande.

Hinojosa's aim is to show, through his writing, that one border experience cannot account for the rest. His writing is about a very specific experience that is both Texan and Mexican, a product of two entities. Although border regions can share a culture, they do not necessarily share an identity. Belken County is distinct – it is an imagined community, imagined in the sense that it was created from and for a particular Valley community. What is the importance of inventing new space on the border? Belken County is a meta-border space – it is a border space within a border space. In *Borderlands of Culture*, Ramón Saldivar analyzes Charles Taylor's idea on the social imaginary, he writes that the social imaginary is formed in "... the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Saldivar 61). Hinojosa imagines his social existence through his sketches. These *estampas* are three-dimensional images of the people that inhabit the area.

Hinojosa becomes the young man in "El Retrato" creating the dead soldier's image from scratch. He chooses to become unhinged from his novel by allowing the characters to take charge of his writing. Leocadio Garasa, a Spanish sociologist explains the importance of focusing on a specific region to demonstrate the historical essence of a community. He writes, "El escritor no es un mero producto de la sociedad en que vive, sino que trata de atrapar su esencia y verterla en formas perdurables con los medios de su propio arte. De su intuición y destreza dependerá la aproximación a la síntesis suprema que hace sensible la idea y remonta a lo absoluto lo histórico contingente" (Garasa 365). Hinojosa's literature is an art that will preserve the history of the Valley.

Hinojosa also describes the characters in the book as resembling someone's disheveled hair, the hair of Mencho Saldaña to be exact. This oily and disheveled hair is representative of his writing. Mencho's "hair" has been matted beyond redemption and relief. "Estas estampas son y están como las greñas de Mencho Saldaña: unas cortas, otras largas y todas embadurnadas ..." (Hinojosa 25). There is no proper mold for Hinojosa's writing. The three-dimensional image of Mencho's disheveled hair shows the author's ability to create something that is not entirely in his hands. He plays a key role in Chicano literature by providing the reader with the necessary details needed to create fluidity in his fiction. Ironically, this *estampa* gives him the freedom to create without

authorial responsibility. He shares his autonomy with Belken County. He “responsibilizes” the reader for creating their own historical account using *Estampas del Valle* as a springboard.

Alternative World

Rolando Hinojosa is a key player within Chicano literature. He describes the Rio Grande Valley in unparalleled detail. He is a promoter of Valley culture and has gone one step further. Hinojosa has built this imagined community and space where mysteries take place. His approach is different than that of Tomás Rivera. Rivera’s preoccupation lies in representing the migrants and immigrants in the Valley – their struggles, suffering and also their daily lives; he wants to paint a picture of the actual situations that he knows about personally. Although he is writing in a fictional voice – this fictional voice is a voice documenting the truth about immigrants and their lives in the United States. Rivera’s writing is very much documentary-like. Hinojosa’s work is more about creating a distinct literary space and backdrop within the Valley. He also aims to document life in the Valley, but his preoccupation lies in creating a fictional space for the Valley that can be found running besides other Mexican and Latin American works. Hinojosa wants to expand Chicano literature’s horizon. He imagines and a space that does not solely rely on documenting the abuses of immigrants and what they have been through, but also documenting important historical events in which Chicanos partake.

Hinojosa focuses on creating an alternative world. He places Chicano literature next to other creative literary works that form part of different canons. He wants Chicanos to be part of the larger picture and not pigeonholed into the category of regional work within the United States. Hinojosa’s sense of place and the validity of his writing claim his assuredness in providing a true depiction of the Rio Grande Valley through his fiction. He also permits his sense of place to take him beyond borders and beyond nations. His personal experiences make his literature unconfined and help it come into dialogue with international works across the globe, particularly those in Latin America. Hinojosa aims to show that Chicano literature does not mean that you have to choose to identify with one side of the border or the other. The Chicanos of Belken County and the Valley live the boundaries limits of these two nations internally.

In his introduction to *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* David E. Johnson criticizes José David Saldívar for forming his critical theory of Chicano culture theory of opposition or defining one’s culture by that which we are not. Johnson states:

Calderón/Saldívar Chicano studies effectively tells all those who would be Chicanos that it is not enough to have been born in a certain place at a certain time of a certain biological-cultural genealogy. It tells them that they have to choose and, further, that they have to *know* what they choose; they will have to resist and they will have to do so consciously. They will have to choose sides. And they will have to know what side they’ve taken. This would be the crisis of identity without the risk, for all Chicanos will decide for “us”; they will all be like “us”. Our resistance against their assimilation. No Chicanos on the other side, *el otro lado*. Chicano identity is inscribed, as is every other identity, within the horizon of the politics of opposition. (Michaelsen and Johnson 19)

Johnson's shortcoming in his analysis of Hinojosa's work lies in the notion that the Valley border has two cultures merely because there are two sides, two nations. The Valley does not produce one community or identity and one resistance, but many communities and many resistances. Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* proves that multiple forms of identity can exist within one cultural space. There have been many changes in Valley since Hinojosa and Rivera's time, hence fortifying the notion that border identities are identities in transit. Although Belken County residents do see shifts in identity and cultural customs along the border, this does not conclude that one side of the border must have one defined identity and the other side of the border another. Hinojosa, through his writing and his personal experiences demonstrates that one can live amidst 'two' worlds and not necessarily between them or separated by them. The Rio Grande River can also serve as a cultural agent that fortifies cultural melding along the border.

Melding Boundaries

More than a concern for being pegged as a certain type of writer, albeit American, Chicano, or Mexican, Hinojosa attempts to represent a specific population during a specific time period in a specific geographical space. This geographical space, unlike others, has closer ties to Mexico than other border areas. Therefore, I differ with Johnson's idea that it is necessary to take sides. "It will also be a possibility of any national literature: Mexican literature, on the one hand, will be written in the shadow of the border; U.S. literature, or so-called American literature, on the other hand, will also take place there, but on the other side, *our side*. We will have taken sides, occupied and possessed; and while, no doubt, there will be crossing over, in translation and in expatriation, the borders separating these two literatures remain necessarily secure" (Michaelsen and Johnson 147). The border does not separate culture as it does the boundaries of a nation. By establishing literary boundaries in relation to national boundaries, Johnson does a disservice to *Estampas del Valle*. These physical boundaries represented with bridges, border crossings, border patrols and pay tolls are not necessarily separating cultures or literatures, but instead building physical boundaries that may or may not permit cultural infiltration from one side to the other. This is based on the individual experience of border peoples. Literature of the Rio Grande has often been compared to rural Mexican writers like Juan Rulfo. It is also compared to works like Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Fin* for its picaresque characteristics. Literature of the Valley encompasses a myriad of literary genres that can be compared across the board on an international scale. The border does not limit, but instead multiply the possibilities of adaptation.

According to José David Saldívar, the U.S.-Mexico border zone is a paradigm of crossings, intercultural exchanges, circulations, resistances, negotiations as well as low-intensity conflict. The use of Mexican American or Chicano cultural and folkloric elements to create a "new" history establishes a sense of community among dispersed and oppressed people of the border. Chicano literature has revived its community. In this sense, Rolando Hinojosa creates and revives his community through his sketches. His writing does not focus on plot or the typical South Texas settings, but instead reaches a decision to represent the Valley with people and genealogies. Hinojosa's sense of place is based on his people, the ones he so meticulously creates in his Spanish language book

Estampas del Valle. Hector Calderón states, “Readers of *Estampas del Valle* and *Generaciones y Semblanzas* were hard pressed to find a clearly outlined plot. Instead, plots were given to the reader as a series of brief sketches in a variety of forms outlining characters and their traits, a literary portraiture of people dealing with the everyday problems, the inner history of a people necessary to develop the larger history of Texas” (Calderón 157). Hinojosa’s work should not be seen as lacking a plot. Instead it should be read as expanding narrative ground and forging a new form of thought for Chicano writers.

Hinojosa has reinstated himself into his community through his fiction. He forms a new perspective, a new position, from his own sense of place among this new community. This does not imply that he has abandoned his community, but instead his identity continues to undergo constant metamorphosis and adaptability. He continues to be an identity in transit like the borderers that he writes about in his *estampas*. His writings are a vivid example of the three-dimensionality of his prose. His voice carries a resonance of multiple identities and multiple positions within this community. Hinojosa becomes a *porta-voz* for the Rio Grande Valley border experience. With his novel, Hinojosa helps situate the Mexican-American in a broader perspective. He speaks of the Chicano’s ability to adapt to circumstances. He does not mean that the Chicano assimilates, but that he is able to create a new life despite historical or socioeconomic difficulties. The Texas-Mexicans, for instance, were forced into a new form of thought and life after the Treaty of 1848, yet the Mexican culture of the Valley persists. A Tijuana DJ comments about his experiences as a Chicano here and abroad:

In Europe, the Chicano is European, American, white; in the United States, the Chicano is Mexican. Always out of place, improperly sited, at home and abroad: this will be the “ground” of the Chicano, of Chicano identity, if there is one, and perhaps, of a certain “people” and “community”. Or, to address the problem in terms of the Louis Kaplan’s reading of *The Pilgrim*, Chaplin’s film set in the “no-man’s-land of the Tex-Mex borderlands, the borderer – the one who dwells, who is at home – is always on the other side of the border. Indeed, we will never be able to tell, to hear, the difference between the border and the boarder. (Michaelsen and Johnson 20)

Hinojosa uses his sketches to represent a “slippery” space that successfully navigates between the Mexican and the American side of this border. Hinojosa’s literature, especially the formation of a sense of place for his writing and within the literary realm creates another dimension that can be thought of as a space that brings both sides of the border together through language, customs and culture. There are also instances in which the writer clearly distinguishes the set place of an individual character such as the *revolucionarios* that fought in the Mexican Revolution and then moved to Belken County. Nonetheless, Hinojosa’s intention is to put a high value on community life, a community that challenges border limits and has been shaped by the Rio Grande Valley.

Voices of Belken

“Voces del barrio”, in *Estampas del Valle* can be compared to that of the writing of Tomás Rivera. It is reminiscent of the young boy at the end of *Y no se lo tragó la tierra...* that wants to unite all of the Chicanos in his community and wants to hold them in his arms. Here Hinojosa wants to provide one voice for the community, especially that of *el pueblo mexicano*, “Cuando el sol se baja y los bolillos dejan sus tiendas, el pueblo americano se duerme para no despertar hasta el día siguiente. Cuando el sol se baja y la gente ha cenado, el pueblo mexicano se aviva y se oyen las voces del barrio: la gente mayor, los jóvenes, los chicos, los perros ...” (Hinojosa 48). *Las voces del barrio* are voices with cultural appropriation. Hinojosa writes that just as the Anglos go to bed at night, the Mexican community comes to life during their family dinner. The Mexican population has more “life” and vivacity than that of its *gringo* counterpart. The voices of the *barrio* are all inclusive. They include women, children, men, and even animals. Hinojosa claims that one can hear the choir of conversations of all of the voices of Belken County coming to life at the end of the day. “El barrio puede llamarse Rebaje, el de las Conchas, el Cantarranas, en Rincón del Diablo, el Pueblo Mexicano – verdaderamente los títulos importan poco. Lo importante, como siempre, es la gente” (Hinojosa 49). Hinojosa highlights the possibility of a communal voice. It does not matter where in Belken County these barrios are located, what matters is the *pueblo’s* ability to unite their voices for a common cause. For Hinojosa there is a clear distinction between the American and the Mexican pueblos. In his writing, culture plays a more important role than a nationality. In fact, in *Estampas del Valle*, culture and language predominate over a distinct national division. The geographical site is practically indistinguishable were it not for the drawing of Belken County that the author provides.

The Mexican imaginary is certainly alive and flourishing in the United States. The children in this “Voces del barrio” belt out Mexican nursery rhymes and playtime songs such as “pin marín” and “cuenta la tablita”. The children sing these songs on the American side of the border proving that there is no need to choose one side or the other, but only to live culture naturally, internally. There are no clear distinctions of nationality or geographical space, only an imagined community that holds fluctuating elements or a border in another dimension; it is a border that lives in Spanish on both sides. Hinojosa shows, the light of the Mexican community on the American side of the border. It would be difficult to know that this community is not actually a place in rural Mexico were it not for the title of the work. The neighborhoods have Spanish names, people speak Spanish, and the cultural context is that of Mexico. Hinojosa blends cultural and folkloric elements to eliminate the distance that exists between the American and the Mexican side of the border in the Río Grande Valley, people navigate this space in “uno de tantos pueblos en el condado de Belken en el Valle de Río Grande de Texas” (Hinojosa 51). The Mexican imaginary is a hybrid one. The *estampas* demonstrate the adaptation and true historical perspective of the Valley. Hinojosa aims to create a community’s voice through memory and nostalgia. He paints a vivid Mexican *retrato* of Belken County.

Chapter Three

I wanted to write about what I knew: about the Valley. Its history, its people, the bilingual, bicultural, and biracial population of which little had been written and less had been published. I didn't want a Hollywood view of the place, far from it. I wanted to and wrote about family relations, the hard work people who work the land are engaged in, old friendships, old enmities, the culture of an international borderland, how one country influences the other, how the region produces its own culture being isolated from Washington and Mexico City.
-Rolando Hinojosa

Lo Mexicano

In this chapter we will discuss Rolando Hinojosa's narrative aesthetic literary style. We will also analyze the fluidity and limits of borders and his early work in Arteaga, Mexico and writing in Spanish. *Estampas del Valle* represents a culture of resistance. Hinojosa uses language and several literary genres to articulate the ethnic qualities of the Valley. Language, demonstrates Hinojosa, is the vehicle for cultural resistance and upon occasion, the cultural offensive against the cultural imperialism of the U.S. Authors such as Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera, Alejandro Morales and Miguel Méndez chose to write their works in Spanish. Writing in Spanish in U.S. territory marks a form of resistance. Works such as *Estampas del Valle*, *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra*, *Peregrinos de Aztlán* and *Caras Viejas y vino nuevo* are an accumulation of linguistic and literary capital key to Chicano literature.

Lo Mexicano has been linked with cultural studies of Texas, and especially cultural conflict along the Lower Río Grande Valley that I discussed in the introduction. The cultural Diaspora that began with the Spanish conquest of Mexico in Veracruz in 1519, that spread to northern Mexico in Zacatecas, Querétaro, and Nuevo León in the 1540s-1570s, to la Nueva México in the 1590s, to Texas and California in the 1740s-1780s, and is still spreading today across the southern and eastern United States, offers the best understanding of Mexican American or Chicano literature at the juncture of two centuries. The writers in this study lived through important U.S. historical moments of the twentieth century—the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the civil rights movement, the Chicano Movement, the feminist movement, gay and lesbian liberation. The traditional notions of "lo mexicano," "mexicanidad," and the Mexican patria have been transformed, at times radically altered, by the writers in this study. We are in many ways, taking from a term coined by Sandra Cisneros, American Mexicans. There are more than twenty million American Mexicans traveling back and forth across political and cultural borders. The writers in this study have contributed to the history of these border crossings.

First Short Story in Arteaga

At a formative age, Hinojosa spent summers in Arteaga, Coahuila, where he wrote his first story in Spanish. Hinojosa's writing in Spanish started at an early age during his summers spent in Arteaga. His early work as a young schoolboy demonstrated a keen interest on the lives of borderers such as *campesinos* and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. His writing focused on farm laborers oppressed by government troops and struggles of exiled families. Hinojosa describes his early work as containing a symbolism that he was not fully aware of at the time. Again, we must emphasize that Hinojosa relies on his inner consciousness to create his literature. His purpose was to represent Mexico's bloody civil war in his writing, even as a young boy.

In 1944, Hinojosa wrote his first short story in Spanish during one of his summer stays in the Mexican village of Arteaga, which stands fifteen kilometers from Saltillo, Coahuila. The theme, in part, was the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and the short story focused on two young farm laborers, *campesinos*, returning from work when they are surprised by government troops intent on impressing them in the army. Their capture would have meant demise and starvation for their families, so they decide to make a run for it in an attempt to escape this unfavorable circumstance. The lead horseman overtook one of the *campesinos*, but the second was run through by a saber thrust into his back. This caused him to fall into the fast-moving waters of an irrigation ditch. His blood was carried throughout the countryside through the waters of the irrigation ditch. At fifteen, Hinojosa confesses he had not read enough to know about symbolism. However, he sensed that the *campesino's* violent death and the spreading of his blood exhibited a realistic picture of Mexico's bloody civil war.

The *campesino's* blood, for Hinojosa, represents the violence that was endured by the rural inhabitants of the border. The savage manner in which they are persecuted validates the adversities lived by the lower classes during the revolution. *Estampas del Valle* takes after Hinojosa's first narrative because the novel paints a vivid picture of the after-effects of the Mexican Revolution through the figures of exiled community members or actual revolutionaries that now reside on the American side of the border. Writing in Spanish has helped Hinojosa authentically represent *campesinos* and *revolucionarios* on the border. The language takes him to a place of a pure creation like he experienced at the age of fourteen. As a young boy, Hinojosa was not inhibited and wrote an illustrative short story about the reality and hardships of a community and how these adversities can lead to their death.

From the first encounter between Spanish-speaking inhabitants and the invading foreigners who spoke, among other languages, English, the history of Texas, like that of the country itself, has been marked by efforts to eliminate Spanish from the conquered territories and impose English as the official language. Efforts that periodically reappear during periods of reactionary paranoia have not been entirely successful. If they had been successful we would not still be discussing literature written in Spanish by U.S. citizens such as Rolando Hinojosa and Tomás Rivera.

Non-Hispanics conceive of Chicanos and other Latinos who maintain our language both in speaking and writing as recent immigrants. They have been trained to think of U.S. residents according to the pattern of European peoples arriving in the Eastern ports of entry and blending into the English-speaking mainstream in a process of assimilation over a couple of generations. Bruce-Novoa's *Retrospace* analyzes the

conservation of the Spanish language among Chicanos in the United States. If a Mexican-American speaks Spanish fluently, he or she is thought of as a recent immigrant or an excellent student. The result of this reduction of thought is that the end product of this transformation is a monolingual American. Bruce-Novoa adds, "Logically, according to this formula, anyone who speaks the language of another country must be either an excellent student or a recent arrival, and those who write it by choice must have been educated somewhere other than U.S. schools. This concept of assimilation remains so ingrained in the U.S. psyche that any deviation suffices to brand a person as exactly that, a deviant, with rather negative connotations" (Bruce-Novoa 42). The importance of works like Hinojosa's is that they aim to wipe out the negative connotation associated with the use of another language besides English on American soil. After the Treaty of Guadalupe, a negative stigma was attached to those that chose to keep their native language. Hinojosa encourages the presence of another language and fortifies regional presence along the border.

Hinojosa also learned to sing two national anthems in *escuelitas* established by men and women exiled in the United States during different phases of the Mexican Revolution. "Mexicanos al Grito de Guerra," is both a song of cultural identity and a call to arms. In Hinojosa's multivolume *Cronicón del condado de Belken/Klail City Death Trip*, his Korean War experience is crucial for the reconstruction of Texas as the Land of Our Fathers, the land defended by Mexican *revolucionarios*. In 1859 don Juan Nepomuceno Cortina was the first to rise up and defend his right against Anglo-Texan authority. At his family's Rancho del Carmen, Cortina fought the Brownsville Rifles and Tobin's Rangers. The fictional don Jesús Buenrostro, the axial figure of Hinojosa's vast *cronicón*, also defended his land at his own Rancho del Carmen. From Hinojosa's 1973 *Estampas del Valle* to his 1998 *Ask a Policeman*, the site of Mexican resistance maintains its rich symbolism as the locus of identity for the Buenrostro lineage.

In *Estampas del Valle*, Rolando Hinojosa presents his community through his sketches. Benedict Anderson believes that communities are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined. His fragmentary style and all-encompassing narrative demonstrate that Hinojosa creates and imagines his community as a part of Greater Mexico. These works comprise a literary world culturally and linguistically associated with Mexico outside of Mexican national territory. The style of the sketches permits elasticity and malleability. They are able to encompass multiple aspects of the border. His writing evokes a form of travel literature that enables the author to speak of the community from afar, to see it from an outside perspective.

Greater Mexico

"Greater Mexico" is a term most associated with the work of Américo Paredes and José E. Limón. Américo Paredes born in Brownsville, Texas in 1915, learned to sing and play Mexican *corridos* at an early age in Tamaulipas, México. Early childhood education was transformed into scholarly studies of what Paredes termed Greater Mexico. Paredes was drafted and served his country in World War II as a journalist in Asia. After covering the war crimes trials in Japan, Paredes returned to Texas through Matamoros, México, to put on trial the history of Texas in his doctoral dissertation, which was published as *With His Pistol in His Hand*. Paredes along with others such as Charles F. Lummis, Nina Otero de Warren, Cleofas M. Jaramillo, and Aurelio M. Espinosa to the

emergence of Paredes were public intellectuals and founders of Mexican American studies. Literature of Greater Mexico presupposes the existence of a Mexican Diaspora. Literature of the Diaspora, furthermore, presupposes a form of travel. Travel literature of the border such as Hinojosa navigates the reader through historical time periods and accurate displays of a social reality. The *estampas* behave as a literary journey through the South Texas border.

The proximity to Mexico is closest in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, Rolando Hinojosa's home. In "Cultural Regionalism and Chicano Literature", Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer states, "Possibly nowhere else in the United States is the Mexican quality of Chicano life purer and more intact" (Dwyer 44). Using Hinojosa's terminology and his decision to write in Spanish, we must assume that his Mexican roots continue to run deep. Ortega y Gasset's famous declaration, "yo soy yo y mi circunstancia"¹ is affirmed in Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* and his contention that Chicano literature has a strong Mexican influence, but still comprises its own literary category advocating Américo Paredes's Greater Mexico.

"Gathering evidence on individuals and events to render judgment on behalf of Mexican borderers was the immediate concept for Paredes's developing concept of Greater Mexico. The term "Greater Mexico" implies that there is more than one Mexico beyond the Mexican Republic" (Calderón 22). Greater Mexico is the ability to feel an affinity or relationship to Mexican culture through literature, language or both, especially from afar. Paredes, when in Japan, continued feeling Mexican. His concept of Greater Mexico, no doubt was created from his view of the Valley and its proximities to its neighboring country. This would allow Paredes to speak of Mexicans outside of the Republic of Mexico and the political boundaries that are established in border zones. "Greater Mexico, now as Greater Mexican areas, would acquire new wider meaning away from the political boundaries of the Mexican republic and the Texas border region: "Greater Mexico refers to all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture – not only within the present limits of the Republic of Mexico but in the United States as well – in a cultural rather than a political sense" (Calderón 23). Greater Mexico encompasses Mexican exiles, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos and first generation or recent immigrants. The term Greater Mexico encourages the ability to see communities of Mexican descent in the United States as multidimensional and multicultural forms of living. Mexican communities in the United States are aware of at least two forms of culture, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions. Greater Mexico affirms the individual's identity outside of rigid national boundaries and territorial inflexibility.

Ramón Saldivar eloquently explains the significance of Greater Mexico in relation to the social imaginary of these imagined communities. Saldivar maintains that by inventing the idea of Greater Mexico as an imaginary social space consisting in transnational communities of shared fates, Paredes allows us to make sense of the new geographies of citizenship in an era of emerging globalization of capital. Paredes, therefore, allows the possibility of theoretical repositioning of modern citizenship in new multicultural versions. Therefore, it is a mistake to see that Paredes's Greater Mexico

¹ See *Meditaciones del Quijote*, 1914.

simply in a cultural-nationalist context. “As an imaginary space of real political and historical effect, Greater Mexico represents an early, direct challenge to the traditional language of citizenship and liberal democratic notions that tie it indissolubly to state membership” (Saldívar 59). The notion of Greater Mexico is indeed a challenge to the traditional and political language of citizenship and regional spaces in the United States.

On that account, if a Mexican-American in the Valley wishes to identify as Mexican or a part of Mexico then it is up to that individual and their choosing to be able to do so. It is not up to the state, it is not up to the nation and it is not up to literary critics or border agents to dictate when a person can see themselves as part of a Mexican community beyond the boundaries of the nation. What, for example, should a person with double citizenship be forced to do? Is this person able to live two lives or can these two identities coexist and form a multidimensional imaginary? With the concept of Greater Mexico, Américo Paredes allows a person to bypass an exclusively binary situation “of being either Mexican or American exclusively, in an attempt to imagine a social formation between nation-states where cultural citizen-subjects could claim and exercise rights in the civic, public sphere of open debate and exchange, and in the ideational domain of the subject”(Saldívar 235). The porous border eliminates identitarian binaries.

“Every Mexican knows that there are two Mexicos – one is found within the boundaries of the Mexican Republic. The second Mexico – the *México de Afuera* (Mexico abroad) as Mexicans call it – is composed of all the persons of Mexican origin in the United States. The composite hybrid of these two Mexicos is what Paredes refers to as Greater Mexico” (Saldívar 37). I reiterate Luis Leal’s point of view that the Customs and Immigrations officers at the border do not define cultural limits and that regional folk cultures, in this case, include two nations forming a hybrid culture. In *Estampas del Valle*, regardless of where they are located, the characters’ cultural values remain constant. Throughout the novel, the reader observes fundamentals of traditional Mexican culture such as the use of the Spanish language, traditional Christian Catholic religion, folkloric and superstitious beliefs, and close family ties.

Carlota Cardenas de Dwyer argues that Mexican quality of life for Chicanos in the Rio Grande Valley is pronounced and unique. This is due to the proximity of the area to multiple borders and the consequent reinforcement and interaction with Mexico. Daily life among Mexican-Americans in the Rio Grande Valley has a strong flavor. In Belken County, family structures, social relationships, cuisine, clothes, and music are all predominantly Mexican in character. Spanish is and continues to be the preferred language. “It is into this *mexicano* world of the Rio Grande Valley that the sketches of *Estampas del Valle* draw the reader. To give that world depth, width, and vitality, Hinojosa pans his narrative view across numerous lives indigenous to the area, zooming in only and then for a close-up of a particular personality” (Dwyer 44).

To describe the rural conditions along the Rio Grande Valley and on the border in Guerrero, Elena Pontiatowska gives her account of her experiences there and what the Rio Grande River signifies as body of water that affects both sides of the border. These elements of a rural setting and a place of abandonment are present in Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle*, especially in the portrayal of the Mexican community and its autochthonous and telluric elements presented in the sketch of Viola Barragán and the burial of her lover. The Río Bravo, or the Río Grande River begins in the Eastern Sierra

Madre and empties into the Gulf of Mexico, near Matamoros. The river really flows; it is willful and unpredictable. Like the rain that falls from the sky, it gives life and brings death. The tumultuous water ends life that has been cultivated with such difficulty; it takes houses, uproots terrace farms on its borders, and drowns the corn and the squash. Pontiatowska states:

It is a blessing and curse at the same time. It punishes the riverside populations of Mier, Camargo, Reynosa, and Dolores. It rules the destiny of the northerners who live alongside it. It marks their existence with a seal of water, a seal of fire, a tattoo that cannot be erased from the body. It is ever changing. Infuriated, it sometimes brings much water and throws it in torrents at the villages settled on its banks. Suddenly the lightning bolt pierces the sky, which shatters into a thousand pieces, and the fury of the water sweeps everything away. Sometimes the Rio Grande writhes and dries up, empty, disappears completely and both men and animals await a miracle, pressed beneath the weight of an infernal heat, a sun that reaches 110F. The droughts are interrupted by violent storms that can wash off and erode the earth in a single day. The great stone banks of the river surrendered the noble material used to pave the streets of Guerrero Viejo. (Miller Pontiatowska, 10)

The rural setting that Pontiatowska describes in this passage from her short story “Viejo Guerrero” depicts the geological struggles that affect people on the border. This type of arid atmosphere has its repercussions on both the American and the Mexican side. Nature’s cruelty does not discriminate. Cultural limits cannot be placed on people based on territory. Therefore Bruce-Novoa’s claim that people of the Valley will never be Mexicans can be studied in opposition to Canclini’s theory of cultural hybridization. These numerous border crossings within a sixty-mile radius give way to the overflow of culture and language from one side to another. As Ramón Saldívar states in his *Borderlands of Culture*, “The Greater Mexican community in fact cuts across imaginary borderlines and symbolic immigration checkpoints” (Saldívar 37). Border identities are transnational and transitory. Mexican immigration throughout the United States proves that Mexican culture and language go far beyond Mexican national territory.

Estampa: Unifying Aesthetic of Travel

Travel literature can take us through the journey of an author’s sense of place and sense of writing. Hinojosa’s fragmentary style emulates journal entries that are commonly seen in travel literature. The fragmentary nature of his writing is a representation of the various life experiences dispersed throughout the world during his war years and as a student. His literature is preoccupied with presenting the reader with episodes that were experienced directly in the environment that they are showcasing. These entries record cultural data, local traditions and give an account of the author’s views concerning local border communities present in his writing. The reader must not try to find a general plot by dissecting every *estampa* as a singular unity but instead view the novel in its totality. The *estampa* in Hinojosa’s work can be seen as a chronicle – a chronicle of a traveler that accompanies the narrative from beginning to end. Jehú, one of

the protagonists of *Estampas del Valle* is a chronicler of the Valley and the changes that occur in that space culturally and historically. We must remove ourselves from the singular fragmented narratives and take a look from afar, from the outside, as we would a Monet painting, to truly appreciate this modern novel in its totality.

In “Otra vez la muerte” the reader is presented with don Víctor Peláez’s journal of his experiences during the Mexican Revolution. “Una vida de Rafa Buenrostro” recounts the life of Rafa Buenrostro in relation to other community members. His life is presented through a series of mini-sketches emulating the act of sporadically remembering specific life events. The aesthetics of Hinojosa’s narrative can also be interpreted as a form of expressing a large quantity of information in a small space. Hinojosa is concise and precise in his writing; he uses his novel to portray as much of the Mexican community of the Rio Grande Valley as he possibly can. His preoccupation with representation springs from the fact that he is one of the pioneers of contemporary Chicano literature. At the time of Hinojosa’s writing, Chicano literature still had to find a space for itself; it had to demonstrate its qualities and its uniqueness in the face of other types of literatures such as American and Latin American literatures. African-American literature had a firm stance within literature departments, but Chicano literature was still seen as innovative and yet to be born. Although earlier authors such as Paredes were on the forefront of this matter, it was the Chicanos of the 1970s that truly defined the art of literature, particularly those from the Rio Grande Valley such as Paredes, Anzaldúa, Rivera and Hinojosa. These authors redefined Chicano literature in the U.S. They put the *frontera chica* on the map.

In his writing, Hinojosa used the opportunity to represent the Valley in the most efficient and memorable way possible. The literary space of the Chicano author in the 1970s was a confined space: Hinojosa writes at a critical time in Chicano literature. At that time, Hinojosa’s position within literature had not yet been established. Fortunately, Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle* breaks away from this confinement and constructs a literary world of characters comparable to that of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. The free flowing style of Hinojosa’s writing is witness to the multifariousness of the Rio Grande Valley. Gloria Anzaldúa and Tomás Rivera, like Hinojosa, also choose to create their works blending several genres and forms of literature in their fiction. This blend occurs with the intention of breaking away from the confined space that Chicano literature was given in the past. Their writing styles, the fragmentary novel as Rolando Hinojosa calls it, calls into question hegemonic forms of writing and transforms the norms for creating a novel outside the limits what is expected. Hinojosa’s sketches serve as a form of experiential snapshot of a border town. Those snapshots can be compared to a narrative postcard such as the short pieces presented in Derrida’s *The Post Card*.

Post Cards: Deciphering *estampas*

The goal of travel literature is to disseminate culture and study one’s community of interest. The traveler then shares the information with the reader in a manner that will enable the writer to be concise, precise and effective. Rolando Hinojosa’s narratological strategies in *Estampas del Valle* are similar to Derrida’s *The Post Card*. A postcard or an *estampa* deciphers; it seeks words and gestures and in the process transforms the writer. Derrida’s *The Post Card* contains reflexive writing in comparison to his scholarly theoretical work. It narrates his experiences and feelings across a range of geographical sites. Amidst his travels through and with literature he has become a chronicler of his

own life and his inner thoughts. These post cards allow us to see Derrida's intellectual, yet sentimental inner workings of the mind through love letters, diary entries and reflection essays. This work is an example of how the author is diverse in his communicative approach. Thoughts in our minds are not organized in the form of an orderly novel, but consist of fragments and pieces that make up a whole. Our thoughts are singular streams of consciousness turned into fragments. The combination of these fragmented images and memories amounts to putting together a puzzle. These disbanded thoughts, in the end, are what form our narrative postcards or *estampas*.

Life in a Postcard: Rafa Buenrostro

The life of Rafa Buenrostro, for example, is transmitted in a series of postcards. "Una Vida de Rafa Buenrostro", the last section of *Estampas del Valle*, takes the reader through the life of Rafa Buenrostro. His life is presented in a series of short narratives giving the appearance of a postcard. These successions of memories make up Rafa's experiences in Belken County. His thoughts, memories and identity are tied to the community. Rafa narrates moments of his life as if they were flashing before his eyes. This *estampa* is divided into thirty miniature *estampas*. Each of these thirty pieces offers a brief look into the life of Rafa Buenrostro. This narrative strategy affirms that our lives are made up of a series of important events and memories. He dedicates the memories of his life to a young man, Chano Ortega, who lost his life during the invasion of France in June of 1944. "Lo que sigue es para él y para unos muy contados" (Hinojosa 113). Rafa remembers times in his life that remind him of the injustice that community members endured and the outlandish occurrences that can take place on the border.

The first miniature *estampas* or postcards are dedicated to his early years in school. "En la escuela americana, en el primer año, Miss Moy se lavaba las manos con alcohol y usaba mucho Kleenex. Tenia el pelo colorado y una cara llena de pecas. No sé cómo le hizo, pero a mí me enseñó a leer en inglés" (Hinojosa 113). Hinojosa describes the teacher's loathe of working in a school with Mexican children. She constantly and exaggeratedly washed her hands with alcohol while teaching the children. Rafa learned to read in English because of this Anglo teacher. In another postcard, Hinojosa describes his classmates' need for approval from the Anglo teacher. She is willing to lie to the teacher to seem more American. "Un día se le ocurrió a Miss Bunn preguntarle a Lucy Ramírez que qué se había desayunado esa mañana. La muy mentiritas dijo que había tomado un vaso de orange juice y dos scrambled eggs con toast y jelly. Thank you, Lucy. Cuando le preguntó lo mismo al difunto Leo Pumarejo, el cabrón de Leo le dijo la verdad: one tortilla de harina with plenty of peanut butter!" (Hinojosa 114). He creates a stark contrast between Lucy's attempt to assimilate and Leo's way of demonstrating that he is not ashamed of what he eats at home. His Mexican food does not embarrass him in front of his Anglo teacher. He admires Leo's ability to speak up and be honest and true to himself.

Other postcards represent struggles and injustices that the people of Belken County have withstood. He incorporates different cities of Belken County into his miniature narratives. The narratives, like the postcard, travel from one place to the next and inform the recipients, the readers of Hinojosa, of incidents that have taken place in these various cities. Some of the postcards even speak of people and experiences abroad. "En Flora la vida no vale nada y la raza un punto menos: Cuando el estado de Texas hizo

un juicio a Van Meers, después de cinco años de haber matado a Mora a balazos, y en plena calle, los testigos del estado atestiguaron a favor de Van Meers y en contra del muerto” (Hinojosa 115). In the case of Mora, justice was not served. Hinojosa criticized the justice system and believes that racism generated a favorable outcome for Van Meers. As we saw in the case of “Por esas cosas que pasan”, the justice system is flawed.

One of the most interesting miniature postcards in this *estampa* is the following: “Una vez, en Edgerton, mi papá le dio tres tiros a uno que se le vino navaja en mano. Papá me dijo que no le dijera nada a mamá cuando volviéramos a casa y así fue. Después empecé a tartamudear y me puse muy enfermo. No sané hasta que la Tía Panchita, con sus rezos y un huevo, me curó de susto” (Hinojosa 116). It is not until this section that the reader finds out what was wrong with Rafa Buenrostro the day Tía Panchita heals him at his home. Now the reader understands that Rafa was being cured of *susto* or fright. This particular narrative ties the novel together. Rafa’s postcards begin to interweave the narrative of the community in a more organized manner. From his perspective, *estampas* that seemed mysterious are now revealed. He also mentions the burial of Pioquinto Reyes in the Mexican cemetery of Belken County. “A Pioquinto Reyes lo enterraron en el cementerio mexicano de Bascom. No sé por qué acompañé a mi papá al entierro y lo poco que me acuerdo era que quizá hiciera demasiado frío para el mes de octubre” (Hinojosa 117). Rafa Buenrostro’s memory takes the reader back to the initial stages of *Estampas del Valle*. It also begins to provide an approximate timeline for the rest of the *estampas* based on the life of Rafa Buenrostro.

Rafa Buenrostro’s innocence as a child shines through in the following postcard:

En un restorán de Ruffing no dejaban entrar a la raza, en otro sí. Puede ser que en el primero lo dejarían entrar a uno pero no le servirían, lo que viene siendo casi lo mismo. En el Segundo estábamos papá y yo cuando vimos a una familia negra, el señor, la señora, y dos hijitos de la edad mía, sobre poco más o menos. Papá dijo que a los negritos nomás les servían en la cocina, y que, en otros restaurantes, ni en la cocina. No le entendí a papá muy bien aunque me dijo dos o tres veces. ¿Cómo haría el negro para que sus hijos le entendieran? (Hinojosa 118)

This postcard displays a vivid image of the racial tensions that the citizens of Belken County experienced when Rafa was a child. For an innocent child, racism does not make sense. He did not understand why his family was not allowed in some restaurants like the one in Ruffing and why African Americans would only be served in the kitchen. He remembers not having understood his father’s explanation for such a thing. He now wonders how the black man could have made his children understand why they had to be served in the kitchen. These postcard calls to attention the difficulties experienced by minorities in Belken County with the presence of the *gringos*. Some of the Mexican citizens worried about their reputation in the eyes of the *gringos*. “En Bascom unos siempre andaban con el susidio de no relajar a la raza: Pértate bien; ¿qué dirían los bolillos²? Lo triste del caso es que a los bolillos les importaba madre lo que uno hiciera. Oh, it’s nothing you know. Just one of them Mexicans having a fight in a cantina ...

² *Bolillos* is another nickname for *gringos* commonly used in the Valley.

They play one of them rancheras on the juke-box and then one lets out a squeal ... first think you know they's having themselves a fight. ¡Qué bonito chingao!" (Hinojosa 124). The gringos did not care about the Mexican community. Instead they stereotyped the citizens of Belken County and demonstrated animosity and prejudice.

Rafa accentuates the arduous circumstances of Belken County. He presents memories, or postcards, that have been the most unforgettable to him in his life experience. The last postcard in "Una Vida de Rafa Buenrostro" demonstrates Rafa's ability to overcome the racial tensions and difficult circumstances that he lived in Belken County. Rafa becomes a symbol for the unity of this fragmented community and demonstrates that he is able to survive and overcome adversities. "Me voy a Austin; a la universidad. A ver qué sale. No voy a desperdiciar el G.I. Bill como mi hermano Ismael que se casó y se jodió. Pueblo nuevo, vida nueva. Veremos" (Hinojosa 128). Rafa Buenrostro is a symbol for the survival of a community. Rolando Hinojosa's life is very similar to the life of Rafa Buenrostro. The author relates part of his personal history in this narrative. Like Hinojosa, although Rafa has decided to leave the Valley, his future success will inevitably be marked with these postcards.

Derrida explains, "You situate the subject of the book: between the posts and the analytic movement, the pleasure principle and the history of telecommunications, the post card and the purloined letter, in a word the transference from Socrates to Freud, and beyond. This satire of epistolary literature had to be farcie, stuffed with addresses, postal codes, cryptic missives, anonymous letters, all of it confided to so many modes, genres, and tones. In it I also abuse dates, signatures, titles or references, language itself"(Derrida xi). The *estampa* in Hinojosa's oeuvre and Derrida's post-card are both chronological, but not linear. Like Derrida, Hinojosa uses other literary genres such as the letter, newspaper, and the diary to create a postcard of the Valley.

Estampas del Valle is the commencement of a series that creates hundreds of fictional characters along the Rio Grande River in fictional Belken County. A chronological and genealogical string represented in Rafa Buenrostro and Jehú Malacara holds these *estampas* together. Hinojosa's chronicle of Belken County is a representation of his personal travels and his personal experience in the Valley on both the American and the Mexican side of the border. Hinojosa's *estampas* or personal postcards lie on both sides of the border from the eyes of characters such as Jehú, the *revolucionarios*, and Rafa Buenrostro, to name a few. Jehú, for instance, leaves the Valley; his narrative *estampa* grows with every step that he takes in his life from his days as an orphan to his days as an adult.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes heterotopia as fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry. "In such a state, things are laid, placed, arranged in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them"(Foucault xvii). Hinojosa's writing is an evolved form of heterotopia. His style is well thought out and developed. His writing is organized by language and culture and not by linear means. Although it may seem at first glance impossible to find order in *Estampas del Valle*, the organization of this novel is based on cultural codes that supersede national codes of ethics. The *estampas* form views of a singular community.

In Hinojosa's writing cultural codes as well as political order in regards to Chicano literature and border culture are not binding. National order, Hinojosa

demonstrates, cannot be imposed on cultural order. There is a unity in fragmentation. Hinojosa proves that these narrative postcards can create a bigger picture. Hinojosa's insistence on a sense of place, family genealogies, factual data, and historical events leads readers to interpret his fictions against the history of the Lower Río Grande Valley. Calderón affirms, "Through his ten books, beginning with 1973 *Estampas del Valle* and through *Ask a Policeman* of 1998, Hinojosa has managed to invent with literally hundreds of characters the history of small-town life of the Mexican border region of Texas from the eighteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, a living reminder of the conquest and settlement of the Gulf of Mexico region that began in Cuba in 1519" (Calderón 140).

In an attempt to make order of culture, Foucault believes that:

It is here that a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes, instituting an initial separation from them, causes them to lose their original transparency, relinquishes its immediate and invisible powers, frees itself sufficiently to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of its spontaneous orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; the fact, in short, that order exists. (Foucault xx)

Hinojosa's *estampas* are spontaneous. The author frees himself from the linear narrative structure of previous Chicano works. He discovers a new form to bring a community to life. Life is spontaneous. Hinojosa displays diversity and spontaneity in his novel. This contact zone between U.S.-Mexico borders mediates the flow of culture from one side to the other. Hinojosa shows how transitory border identities amalgamate these philosophical thought processes? Foucault continues, "As though emancipating itself to some extent from its linguistic, perceptual, and practical grids, the culture superimposed on them another kind of grid which neutralized them, which by this superimposition both revealed and excluded them at the same time, so that the culture, by this very process, came face to face with order in its primary state. It is on the basis of this newly perceived order that the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized and rendered partially invalid" (Foucault xx). Cultural perception for border authors such as Hinojosa, Rivera and Anzaldúa is influenced by their extensive travels making them creators of travel literature and chroniclers. There is no perceived order. Borderers live in a constant repositioning and transformation. By writing short sketches Hinojosa builds new codes of language and representation.

Engraving Estampas: The Traveler

The traveler plays with language and style. Hinojosa plays with the *estampa*. An *estampa* is engraved; it is a piece of art that is to be interpreted as representative of a culture through art, such as the *estampas* of José Posada in Mexico. Hinojosa gives us various narratives that are paintings of this community. How is one to read an *estampa* without accepting its convocation or invocation? Hinojosa places the reader in a position in which they are addressed to interpret his writing. A piece of art calls for an

interpretation and analysis that gives way to statements of authorial abrogation. Minimalism is key; Julio Torri did not believe in explaining his work. He believed that his engravings spoke for themselves. Similarly, Hinojosa also values a laconic communicative approach for his novel. His sketches, like Torri's, speak for themselves. An *estampa* is an engraving. It is more permanent than a simple word or a phrase. It is the word coupled with this engraving. Hinojosa attempts to engrave his literature into the Chicano literary sphere as well as in the minds of the readers. An engraving can be repetitious with various connotations and is open to interpretation, yet it is an image that refuses dismay or dismissal. The chronicler uses various modes and genres. All in all, the chronicler uses the reality of fiction as a form of meta-literature; fiction pretending not to be fiction, as González-Echevarría argues. What enables the traveler to comprehend their community and country's situation from afar?

Hinojosa left the Rio Grande Valley to pursue an education, and eventually returned to the Valley as a writer through his writing. It was precisely this observation and affinity to his community from afar that helped him return to his sense of place just as Jehú also feels that the Valley is what defines him. We can see this in other authors such as Américo Paredes in Japan and José Martí in New York. Hinojosa, Martí and Paredes are social geniuses, for they use vernacular poetics and vernacular politics such as the idea of Greater Mexico and the study of Cuban-Americans to formulate the social consciousness of a new-formed community and traveling identity. Hinojosa's social and cultural mural of the Valley in his literature is a form of power. According to Margaret Cohen in "Narratology in the Archive of Literature: Literary Studies' Return to the Archive"³ cultural expression is a form of power. Narratology in the archive of culture is artisanal. Margaret Cohen expresses the guise of the playful organization and transformation of cultural information through literature.

Alternative Borderland Modernity

Martí, Paredes and Hinojosa authors blend social aesthetics and ethics in a transnational modernity, or in this case, an "alternative modernity" for borderlands theory and for cultural emancipation theory. Interestingly enough, Martí also had experience as a foreigner in Mexico City, which made him feel nostalgic for his homeland. The traveler, in these three cases, develops a theory of self-formation in relation to the other, which he aims to represent or convince of his subject and self-formation. We can analyze and categorize their writing in the following manner: The author's subject formation, the author's intention and the author's limitations. In Hinojosa's case, he finds his sense of place through his writing of the Rio Grande Valley once he is away from the space itself. He expresses that he writes for *something* and not for *someone*. What is it that Hinojosa is writing for? In *Estampas del Valle* we can interpret that he writes for himself, for the community and to tell the tale of history which has not been told. His personal account sustains the ethical bonds he feels towards his community in the Valley, to his academic community as a professor and to his community of writers in Latin America and in the United States.

³ Cohen.

Judith Butler's diacritical theory in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, shows how the theory of subject-formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can work in the service of a conception of ethics and responsibility. Butler states:

If the subject is opaque to itself, it is not therefore licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its relations to others. Indeed, if it is precisely by virtue of its relations to others that it is opaque to itself, and if those relations to others are precisely the venue for its ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it sustains some of its most important ethical bonds. (Butler 2)

The ethical bonds that connect Hinojosa, Paredes and Martí to their community are precisely the bonds that are formed from the outside in. When these writers are able to give an account of oneself, the awareness and bonds with their communities and strengthened.

There is an inherent difference between speaking about oneself and giving an account of oneself. When one gives an account, there is an ethical compromise to speak in terms, which will convince others who you are, and what you represent. It is through their literature that these authors give an account of themselves in relation to their community and what they aim to represent in their writing. The scene of this address is what Judith Butler calls the rhetorical condition for responsibility. The rhetorical condition for responsibility means that while I am engaging in a reflexive activity, thinking about and reconstructing myself, I am also speaking to you and thus elaborating a relation to an other in language as I go. "The ethical valence of the situation is thus not restricted to whether or not my account of myself is adequate, but rather concerns whether, in giving the account, I establish a relationship to the one to whom my account is addressed and whether both parties to the interlocution are sustained and altered by the scene of address" (Butler 50). Rolando Hinojosa's writing establishes a relationship with the Mexican-American community represented in his writing. When giving his account, because his writing is personal he is reflexive and reconstructs himself in a multidimensional form. He is an entity of the Rio Grande Valley, yet he is also a chronicler of the Valley through his travels.

Writers such as Hinojosa, Paredes and Martí are dislocated or displaced in a foreign land in which they are forced to cope with a different living situation than that of their own native origin. Foreigners in their own land, these writers express their disillusionment with their country, yet still feel a certain affinity. In the case of Hinojosa, he took part in the Korean War and spent a large amount of time in Korea and other places such as Puerto Rico as a correspondent and radio deejay. His war experiences apart from his own go back to his father's participation in the Mexican Revolution. The Korean War and the Mexican Revolution were a vivid part of Hinojosa's life, two of his older brothers also enlisted for war. This view from the outside gave him an introspective perspective on his community. It allowed him to view from the outside in, yet still form a part of this community's consciousness.

Américo Paredes and Rolando Hinojosa are borderers representing an area of conflict between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans. Américo Paredes, for example, had a retrospective experience as a borderer outside of the Valley. After

enlisting, Américo Paredes is sent to Japan as a correspondent of the war events for the *Stars and Stripes* army newsletter. He and Chicano photographer Miguel (Micky) Portillo were essentially the chroniclers of the post-war proceedings in Japan. Both Chicanos experience American patriotism abroad in a revelatory fashion. The United States wants and accepts everyone to fight for supposed equal rights. Ironically, two Chicanos are representing the American people as *letrados* and writers in a foreign land when in their own land they are denied autonomy existence through imperialistic hegemonic discourses of the U.S.-Mexico border. They feel exiled within their own land through means of internal colonization. Hinojosa feels the same in his experiences in Korea, for the first time in his life he feels American. Cultural ties to Mexico and his relationships on both side of the border formulated Hinojosa's identity as a Mexican. It is from afar that Paredes and Hinojosa first feel what it is like to be an "American", since both of them saw themselves as strictly Mexicans before this experience. They had always seen themselves as Mexican Americans and not simply an American, which is typically considered Anglo in the Valley.

During their time in the service, both men were discouraged with the racism they encountered from their fellow men abroad. Even though Mexicans were fighting for America, racism was not eliminated; still they were seen as different. Border subjects linger between multiple spaces. Hinojosa enlisted to serve his country and afterwards pursued an academic career. Hinojosa is a transitory border subject from growing up as a Mexican on the American side of the border, not knowing his true distinction as an American until he was abroad. Here, Hinojosa posits serious questions of identity. I believe that through his writing and specifically his writing about the Rio Grande Valley helped him reach his sense of identity. Hinojosa created *Estampas del Valle* to reconstruct himself and to understand his own account.

Malleable Fluidity: Hinojosa, Paredes, Martí

Writers can be loyal to an ideal self, a potential identity, an existence to be created and explored through language. "The true language of an artist is that which comes naturally, without any consideration outside of the personal act of creating literature" (Bruce-Novoa 50-51). Bruce-Novoa stresses that the true language of an artist is one that comes naturally. For Hinojosa, the Spanish language has been and continues to be an integral part of his life. His influences come from his family speaking Spanish at home, other community members that speak Spanish in the Valley and also his experiences with Spanish newspapers that were distributed in the Valley during his time there, especially those delivering news about the Mexican Revolution to the Mexican population of the Valley. Rolando Hinojosa spent as much time on the Mexican side as the American side of the Rio Grande River. He spent summers in Arteaga, Coahuila, where he wrote his first story in Spanish. He also learned to sing two national anthems in the Spanish *escuelitas* he attended established by men and women exiled in the United States during one phase or another of the Mexican Revolution. For Hinojosa, "Mexicanos al Grito de Guerra" is both a song of cultural identity and a call to arms. Over one hundred families of Mexican exiles (of the Mexican Revolution) lived in Mercedes, Texas and due to prolonged political troubles in Mexico many of them stayed and became American citizens. To earn their living many of these professional men and women opened *escuelitas* where we learned to read and write in Spanish. Hinojosa states, "We already

spoke Spanish at home, and the formal teaching of it led to my writing stories in that language” (Hinojosa-Smith 65).

In Korea, however, Hinojosa, like Paredes in Japan, begins to posit question about the construction of identity. He begins to examine his own identity and position as a mutable identity due to fluctuating hegemonic situations. Hegemony must be continually renewed, recreated, defended, challenged by pressures not all its own. In Paredes’s case, Foucault would interpret this as epistemological violence due to the power that is bestowed upon him by the Japanese that simply see him as another “American” soldier because of his uniform. Paredes, with his uniform in a foreign land, is now in a state of “power” – he is now forced into the hegemonic sphere of imperialist United States. Hinojosa and Paredes are constantly shifting within various hegemonic paradigms. This fueled a fire that was already present in their juvenilia writing. Their juvenilia are already filled with criticism irony, parody. They were conscious of their standpoint as subalterns in South Texas and were advocates of the Mexican American community’s fight for equality before they were in Japan or Korea. By detaching themselves geographically, they are able to return emotionally.

However, both men were insulated from their own culture; Japan, for Paredes, Korea for Hinojosa, just like New York for Martí, were a point of departure into a new literary sphere of representation: they brought a global focal point into a local struggle. Epistemic understanding of the self is dependent on one’s standpoint. Identity is shaken for Hinojosa, Martí and Paredes. What occurs with the traveler is a change in cultural nationalism. Hinojosa and Paredes were border dwellers and come to feel urges to racialized self-privileging to such a degree that it becomes insular – they bring a cautionary sense of global context from their experiences in Japan and Korea. Paredes and Martí come to recognize a sense of critique inward with an outward look. The experience of the traveler brings up two ways of living that intersect. In Japan a Black Market stirs curiosity and in the U.S., New York, Martí finds himself amongst a “false totality”, the epitome of modernization. Distinct realities start uniting and the traveler brings this view to his community. Therefore, a change in cultural nationalism occurs.

Hinojosa’s sense of cultural nationalism is a hybrid one. The development of his sense of place fluctuates between both sides of the border. Hinojosa claims close cultural ties to Mexico from his experiences in the Valley as a young man. Although he no longer resides in the Valley, he continues to market Valley culture as a Mexican culture on the American side of the border. For Hinojosa, the physical border that separates the United States from Mexico disappears in his writing. We can interpret and analyze Hinojosa’s ambiguous geographical setting of Belken County as a form of erasing the boundaries that are set up by nations. Geographical limitations, Hinojosa claims, cannot stand in the way of cultural preservation. The community of Belken County attests to the importance of the Mexican influence in South Texas and how a border, as a national barrier, is blurred as a cultural entity.

Atrophying Polysemic Borders

We live in a time and space in which borders, both literal and figurative, exist everywhere. In his “Dynamic Identities and Heterotopia”, Alejandro Morales believes that a border maps limits; it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone. “To confront a border and, more so, to

cross a border presumes great risk. In general people fear and are afraid to cross borders ... People cling to the dream of utopia and fail to recognize that they create and live in heterotopia” (Gurpegui Palacios 14). Alejandro Morales accurately describes the multifarious elements of the border space. There are physical borders such as the ones used between the United States and Mexico and there are figurative borders in terms of identity and nationality. Rolando Hinojosa claims a geographical border site that is both real and fictional. His fictional world, Belken County, is centered in an area that has a long-standing complicated history with the U.S. and has been torn from one nation to another. The epistemological violence and racial prejudice that the people of the Rio Grande Valley have encountered drove Hinojosa to experiment with national borders in his literature in regards to identity and land. His experimental form of writing has helped us understand the fluidity of the Rio Grande Valley border.

Are some borders more fluid than others? What is the difference between a “frontier” as in *frontera* and a border as a *frontera*? The notion of “border” is not singular. The border is a polysemic notion. Alejandro Grimson states:

Están las fronteras como espacios marginales – a veces imaginados como vacíos – donde el Estado no está presente. Son las fronteras en el sentido ingles de “frontier”, tierra vacía que deberá o “invita a” ser ocupada o conquistada. Y está también el hecho de que la frontera, sea con mojones que separan o sin esas marcas en el territorio, está para o “invita a” ser cruzada. Pero además, también están las fronteras que “se viven”, en un cruzar de ida y vuelta permanente. La frontera separa, la frontera se ocupa, la frontera se cruza y se vive. El limite (boundary) separa, la frontera (frontier) se ocupa, la “zona fronteriza” (border) se vive. (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 334)

Hinojosa proves that the Valley border is an invitation to be crossed. The sketches of the *revolucionarios* exemplify the necessity to create cultural links despite national boundaries.

The Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, in Grimson’s analysis is a cultural contact zone; a border invites its crossers and travelers. Borders, he believes, are essentially created for transgression. Hinojosa demonstrates that the *zona fronteriza se vive*. The characters in Rolando Hinojosa’s novel live this border. They not only live *on* the border, but they *live* the actual border – the cultural contact zone is a lived and vivid experience. These experiences vary from individual to individual and the crossing of culture and borders is a personal inscription. The border although known for physical separation, can also serve as a form of unity.

Revolutionary Culture

“*Los revolucionarios*” is the piece that gives most importance to the *revolucionarios* themselves. This *estampa* is a testament to the lives of borderers that atrophy national boundaries, both culturally and linguistically. The revolutionaries, believes Hinojosa, are a rare breed. “Se acaban los revolucionarios. En el condado de Belken, en el Valle, quedan pocos; unos libres, y otros, con menos fortuna, prisioneros en esas *rest homes* de las que nadie se salva. Esos, los de las *rest homes*, en efecto, ya no

son revolucionarios; son cartuchos quemados, parquet mojado que noo rinde chispa. Son como las balas Mauser en los rifles Springfield: inservibles. Ese es el caso” (Hinojosa 91). The revolutionaries are becoming scarce. The men that lived the dynamic history of the Mexican Revolution on the border are dwindling. These elders openly live their multifarious personalities. Hinojosa shows that the *revolucionario* lives a dialogic border experience.

Hinojosa vividly describes the hybrid lives that these revolutionaries live. Their binary cultural status is described with thoroughly in the following passage of *Estampas del Valle*. “Estos viejitos como Braulio Tapia, Evaristo Garrido, y don Manuel Guzmán, nacieron en Estados Unidos, pero guerraron en la Revolución igual que tantos otros de la misma camada y calaña, como se dice. Los padres de esta gente también nacieron en en este país así como los abuelos (aquí se habla de 1765 y antes). Como la tierra era igual para los méxico-americanos dada la proximidad a las fronteras y el bolón de parientes en ambos lados que nunca distinguieron entre tierra y río, que al atravesar la una y cruzar el otro lo mismo era, fue, y (aunque los de la inmigración – la migra – no lo crean), sigue siendo igual para muchos méxico-americanos; la raza, pues, hacía lo que le daba la gana con su vida” (Hinojosa 91-2). The citizens of Belken County distinguished the land by the position of the river. Political national boundaries do not determine the identity of these Mexican-Americans. The cities of Belken County are very close in proximity to the border. For these Mexican-Americans who were once Mexican nationals and then American citizens (by default) did not change their identity when this territory shifted possession. Belken County remained Mexican despite the divides.

Los Revolucionarios: Transitory Identities

Though the Valley might seem like a small community as Joyce Glover Lee has described it in *Rolando Hinojosa and the American Dream*, it has expanded significantly in size and in recognition across the country. Border studies in academia have made the Valley and other border sites less invisible. Hinojosa’s writing paints a picture of the Valley, and gives precedence to historical value. His works encompass more than one hundred years of Texas-Mexico history – a history that is presented through his fiction and through various characters such as the *revolucionarios*. Hinojosa’s works are complex, creative and can also be read outside of the geographical sphere of the Valley. I am not arguing that readers that do not know the Valley are not able to read Hinojosa, but instead that those that do can read him in a different light and those that do not can learn about the South Texas border dynamics.

Hinojosa’s writing evinces cultural and territorial transgression on behalf of the citizens of Belken County. Belken County is a place where some community members speak Spanish as a first and only language, participate in the Mexican Revolution and believe in superstitious Mexican folklore. Often times, were it not for the name Belken County, the reader could not distinguish whether the characters in Hinojosa’s novel are on the American or the Mexican side of the border. I believe it was Hinojosa’s intention to blur the rigidity of the physical border. Physical borders cannot control cultural contact and dissemination. Héctor Calderón believes that Hinojosa can be seen or read from either side of the cultural divide. He states, “Hinojosa’s work can be seen from either side of the cultural divide, whether inside or outside, as either a Spanish or an English series. Hinojosa is, to be sure, the finest expression in Mexican American

literature of how the languages and cultures of Spain, Mexico, and the United States, have fused to form a Texas-Mexican culture of Greater Mexico” (Calderón 142).

Estampas del Valle can be seen as a fusion of various cultural elements pertaining to the history of the Rio Grande Valley. Hinojosa’s oeuvre travels and fluctuates from one side of the border to another without warning the reader. In this manner, geographies are blended to form this contact zone, first coined by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*, void of physical borders and instead inhabited with the transitory identities of the Belken County community. There are two *estampas* in the novel that help us understand the concept of transitory identities and their purpose in the work of Hinojosa. Hinojosa leads us to believe that it is through these “traveling” identities that cultural ties are kept on both sides of the border. Spatial borders are erased through time and consciousness; the memory builds on the rummage that was left behind by history and experience. The experience of the Mexican Revolution through the eyes of a Mexican-American is depicted in three different forms from three different characters.

The old-timers in this sketch speak openly about the Mexican Revolution and at times, nostalgically reminisce about their time in Mexico and their participation in this historical event. Braulio, for example, is concerned with showing off his war wounds. He does not complain of the situation, but instead places himself back in time with a musical piece that reminds him of the Revolution. “Cuando Braulio Tapia habla con sus amigos, habla más de lo que hizo su padre de crianza, don Juan Ene, que lo que él, Braulio, le tocó hacer en la Revolución. Es rara la vez que se queje pero cuando lo hace es por las piernas donde lleva dos o tres balas (no se acuerda ya el número exacto) que por poco lo aplastan durante el sitio de San Pedro de las Colonias. Cuando le da la gana se pone a cantar aquello de: San Pedro de las Colonias; ¡qué lejos te vas quedando, quedando!” (Hinojosa 92). Braulio’s war wounds serve as a conservation of memory. He looks at these bullet wounds with pride because he recognizes the magnitude of this historical event. He often feels the need to reconnect with his experience and does so by singing a song of the Mexican Revolution. For Braulio, music and war wounds become an integral part of his essential being like the culture of the corrido in the Valley.

Evaristo’s narrative is grimmer and his memories of the Revolution and his time in Mexico are not, for him, worth reminiscing over. “Evaristo estuvo en Culiacán y en Matamoros con Lucio Blanco. Durante el bombardeo de Matamoros, Evaristo fue a visitar a unos parientes en las Yescas que está al otro lado de Relámpago, Texas: allí conoció a Petrita San Miguel. En Culiacán, tiempo atrás, no le había ido tan bien: dejó la mano derecha, con todos los dedos, en el estado de Sinaloa; granada de mano que reventó antes de tiempo” (Hinojosa 93). Evaristo survives a bombing. His memories of the Mexican Revolution are not as pleasant as Braulio’s memories. Evaristo lost his hand in battle and was permanently disabled and prefers to keep his experiences in the revolution in the past. Hinojosa’s marking quality is the ability to provide multiple points of view of the same occurrence. He values a realistic approach to historical events as important as the Mexican Revolution.

The figures of the Revolution play an important role in Hinojosa’s narrative. Don Manuel Guzmán, for example, is a father figure to Jehú. His legacy in the Revolution is important and he tells it as such. Through him, Hinojosa demonstrates that some immigrants in the United States would like to return to Mexico, but political or economic reasons do not make this feat possible. Don Guzmán’s family is taken advantage of

while he is away, further evincing his vulnerability as a revolutionary immigrant. “El hombre conoció a Obregón y parece que le cayó bien al sonorenses porque se le nombró oficial primero de carceleros en Lecumberri. Las cosas iban bien y cuando estaba pensando en traerse a la familia para México, Toral de León asesina a Obregón en *La bombilla* y don Manuel abandona la idea de quedarse en la capital. Vuelve a Klail por un rato y se da cuenta que ha perdido el terreno que había comprado. Doña Josefa, apesar de su fuerza, no le llegaba a la punta de los pies al papelaje que le encajaron los *land developers*” (Hinojosa 94). Hinojosa gives us an array of experiences of revolutionaries on the border. Each story is unique and each person was affected physically and emotionally. The displaced *revolucionarios* see the world in a different fashion than others in Belken County. Their current lives take place in a country that is not their own. These revolutionaries fought a revolution in Mexico; they fought for a cause that they believed. Now they are living on the American side. Their connection to Mexico lies in Belken County community. All three of these men have overcome difficulties in the U.S. brought about by land developers and the complexities of having to learn another way of living. Ironically, once again, those in power are taking land away from them. Their fight as Mexican *revolucionarios* has now become a fight to survive as an immigrant.

Braulio Tapia serves as a link between the two nations on the border. His relationship with Mexico is an extensive and sentimental one, for he was part of the Mexican Revolution and became one of the many Mexicans that were able to escape Mexico during this difficult historical moment. “He remembers his experiences as a participant in the Mexican Revolution. He belongs, as do the Evaristo Garrido and don Manuel Guzmán, to a generation whose members in Belken County are “getting scarce”. They remember stories about the Mexican Revolution, for they fought in the armies of Pancho Villa and Lucio Blanco” (Saldívar 105).

Hinojosa’s writing includes a vivid representation of the Mexican Revolution and how it affected the local communities. The subject of the Mexican Revolution is a common theme in his novels and particularly in *Estampas del Valle*. To incorporate a narrative about the Mexican Revolution into his work, Hinojosa uses distinct modes of fiction to register the history and occurrences of some of the characters in his novel and their participation. Hinojosa uses newspapers, diaries, monologues and dialogues to fictionally archive the presence of the Revolution within his narrative. This element of fiction as an archive is reminiscent of other Latin American writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and José María Arguedas.

This type of fiction gives Hinojosa’s narrative a mirage of reality; it makes the narrative conceivable. The Río Grande Valley did, indeed, have a historically and culturally close relationship to the Mexican Revolution. Many families migrated to South Texas during and after the Revolution in an attempt to escape economic and political hardship. Hinojosa’s depiction of the Revolution is from the position of an elderly *revolucionario* in the form of a diary. The novel becomes a chronicler of the past and the truth through first-hand experience. González-Echevarría believes that “The most persistent characteristic of books that have been called novels in the modern era [Latin America] is that they always pretend not to be literature” (González Echevarría 7).

Hinojosa is a well-known chronicler of the Valley and his depiction of the Mexican Revolution and its effects on the people of the border is no exception. *Myth and Archive*, a study of the foundation and myth as an archival narrative of Latin America,

González-Echevarría states, “The novel, or what is called the novel at various points in history, mimics such documents to show their conventionality, their subjection to strategies of textual engenderment similar to those governing literature, which in turn reflect those of language itself. It is through this simulacrum of legitimacy that the novel makes its contradictory and veiled claim to literariness” (González Echevarría 8). This simulacrum of legitimacy can be traced in the Hinojosa’s *Estampas del Valle*. Hinojosa’s propensity for inserting references that clearly allude to a metafiction that transcends, and sometimes overlaps with, the Belken County reality. One such maneuver features the author’s *Hitchcockian* cameo appearances as the honest lawyer Romeo Hinojosa in many of the installments. In fact, the middle initial in Rolando R. Hinojosa actually stands for “Romeo.” The lawyer makes his first appearance as Baldemar Cordero’s attorney in “Por esas cosas que pasan.” Limiting this analysis to the question of relation between Chicano and Latin American Literature, they both share a similar past history such as colonization and mestizaje.

More and more it is not nationalism that is important to Chicano writers, but a plural heritage. They also share a similar oral tradition that motivates certain similitudes in folklore and popular poetry; this is particularly true in the case of Mexico. “One should be careful when extrapolating those affinities to the rest of Latin America, where different pre-Hispanic cultures have left a different heritage to present-day societies. The formation of a national independent conscience was not a major catalyst of cultural change in the Southwest until later, when it was conditioned - in the case of Mexicans in the United States - by their resistance to the new colonial power” (González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker 567). Border literature has received important influences from its Latin American counterparts. Authors such as Rolando Hinojosa and Ron Arias, who hold degrees in Spanish, are more likely to possess expert knowledge on Mexican and Latin American literature. Latin American and Chicano artists have found common ground in the struggle to establish a literary and cultural identity. Some writers such as R. Anaya turned to the landscape and to native beliefs as the most autochthonous elements of the Southwest. Others, as Rodolfo Gonzales or Rolando Hinojosa, turned to history including an oral history and folkloric tradition from a Chicano point of view. “In a sense, the processes of transculturation that Angel Rama has so eloquently written about, have also been a key factor for many Chicano writers who seek to render their traditionally oral culture into writing and print, at times in a language other than that historically used by their culture” (González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker 568).

Some social and literary events in Latin America such as the Mexican Revolution that is ever present in Hinojosa’s writing have had a direct impact on Chicano letters. The Mexican Revolution brought large segments of the population – among them many intellectuals - to the United States, especially San Antonio, Texas an epicenter of Mexican writers during the Mexican Revolution. Links have always existed to keep alive the communication between Latin American and Chicano literatures. Latin American writers in the United States connect both to specific popular movements and a broad dissemination of works. In the case of Mexico, the contacts have also been kept alive thanks to the constant border crossings in one direction or the other, personal visits to Mexico by Chicano writers like Hinojosa in Arteaga, relatives who still live in that country, and cultural exchanges of international scope.

Revolutionary Contact

For Rolando Hinojosa, the Mexican Revolution was and has been a present entity in his personal life and in his literature. Growing up in the Valley and in Arteaga, Mexico, the Revolution was very much present in his personal life. Hinojosa explains the importance of the Revolution and the effects that it had on his personal and academic life:

Como nací en 1929 me crié durante los años treinta, la Revolución seguía siendo cosa viva; por ejemplo, los hermanos Cedillo iniciaron un cuartelazo y esto tuvo repercusiones en el Valle ya que muchos mexicano-americanos de la generación de mi padre (1885-1950) habían participado durante una o varias etapas de la Revolución. De niño me sentaba a escuchar historias de los hombres mayores que hablaban de la Revolución como si hubiera ocurrido ayer, como quien dice. (Choi and de Yoon 179)

As a child, Hinojosa would sit around and listen to the stories being told by the elders about the Mexican Revolution. The act of storytelling has accompanied him since an early age. This is how information and personal experiences about the revolution were passed along from one generation to the next. His father's generation actively participated in one or more stages of Mexican Revolution.

The image of Hinojosa sitting with the elders listening to their stories sparks a snapshot of his sketches in *Estampas del Valle*. The sketches are like the stories being told around a fire. They are short and rely on the memory of various community elders. The history and experiences of the community are brought to light:

Además, el periodico *La Prensa*, bien conocido diario de San Antonio, TX, publicaba ensayos históricos de la Revolución. De niño, yo vendía *La Prensa*, y mi padre, igual que muchos mexicano-americanos, la leían y comentaban en pro o en contra de lo escrito. Para mí, pues, la Revolución no había muerto y por eso es que aparece en partes de la serie que vengo publicando desde 1973. Además, mi padre era amigo de don César Lopez de Lara (a quien conocí cuando cruzó el río para visitar a mi padre – el General C Lopez apoyó la campaña presidencial de Francisco I Madero y, a su muerte, siguió en la lucha revolucionaria al lado del famoso general Lucio Blanco, en el norte de México). Dentro del contexto de la frontera también habían muchas familias exiliadas en el Valle y, naturalmente, en Mercedes también. La gran mayoría de los exiliados eran nortños, principalmente de Tamaulipas y Nuevo Leon. Para ganarse el pan cotidiano, muchos hombres y mujeres abrían escuelas, a una de las cuales asistí yo a la edad de cuatro años, se les donominaban 'las escuelitas'. Las escuelitas aparecieron por todo el Valle; muchas familias se quedaron en el Valle y allí formaron sus nuevos hogares. (Choi and de Yoon 179)

Information and participants of the Mexican Revolution surrounded Hinojosa. Many of the families in the Valley were exiled families from northern Mexico states such as Tamaulipas and Nuevo León. The Rio Grande Valley had individuals associated directly and indirectly with the Revolution. *La Prensa* would print the news and the townspeople

relied on that as well. The participants of the Mexican Revolution played an important role. The Mexican Revolution was a proletariat and rural revolution. The inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley live a rural lifestyle and adhere to community tradition through storytelling.

The Mexican Revolution, as we can see from reading the excerpt above, continues to be an integral part of Hinojosa's personal life and as an author. Two sketches of *Estampas del Valle* "Los revolucionarios" and "Otra vez la muerte" give a compelling insight into the life Belken County men that participated in the Mexican Revolution. "Otra vez la muerte", incorporating González-Echevarría's theory of the novel pretending not to be a novel, consists of notes made in the military zone of Papantla, Veracruz and in the Federal District of Mexico. These notes are presented through the eyes and careful editing of Jehú Malacara, one of the protagonists of the novel. Jehú Malacara sees don Victor as his adoptive father after both of his parents passed away and he joined the local *maromas* or "tumbles" circus that don Victor manages. "Otra vez la muerte" tells the story of don Victor's death in an indirect form. Jehú, as he has done so in the past with the death of his parents, tends to have an observant spirit that focuses on the details surrounding death and not necessarily the dead. This piece tells the story of don Victor, a lieutenant colonel in the military zone of Papantla, Veracruz in the 1920s that now lives in city of Relámpago in the Rio Grande Valley. Don Víctor comes to represent Jehú's father figure in *Estampas del Valle*. He is also an ex revolutionary. He was a *veterano de la Revolución* and originally from Coahuila, Mexico. In the 1920s he was a colonel in the military zone of Papantla, Veracruz. "La estancia en las Huastecas potosinas y veracruzanas duró poco más de un año; parte de mi lectura provino de unos apuntes que él había hecho durante ese tiempo" (Hinojosa 28).

Jehú is an avid Spanish reader and don Víctor's journal serves as literature for this young boy. Jehú then goes on to describe his readings of the journal. Hinojosa's writing is a form of metafiction. It is fiction within fiction upon many layers. Interestingly enough, it is Jehú who takes the reigns as editor of don Victor's notes on the Mexican Revolution. Jehú becomes deeply involved in the narrative of the Revolution. Through don Víctor's writing he is able to learn more about his father's character and Mexican history in the Valley. He states, before presenting the notes, "Lo que sigue, pues, forma parte de los escritos de don Victor. Diré que tengo que aceptar la responsabilidad en el ordenamiento así como en las enmendaciones ortográficas ya que no el contenido, como debe ser" (Hinojosa 28). Don Víctor's journal notes include his experiences in the Mexican Revolution with details such as the orders that he was required to give and to take while serving. One of the passages states, "Por órdenes del jefe de esta zona, el gral. Lázaro Cárdenas, han prendido al gral. Rodolfo Herrero como el presunto asesino de don Venustiano Carranza" (Hinojosa 29). This detailed description in form of a journal or personal notes exemplifies the style of fiction that Hinojosa wishes to represent in his novel. It is similar to the form of narrative that García-Márquez uses in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*. Hinojosa provides fiction based on actual facts of the Mexican Revolution. The reader learns about historical decision-making in which some of the participants of the revolution were involved. This is a form of insider information echoing the types of lives that some of the elders lived during the time of the Revolution. These sketches become a documentary of the Mexican Revolution.

This style of fiction depends on other forms of literature and turns this novel into a metanovel. Jehú's memory goes no further than two generations into his family's past, but eventually he retrieves the complete genealogy of the Tapia family and charts it in the fragment "Los revolucionarios" in *Estampas del Valle*. What is more, Jehú now displays detailed knowledge not only of his own family history, but also the histories of all the elderly in his barrio and their participation in historical events such as the Mexican Revolution. "Thus, Jehú represents the young Chicano gradually discovering "a historical conscious of a regional society that has not had the fortune of having a written story" (Leal, 104). The Mexican Revolution remains as a theme in several of Hinojosa's novels. This is inevitable, since he was born on the Texas-Mexico border in 1929 and was raised on the stories told to him by his father and by friends of his father, most of whom had either crossed the Río Grande to fight in the Revolution or were sympathetic to one side or the other during that confused, unhappy time in Mexico. "My first work, *Estampas del Valle* (1973), gives evidence of its presence and importance during my youth in the two chapters "But Since He Died" and "The Old Revolutionaries". Although there are other mentions in *Estampas*, these two sections focused on American citizens who had participated in the Revolution" (Hinojosa-smith 65). Once again, Hinojosa confirms the importance and the validity of the Mexican Revolution in his life and in his writing. Don Victor represents the Mexican Revolution just as much as the old men that Hinojosa used to hear these stories from. These historical relationships between south Texas and northern Mexico are ever-present in Hinojosa's writing. The Mexican Revolution served as a historical occurrence that created close connections and bonds with citizens from both sides of the border.

The Mexican Revolution has amalgamated the space on the border; national barriers and political separation are no longer enough to keep one side from interacting with the other. Hinojosa believes, through experience, that there are people on both sides of the border that never distinguished between the land and the river, but cross them both as if they were undistinguishable from one another. Immigration service, he declares, cannot make a marked distinction between one side and the other, the border is not always a place of division; dams or bridges cannot contain culture. In Rolando Hinojosa's work we can trace the evolution of the river as a place of commonality to a place of division. This being said, Johnson equates one side of the river with one culture and the other side of the river with another culture. Although it is a fact that this river and customs do divide two nations it is not true that this river divides its population into two cultures. Although there are two different living experiences on one side and the other, most of the subjects in *Estampas del Valle* are familiar with the Mexican side and/or spend crucial, substantial and valuable time there. For some border subjects both sides of the river is their home. It is not a division of cultures but instead an amalgamation of cultures or experiences unnaturally divided by political national boundaries. Johnson also claims that before the arrival of Anglo settlers, there would have been no customs and perhaps even no culture.⁴ Luis Leal states:

The histories of Northern Mexico and the Valley in Texas are hard to keep as two separate entities. The Valley was settled by people who came from

⁴ Michaelsen and Johnson.

Mexico with José de Escandón (1700-1770), the founder of Nuevo Santander, now the state of Tamaulipas. He brought from Querétaro numerous settlers during the middle of the eighteenth century and founded twenty-one communities and several missions. Among those settlers was the Buenrostro family, prominent in *Estampas*. (Leal 106)

In his study, Johnson does not account for a mixture of two cultures, languages or the formation of an entity that is comprised by various cultural and linguistic elements and practices such as that seen in *Estampas del Valle*, specifically in the characters of Rafa Buenrostro, Jehú, the *revolucionario* Don Manuel Guzmán, and the old timer Esteban Echevarría who lived their lives on both sides of the river and within two cultures and two languages, although the dominant language is Spanish. Rolando lives his life in Spanish and in English and the characters in his work do so as well. Don Manuel Guzmán, an ex-revolutionary, for example, lives two lives. The life that he made for himself in the Valley and the life that he lived before he had to settle into this new space. The Valley allows Don Manuel to adapt in a new territory. In the Valley Don Manuel is able to combine his two lives. His character demonstrates the heteroglossia in forms of living in the Río Grande Valley: In a small town one person may have many *oficios*. Hinojosa describes the sketch of Don Manuel as:

Ex lechero, ex dueño de tres sastrerías, ex socio de una panadería y ex policía del barrio mexicano de Klail City. Esa fue una vida de don Manuel. Aquí va otra. Peón, domador de caballos, ex revolucionario, siguió esa huella tan conocida: Villa, Obregón, decepción. [...] Como ocurre a veces con esa gente que vive varias vidas y entre ellas unas agitadas, don Manuel vino a morir de un derrame cerebral cuando hablaba con su mujer mientras ella le quitaba los botines. (Hinojosa 45)

Hinojosa's relationship to casual deaths such as don Guzmán's, or Jehú's father while he was saying a joke exemplifies the irony with which death is treated in his novel.

Memories of a Revolution

"Los revolucionarios" is the piece that gives most importance to the *revolucionarios* themselves in the work of Hinojosa. It is the story of three men that took part in the Mexican Revolution and now live in Belken County. These men continue to reminisce of the Revolution and their personal experiences. They are the *viejos* de Belken that Hinojosa would listen to as a child and had decided to bring back to life in his literature to expand on the connections between the Rio Grande Valley and Mexico during and after the Mexican Revolution. "Se acaban los revolucionarios. En el condado de Belken, en el Valle, quedan pocos; unos libres, y otros, con menos fortuna, prisioneros en esas *rest homes* de las que nadie se salva. Esos, los de las *rest homes*, en efecto, ya no son revolucionarios; son cartuchos quemados, parquet mojado que noo rinde chispa. Son como las balas Mauser en los rifles Springfield: inservibles. Ese es el caso" (Hinojosa 121). This story has a touch of nostalgia. The *viejos* of the Revolution are dying and their history is dying with them. This, in turn, gives the reader an idea of the importance

of Hinojosa's writing as a chronicler of South Texas. His writing will keep the memories and the revolutionary pasts of these individuals alive.

“Estos viejitos como Braulio Tapia, Evaristo Garrido, y don Manuel Guzmán, nacieron en Estados Unidos, pero guerraron en la Revolución igual que tantos otros de la misma camada y calaña, como se dice. Los padres de esta gente también nacieron en en este país así como los abuelos (aquí se habla de 1765 y antes). Como la tierra era igual para los México-americanos dada la proximidad a las fronteras y el bolón de parientes en ambos lados que nunca distinguieron entre tierra y río, que al atravesar la una y cruzar el otro lo mismo era, fue, y (aunque los de la inmigración – la migra – no lo crean), sigue siendo igual para muchos México-americanos; la raza, pues, hacía lo que le daba la gana con su vida” (Hinojosa 121). Hinojosa maintains that the border is not a barrier for culture and history. Immigration officers, he affirms, cannot make these border communities stay exclusively on one side or another. Border identities are identities in transit that navigate through multiple dimensions.

The sketch of *los revolucionarios* briefly describes the lives of three men that were part of the revolution and now make up part of the Valley imaginary. Braulio, for example, brings up his experiences in the revolution in relation to those of his father. He brags of war wounds that are still present in his body, a constant physical reminder of his connection to Mexico and the Mexican Revolution. Once an active man of Mexican politics, Braulio now spends his time reminiscing and acknowledging that each day, his memory and his participation in the revolution are slipping away. He can no longer remember how many bullets are in his body. The connections with Mexico persist as long as Braulio is nostalgic about his times in Mexico. These connections exist through memory. Evaristo Garrido, another revolucionario in this piece was less fortunate than Braulio for he lost his right hand in a grenade incident during the revolution. He too, now forms part of the Valley imaginary and his days in the Mexican Revolution were far more active than that of Braulio's. He returned to the Valley for the love of a woman and now he remains as a *viejo* of Belken County.

The stories of Braulio and Evaristo are not as detailed as that of don Manuel's account of the revolution. Don Manuel's experience in the revolution was significant. He met Obregón and he became a high ranking official during in his time. His time in the revolution, though, cost him and his family their land in South Texas. Due to linguistic barriers the family lost their land to land-developers that took advantage of Mexican immigrants on the border to construct their agricultural businesses. Don Manuel's story reminds us that the border is permeable although it is a menacing place for some immigrants that are taken advantage of:

El hombre conoció a Obregón y parece que le cayó bien al sonorenses porque se le nombró oficial primero de carceleros en Lecumberri. Las cosas iban bien y cuando estaba pensando en traerse a la familia para México, Toral de León asesina a Obregón en *La bombilla* y don Manuel abandona la idea de quedarse en la capital. Vuelve a Klail por un rato y se da cuenta que ha perdido el terreno que había comprado. Doña Josefa, apesar de su fuerza, no le llegaba a la punta de los pies al papelaje que le encajaron los *land developers*.” Don Manuel “leía y escribía lo que se dice bien; el inglés lo chapuceaba pero siendo hombre discreto no se metía

mucho en ese idioma. Las vidas de don Manuel fueron en español.
(Hinojosa 128)

Hinojosa makes it a point to describe how immigrants on the American side of the border still lived their lives in Spanish. The Mexican world of Hinojosa takes place in the United States, this specific border, the border with Belken County and the Valley permits this type of movement through cultural space. “The world of ranching, horses and cattle, and the south Texas physical landscape are noticeably absent. Instead, Hinojosa focuses on people, genealogies, and relationships forged through time. The fictional world that emerges from Hinojosa’s first books written in Spanish, *Estampas del Valle*, *Generaciones y semblanzas*, and *Claros varones de Belken*, is based on a Mexican world – its various classes, cultural expressions, and language – recalled from the twentieth century by various narrators” (Calderón 154).

Johnson uses the spatial theories of Derrida and Torodov to suggest that Chicano studies and the politics of theory of Chicano literary theory through Calderón and Saldívar are imitating what they are most trying to avoid, which is to define a culture through opposition; he suggests that they have become a subject of their own criticism. He also uses Octavio Paz’s theory on the border as a separation, force and necessity. Nevertheless Johnson overlooks the need to establish a sense of community, whether it is real or imagined, for the Chicano or Mexican American community. A sense of place is a sense of belonging. It is a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself, something that gravitates one towards a specific form of identity or a specific form of expression through writing. In conclusion, Rolando Hinojosa sketches bring together the history of Mexico to lived experiences in the Valley and in Belken County.

Intermingling of Nations

The Greater Mexico of the Rio Grande Valley is similar in geographical esthetics to Juan Rulfo’s Comala. It is distinct to other borders such as Tijuana and Juárez that are urbanized and serve as a metropolis. These metropolitan areas develop a new form of culture more in tune with modernization. Belken County is a rural community and it is precisely its remoteness that has allowed this place to preserve closer cultural ties to Mexico than other border regions and crossings. Texas history, the Treaty of Guadalupe of 1848, the Mexican Revolution and continuous immigration also serve as a means of preserving Mexican traditions and the Spanish language in the Rio Grande Valley. The Mexican-American experience in Hinojosa’s writing evinces hybridization and intercultural possibilities between two worlds. The space is continually expanding, pushing the two influences out and apart as we claim more area for our reality, while at the same time creating interlocking tensions that hold the two in relationship. In reality, there are not just two poles, but also many. Bruce-Novoa states, “Neither Mexico nor the U.S.A. is monolithic. Each is pluricultural and intercultural. Thus the synthesis is multiple and plurivalent, not bipolar at all. This means that we are not simply bicultural, but intercultural” (Bruce-Novoa 98). Interculturality calls for cultural interaction. Belken County is an intercultural hybrid space, the same space that Rolando Hinojosa lived to find his sense of place for his writing.

The complexity of finding a sense of place in a border area seems daunting, yet Hinojosa, through his writing and his personal experiences in the Valley, was able to

regain this sense of being by amalgamating his experiences on both sides of the border. The fusion of cultures and separation of nationalities precludes a unanimous or homogenous identity. Borderers struggle to find their sense of place due to the labyrinthine intermingling of two nations and multiple cultures and identities in one geographical space. In the Rio Grande Valley one can find families that have been there for generations, before it was U.S. territory, and others that have just recently arrived. Nonetheless, in this specific border, individuals on both sides of the border commingle through their historical, traditional and linguistic connections. Alejandro Grimson explains the complexity of living on the periphery:

En la frontera de México-Estados Unidos, también testigo de un proceso llamado de “integración” (el NAFTA), cada vez hay mayores dificultades para entrar a los Estados Unidos. Tal como apunta García Canclini: se construye una muralla de acero – hecha con material utilizado por Estados Unidos en la Guerra del Golfo para construir pistas de aterrizaje en el desierto – y se triplica el costo del pasaje ilegal (lo cual es siempre un síntoma del grado de dificultad para cruzar). Mientras se dinamiza el movimiento de capitales mercaderías se incrementan los controles sobre el desplazamiento de personas (los migrantes mexicanos conocidos como espaldas mojadas). Por su extensión, la diversidad de la población fronteriza y los países implicados, la frontera presenta una enorme complejidad. Al mismo tiempo, ha concentrado una gran parte de los estudios sobre fronteras en los últimos años. (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 34812-13)

Alejandro Grimson, a border scholar, studies the difficulties and historical violence of border individuals. Any border presents an enormous amount of diversity. Hundreds and hundreds of individuals completely different from each other in terms of background, identity, and way of life populate border regions such as Belken County. Rolando Hinojosa lends his voice to the historical, cultural, geographical and spatial dynamics of the Valley. Hinojosa provides the tentative voice for border individuals and demonstrates the diverse nature of a small rural region.

Smaller borders had not been represented adequately before Hinojosa, Rivera and Anzladúa. These rural borders are ignored, brushed aside by the attention given to more populated border spaces. In conveying the importance of language and space for the writing of Hinojosa, David E. Johnson states, “But first would have been the place, and that place, which Hinojosa will never refer to as double or multiple, but always singularly as the Valley, will be bordered by languages and lived experience. The Valley names the site of specific, linguistically determined lived experiences” (Michaelsen and Johnson 149-150). Hinojosa lives the Valley in both Spanish and English, however, his writing and his sense of place for this writing has a specific language of choice.

Hinojosa’s Valley Spanish enabled him to describe, invent, and live the Valley through his characters. The Valley, *singular* and at the same time *plural*, as David Johnson states, is specific. Bilingual experiences, are, in part, a formation of this fragmented space we call the border. The principle of Hinojosa’s narrative cannot tolerate such repetition, the effect of which is to displace the singularity of place, the

jurisdiction of language and the borders that would determine the univocal. Border cultures do not amount to the future possibility of cultural development that could be called a common ground; instead, they multiply borders. Borders are not to be generalized. Although borders can theoretically be ground for commonalities, many times a border space must be deconstructed. *Estampas del Valle* deconstructs the border. Johnson affirms, "Culture will be found within borders, never between them, for what is within borders will in every singular case be determined by a particular configuration of language, space, and time" (Michaelsen and Johnson 153). Rolando Hinojosa and the Belken County community are a testament to Johnson's theory that culture exists within borders as a unifying element and not a separation.

Chapter Four

When I'm writing, I'm in the world
I'm writing about.
-Rolando Hinojosa

Estampas Americanas

Following Mexican and Latin American literary paradigms, writers have created vivid and imagined communities through writing. Gabriel García-Márquez created *Macondo*, Juan Rulfo painted *Comala*, and Euclides da Cunha chronicled *Canudos*. Rolando Hinojosa's work is no exception. The community of Belken County is a testament to the lived experience of oppressed borderers. The rural conditions of the area are reminiscent of the telluric Latin American novel. The border as a multifarious space, a space of transitory expression, especially the space created by Hinojosa in *Estampas del Valle* signifies that we are not forced to choose sides. Hinojosa proves that the border is a lived space; it must be lived internally. *Estampas del Valle* demonstrates that the borders separating these two nations can be blurred. Equally it validates blurring literary borders. The work of Hinojosa can be read as part of the Latin American and Mexican literature school of thought as a part of Greater Mexico. As Sandra Cisneros has said of Mexican-American writers, "We're writers, but we're coming from homes where there were not books and the radio was on. We're the first generation to get up and write a book. That makes the kind of stories and issues we write about very different, say, from the García-Márquezes or the Laura Esquivels. In stories their families were families with servants. We are the servants. We don't write magical realism. Our issues are grounded in working issues."¹ Valley border writers have focused on the autochthonous and telluric elements of this area. This specific border is not a series of quiche images that a bigger city like Ciudad Juárez or Tijuana would display. The Belken County border is a rural space with a revolutionary and tumultuous history.

Border Studies can be problematic in that they generalize the border experience and its inhabitants. There is no such thing as one border, one border culture and one border literature. Each border crossing, each border mile carries with it its own agency, its own personality, its own people and its own cultural traditions. Although there are some general notions that these borders share, in the end they are significantly different and the Chicano experience is distinct along every border and throughout every border town. The diversity of some California cities, such as Los Angeles, encouraged the Chicano community to differentiate itself among other groups, to seek the same kind of privileges and protection from the government as others around them. This brought to light the experiences of the Chicano movement in the 60's, a search for an identity and an assertion of identity among others.

In the Rio Grande Valley, however, the population differs very much from that of bigger metropolitan cities. The 65-mile border, now more widely known on a national scale due to the increasing drug-violence on the border and to shows like Border Wars on the National Geographic channel, is inhabited mostly by first and second generation

¹ *Austin American-Statesman*, 17 September 1993, C1

Mexican Americans that live in conjunction with a large population of illegal immigrants. This environment does not push for a differentiation in terms of identity. For example, in Rio Grande City, population 17,000, the majority of the people speak Spanish. Although public schools in the city conduct their teaching in English, there are many inhabitants who have lived there more than thirty years and do not speak English because it is not necessarily essential for communication with others in the area. This, however, can be read as a rejection of American assimilation and also as a preservation of a Mexican culture. The lack of a heterogeneous population, rural conditions and the proximity to Mexico lends itself to close ties and affinities to Mexico and the Spanish language. Mexico's border economy depends on the U.S. citizens and residents crossing over to do their shopping, to buy their medicine, to make a visit to the dentist, to go for a doctor's visit and to buy their ostrich boots. Citizens in border towns also depend on crossing the border to fulfill their medical and personal needs.

Border literature chronicles the daily experiences of these border subjects. Tomás Rivera and Gloria Anzaldúa speak of the border through their fiction. Their stories tell the tales of striking occurrences and discuss issues of identity. Rolando Hinojosa chronicles the Rio Grande Valley like no one has done before. His writing creates a detailed and evocative community that is unlike other Chicano literature written before and after him. His quixotic-like characters and his Cervantian-like creativity has positioned Hinojosa in a unique place within the paradigms of Chicano literature and Latin American literature. Hinojosa's work and creation of a community with what seems like a never-ending stream of characters is redolent of a work such as García-Márquez's *Cien años de soledad*. His literature speaks for attention. In this particular novel, *Estampas del Valle*, the reader can appreciate the dedication that Hinojosa has to representing the Rio Grande Valley through his sketches and the countless characters that inhabit them. His attention to detail and his writing as a chronicler of this region is lauded for preserving history through literature. Hinojosa goes beyond the limits to create a novel that would accurately and yet, creatively represent a community.

Earlier we saw that Rolando Hinojosa has reinstated himself into his community through his works, it is also important to note the distinction and correlation between the terms *reinstate* and *reposition* in relation to the author and his work. Through his work, Hinojosa was able to once again form a part of this community after being away for so long, as a chronicler of history and culture it's as if he never left the Valley. Nonetheless, because his view as a traveler – from the outside in – aided him in created his novel, Hinojosa repositioned himself as a knowledgeable community member with an authority for representation. As a Valleyite, he is Rolando Hinojosa, the boy who spent his summers writing in Arteaga, Mexico and as an author he is Rolando Hinojosa, the author, the academic scholar who has shed light about this border space and geographical area; he has put the Rio Grande Valley on the map.

Fragmented Diaspora

Hinojosa's literature has a fragmented structure. His fragmented narrative is a representation of the similarities and differences within Chicano communities throughout the United States. The Chicano Diaspora encompasses an array of experiences along the borders with Mexico and in other non-bordering states. In recent years there has been more emphasis on attaining inclusivity within literary circles. *The Cambridge History of*

*Latin American Literature*² dedicated part of the second volume to Chicano literature. Although there have been efforts to claim inclusivity, these usually come with conditions attached. For example, in the article by Luis Leal and Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez they provide a wide-array of Chicano literature in historically chronological terms. Leal and Rodríguez state that Chicano writers are not ready to “give up” their individuality to be seen as part of a whole. González Echevarría states:

Yet Chicanos are not ready or willing to give up their own cultural identity, and insist on being considered as an ethnic group whose literature contributes, on the one hand, to the enrichment of the kaleidoscopic nature of North American literature, and, on the other, to the creation of a bridge between that literature and Latin American letters, especially since Chicano literature is written in both English and Spanish, or in a combination of the two languages. (González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker 556)

Chicanos are not willing to give up cultural identity because there is not one singular identity that can be pinpointed and then chosen for the sake of literary demarcations. Hinojosa makes it clear that the historical and ethnographical makeup of the Valley is unique and should not be compartmentalized. The fragmented nature of the sketches does goes against all compartmentalization.

The Chicano culture itself is a fragmented culture as Benjamín Alire Saenz has stressed in his essay “In the Borderlands of Chicano Identity, There Are Only Fragments”. A nationalist discourse demands complete acquiescence. “You are allowed only one name: American. We are all so sure we know what that label means. To some it means erasure. No one is born with an “essential” identity. Identities are produced, and they make sense, they have meaning, only in the cultural context of their production” (Alire-Sáenz, 94-5). *Estampas del Valle* saves the Valley from erasure. It creates a literary space for this unique border location with important historical weight. In the Valley it can be seen as something pejorative or negative – as a way of “stealing” Mexican ideals and identity from an individual. It is important to note that Chicano literature is its own genre, its own culture and although it can serve as a gap between two nations or two languages, the importance of Chicano literature lies not in making these gaps, but instead in disseminating cultural cues and traits throughout the world. Hinojosa can be thought of as *reforzador de fronteras*³ or an individual that aims to recuperate forgotten aspects of the border life and culture. In his writing he displays the dynamic of the contact of cultures or of cultures that infiltrate a dominant political space and aim to survive in this new state of mind and nation-state. Within Chicano discourse, it is

² Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker. *The Cambridge history of Latin American literature. Vol. 2, The twentieth century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.

³ Alejandro Grimson, Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, and (Organization) IDES. *Fronteras, naciones e identidades : la periferia como centro*. 1.th ed. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ciccus :La Crujía, 2000. Print.

important to note the difference between sharing a culture and sharing an identity. There exist many borders and many identities and identity politics within each U.S.-Mexico border region. Pablo Vila accentuates, “En gran parte de la nueva teoría de frontera norteamericana hay una tendencia muy marcada a confundir compartir una cultura con compartir una identidad” (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 102).

Pablo Vila suggests that the focus on Chicano literature and culture in the United States silences the voice and the existence of the individual on the other side of the border, on the Mexican side. Through Rolando Hinojosa’s sketches we can begin to understand the tumultuous dynamicity of this region that can be confused for silencing the Mexican side of the border. His writings incorporate the voice of the individual that has crossed that border, an individual that has been on both sides. Hinojosa’s literature is a voice for the Mexican community on both sides of the border. Pablo Vila’s statement refers to the tension that exists along the border in terms of identity and in terms of hegemonic power. Although regional rural spaces that are on the Mexican side of the border are forgotten spaces as pointed out by Roy Germano in his documentary *The Other Side of Immigration*, we cannot forget that the Chicano population on the American side of the border lives a similar experience. Hinojosa provides us with an account that witnesses the threat and brutality that Mexicans on the American side live with on a daily basis. An identity in crisis of oblivion in face of a strong hegemonic power such as that of the U.S. presents us with different cultural traumas that Vila does not consider in his study *Crossing Borders. Reinforcing Borders. Social Categories, Metaphors and Narrative Identities on the U.S. Mexico Frontier*⁴.

Estampas del Valle serves as a means of amalgamating both sides of the border through the common bonds of language, space, culture and tradition. The racial and economic tensions of the Rio Grande Valley are unique to this border and cannot be generalized. Generalization causes erasure because it takes away from the unique qualities of each border space. Rolando Hinojosa is aware of this and chooses to represent this specific border area. As a borderer himself, he writes about this which he knows and challenges hegemonic discourse of border literature as a generalization of all borders. Pablo Vila argues that this specific border has its own unique qualities and cannot be generalized or globalized because the tensions are historical. Vila argues that the search for identity within the Chicano community within the United States is more of a metaphor than a true struggle that can be identified with quotidian life of the border. Although border studies have become a study of metaphorical borders across the globe, the writings of Rolando Hinojosa provide much more than a mere metaphor of a border. For example, Hinojosa and Rivera’s personal experiences and travels through Mexico and their academic careers can produce a literary work that represents the people, which is the voice of this community.

In his work, Pablo Vila trivializes identity politics of Chicanos in the United States without properly analyzing what is being written from an ethnographic fictional standpoint by authors of Mexican descent in the United States, thus we are in agreement with Nestor García Canclini when he states in “¿De qué lado estás? Metáforas de la

⁴ Pablo Vila 1952-. *Crossing borders, reinforcing borders : social categories, metaphors, and narrative identities on the U.S.-Mexico frontier*. 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. Print.

frontera de México-Estados Unidos [...] Hay elementos contradictorios en la noción misma de la frontera. Me parece que esta es una de las razones por las cuales las narrativas y metáforas son indispensables para comprender el sentido de las situaciones fronterizas” (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 140-141). Hinojosa’s writing is a cultural record of the Rio Grande Valley. He is part of this living history. Hinojosa fights for a border identity, but more than that he writes for the Rio Grande Valley identity. Cultural identities on the Mexican and American sides of the border depend on the border and its determinations. Once again, the border cannot be generalized. When referring to Octavio Paz, for example, David E. Johnson writes, “There will be no difference between the birth of U.S. cultural identity and Mexican cultural identity: both will depend on the border and its determinations. On either side of the border, on both sides of the border, there is one cultural identity; however it is defined, in whatever terms it is disclosed, it is nevertheless *one* – it is *our* identity” (Michaelson and Johnson 133). Even if on either side of the border there is more than one cultural identity, each one will be located within the horizon of certain discretion; each will be found in its own place, bordered by the dream of its proper univocity like Belken County.

The influxes of Mexican culture into the United States and vice versa have created a unique border space. Hinojosa examines the blends and mixture of both sides of the border by focusing on generating an image that evokes a unitary communitarian identity. The Chicano transitory individual presented in Hinojosa’s writing is unique to the border space of the Valley, yet may still identify with other Chicanos or Mexican-Americans that are also part of Greater Mexico. The notion of the border carries the complexities that accompany the term and border studies as a whole. As readers of border literature we must constantly remind ourselves that all borders are different. Although the border is generalized for “border studies”, each cultural contact zone is immanently different. Each border is unique and carries its own heterogeneity. The macrostructure of the border concept permits generalization of border studies. However, as scholars, we must constantly acknowledge that by generalizing borders, we erase the rich history and cultural intricacies of each specific space. In his work, Rolando Hinojosa highlights the specificity of the border of the Rio Grande Valley and thus demonstrates that each border space is historically and culturally unrepeatable. Néstor García Canclini explains:

No todas las fronteras son reducibles a un mismo tipo de metáfora, apunta García Canclini en su trabajo. La frontera de México-Estados Unidos son muchas fronteras, con poblaciones e historias singulares. Esa heterogeneidad, se multiplica cuando incluimos otras regiones del mundo, tiende a ser anulada por miradas generalizantes y deshistorizadoras. Una de las mayores generalizaciones, que vacía de sentido histórico a las fronteras, afirma que todas las fronteras son separación e unión al mismo tiempo. En determinados contextos históricos y en ciertas regiones pueden señalarse tendencias más o menos generales sobre las fronteras. Así, en cada caso empírico, esas dos características de toda frontera se encuentran ordenadas y jerarquizadas. Hay fronteras más permeables que otras; hay fronteras más permeables que otras; hay momentos de mayor militarización de los cruces; hay personas que cruzan con facilidad,

mientras otras son humilladas y perseguidas. (Grimson, Oliveira and IDES 23)

The border of the Rio Grande Valley, as evinced in Hinojosa's writing, is a more permeable border, not less rigid in terms of militarization of the border, but permeable in terms of culture and language. Often times, this region is referred to as Rio Grande Valley, Mexico. Close ties that are maintained with the Mexican side of the border. Generalizing a border would mean to de-historicize a region with a rich history and a unique culture. Rolando Hinojosa refuses to have this site, his sense of place, succumbed into the broad world of abstract and literal world borders. Hinojosa creates a fictional historical chronicle of the Valley that imitates Valley life and Valley history.

The multiplicity of layers found in his *Estampas del Valle* is a testament to the richness of the culture and to the importance of documenting areas that are seen as rural and are less known than bigger metropolitan areas. The Rio Grande Valley is different. It is a part of Texas, but also a part of Mexico. It represents many identities and transitory subjects. It is precisely the style of Hinojosa's writing that permits the representation of multifarious identities as part of a unique history. Hinojosa's fragmentary novel, representing hundreds of characters, is a response to the plurality his life encompasses growing up as a borderer in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. Hinojosa inherently takes part in two cultures and lives them internally. His dialogic formation of identity encompasses two cultures internally. Through his writing and his use of both languages he creates his prime and central identity through the navigation of these two cultures expressed in the sketches of *Estampas del Valle*.

Mexican vs. Chicano

Héctor Calderón cites the cultural enmity and the fusion between Mexicanos and Texas Anglos as a distinct feature of Hinojosa's writing. In fact, Hinojosa has referred to himself as a Mexican for most of his life. In the Rio Grande Valley, no specific distinctions were necessary from one side of the border to another. Hinojosa feels cultural, linguistic, but most importantly historical and experiential ties to Mexico. In this passage, Hinojosa explains his historical ties to Mexico and his auto-reference as a Mexican even though he clearly knew that he was born on the American side of the border. Calderón does not intend to displace the term "Chicano", but instead acknowledge that some borders (on the American side) identify as Mexican and not necessarily with the Chicano movement of the 1960's in California.

The Southwest and Texas in particular has constantly lived in a state of turbulence racially and politically. Therefore to believe that the Mexican Americans of Texas were not politically active is to dismiss decades of struggle against land appropriations, racism and multiple national boundaries of division. Calderón states, "I do intend to displace the term "Chicano". It is part of a historical moment that many of my generation lived through. History will record the Chicano Movement as a brief period of Mexican American social and cultural history. And its brevity does not diminish its full impact in all spheres of public life. The Movement changed the way Mexican Americans viewed themselves, the way Mexicanos viewed their brethren across the border. It is part of a larger process of history that goes back to the nineteenth century. The Chicanos of the 1960s and 1970s were not the first to be concerned with issues of identity and cultural

conflict. Someone like Paredes writing in isolation as early as the 1930s was fully aware of this fact” (Calderón xiv).

In an interview in Korea he was asked about his self-identification and why he chooses to be called Mexican American instead of Chicano. He states:

Las raíces que sostienen dicha conciencia empiezan en 1747 cuando los primeros colonos llegan a lo que es ahora tierra norteamericana y el norte de México, en el estado de Tamaulipas. Desde niño mi auto referencia era ‘mexicano’ sabiendo bien que había nacido en Texas y que era norteamericano de nacimiento. Lo que ayudó a que uno se identificara como mexicano era de lo mas natural; además nuestros conciudadanos nos llamaban “Mexicanos”, aunque casi siempre usando el despectivo Messican. [...] Mis estudiantes se identifican como Hispanic, Latino, Hispanic American, unos cuantos como Chicanos, voz que no cobró popularidad en Texas como lo fue y sigue siendo en los estados de California, Arizona, y Nuevo México. En español se auto identifican como mexicanos, como si la pregunta fuera necia. Lo que también influye es lo rural del lugar, sabido es que las áreas rurales conservan la cultura y el habla a distinción de las ciudades donde se tiene que aprender ingles para competir en el trabajo. En el Valle, ambos idiomas se mantienen. (Choi and de Yoon 181)

Hinojosa’s students find the question of identity an obvious one. In Texas the Anglos see Mexican-Americans only as Mexicans. The term “Chicano” did not claim popularity in Texas. This term is used more often in states like California where the Chicano movement was more prevalent. The history of Quinto Sol explains the direction of Chicano literature of the 1970s.

Quinto Sol: Chicano Avant-Garde

Octavio I. Romano, professor emeritus of behavioural science at the University of California, Berkeley’s School of Public Health died in 2005 at the age of 82. He was born in Mexico City in 1923 and moved with his family to the United States as a child, growing up in the San Diego area. As a young man, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943 and served in Europe for two-and-a-half years during World War II. After his service, he was awarded the European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Meritorious Unit Award and World War II Victory Medal. After the war, Professor Romano attended college on the GI Bill and became the first in his family to earn a college degree. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico and a master's and doctorate in anthropology from UC Berkeley. Professor Romano founded Quinto Sol Publications in 1967. He was the pioneer publisher of Mexican-American authors in the 1970s. Quinto Sol published *El Grito: A Journal of Mexican- American Thought* and several anthologies of contemporary works by Chicano authors. Throughout subsequent issues of *El Grito*, Romano figured as a major force. His lyrical introduction to "Goodbye Revolution, Hello Slum," a 1968 special issue of *El Grito*, set the stage for a reconstruction of Chicano history since 1910 and a renewed attack on Anglo-American academia. Although the word *Chicano* did not yet appear in

Romano's vocabulary, the political subtext of his closing remarks was clear: "Someday, when all the rangers are totally disbanded and prostituted history no longer emits from the priesthood of the social scientists, the Mexican-Americans will be free."⁵

In 1970 the Quinto Sol publishing house, of which Professor Romano had been the principal founder, announced the first Premio Quinto Sol, a literary competition that in essence initiated the formation of a canon for Chicano literature. The first three winners continued to be the founding fathers of contemporary Chicano prose fiction well into the 1980s: Tomás Rivera, Rudolfo Anaya, and Rolando Hinojosa-Smith. The last Premio Quinto Sol was given to Estela Portillo Trambley in 1965. Equally crucial to this enterprise was Romano's publication in 1969 of *El Espejo / The Mirror*, an anthology of Mexican-American literature, which includes texts by writers who would become increasingly influential in the coming years.

Chicano literature in the 1970's was in a position of struggle and resistance. Hinojosa's new space in the literary world was and continues to be a structural adjustment. *Estampas de Valle* creates an alternate discourse that empowers those in the periphery. Hinojosa chooses to write in Spanish further destabilizing the hegemonic canonical regiment whilst striving against the exclusion of regional literature across national boundaries. Writing as a Mexican American author in the seventies was at the same time current, avant-garde and experimental. Like Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera had published his novel *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra* based on the Southwest Mexican community, predating noteworthy oeuvres such as Gloria Anzaludúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* published in 1987. Although earlier Chicano works do exist, Hinojosa, Rivera

⁵For a detailed analysis on Professor Romano's contributions to *El Grito* see:

- Romano-V, O. I. 1967. Minorities, History and the Cultural Mystique. *El Grito* 1(1): 5-11.
- Romano-V, O. I. 1968. The Anthropology and Sociology of the Mexican-Americans: The Distortion of Mexican-American History. *El Grito* 2(1): 13-26.
- Romano-V, O. I. 1969; The Historical and Intellectual Presence of Mexican-Americans. *El Grito* 2(2); 32-46.
- Romano-V, O. I. 1970; Social Science, Objectivity and the Chicanos. *El Grito* 4(1): 4-16.
- Romano-V, O. I. 1976.
- The Scientist. *Grito del Sol* 1(1); 85-108.

I have obtained a copy of [Grito del sol : a Chicano quarterly](#), year 1, book 1, Jan.-March 1976. It is my interest to compare "The Scientist" to "O Alienista" by Machado de Assis. Romano's original fiction develops many of the concerns that inform his scholarly articles. His 1976 short story "The Scientist," for example, deals with Dr. Simón Bocanegra, an authority on mental health, who returns to a town called El Barrio to test a series of hypotheses he has theorized while at a university. The establishment of the Ajúa House, a psychiatric clinic, and the refinement of his theories lead to the blurring of the boundary between mental health and mental illness. Eventually five-sevenths of the townspeople are committed. After an unsuccessful rebellion by the community against Bocanegra's practices and a complete reversal of his original theory (he comes to believe that the abnormal are those who are rational and well-balanced), the psychiatrist finally becomes his only patient and "for days on end he could be heard in an encounter session with himself." After the doctor's death, his wife leaves with the local priest, and El Barrio returns to its former state. For more detailed information see: <http://www.bookrags.com/biography/octavio-i-romano-dlb/>.

and Anzaldúa highlighted the Rio Grande Valley in their written works and thanks to their published material a critical Chicano canon was established. Border writing was gaining significant importance and recognition at this time. Hinojosa contributed to the development of a different Chicano identity and consolidated the Valley's place in the transnational imaginary.

Historically and literarily, these avant-garde structures for fiction on and along the Rio Grande River provided substructures and model theories for future border studies and the analysis of this particular region on the American and Mexican side of the border. In "Always Writing: A Chicano Life", Hinojosa mentions that it was indeed Tomás Rivera, after having met at a conference in San Marcos, submitted Hinojosa's "Por esas cosas que pasan" to Quinto Sol Publications in Berkeley. Hinojosa speaks of Rivera's generosity and enthusiasm for literature related to the Rio Grande Valley. It was with Tomás Rivera's support that Hinojosa received a contract from Quinto Sol accepting "Por esas cosas que pasan" and it would appear in a special number of the journal *El Grito* with Tomas Rivera and Rodolfo Anaya as contributors.

By coincidence and with much luck, Hinojosa states, he was able to purchase the first edition of *Estampas de Valle* published by Quinto Sol in 1972. This edition's introduction is different than other bilingual versions of the book. Herminio Ríos C. was one of the first translators of Tomás Rivera's *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* into English (*... And the Earth Did not Devour Him*). Ríos highlights the importance of Hinojosa's writing for the Mexican American community in the 1970s. He also associates Hinojosa's work to a Hispanic and Latin American imaginary. In the first edition of *Estampas del Valle*, Ríos C. states:

It is not our intention to engage in a discussion as to whether or not Chicano literature exists, even though this issue is still being debated in some university circles. For the writers who create their works within a Chicano consciousness of collectivity, and for those of us who publish Chicano literature, and who have provided ample historical documentation concerning the artistic and intellectual efforts of the Chicanos, not only the 19th century, but also in the 20th century, as well as for the people who see themselves faithfully reflected in this literature, the existence of Chicano literature is as patently clear as the existence of the Chicanos themselves. (Hinojosa Intro)

Ríos underlines the importance of Hinojosa's work from a socio-historical perspective and maintains that the fundamental issue is to establish the relationship that exists between Chicano literature and the rich Hispanic literary tradition. Quinto Sol aimed to approximate the Chicano experience to other literary works in the Americas.

Quinto Sol Objectives

One of Quinto Sol's discernable objectives was to relate U.S. Hispanic or more specifically, U.S. Chicano literature to the greater spectrum of "American" literature. Quinto Sol desired to see the publications of these Mexican American writers as part of U.S. literature, fomenting its reading population, and just as importantly, Quinto Sol's objectives also included reconnecting with the Hispanic world of literature, especially

through these publications written in the Spanish language. From 1967 to the summer of 1972, Herminio Ríos C. was the acting editor of *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought* published by Quinto Sol Publications in Berkeley, CA.

In addition to being the editor of the journal he was also part of the comparative literature department at the University of California, Berkeley. His experience in the literary field, specifically in comparative studies, gave him a unique insight into the world of Chicano or Mexican-American texts and how they can be read on an international scale. Tomás Rivera was also contributing editor of the literary journal at the time. Herminio Ríos explains that Rolando Hinojosa's writing was chosen from other works as the Quinto Sol literary prizewinner because his work, aside from being a creative literary piece, also addresses social sciences in the Mexican-American community. Hinojosa depicts the Mexican-American community in a light that is positive, yet realistic.

On the fifth anniversary of *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought*, Ríos C. underlines the goals of this specific Quinto Sol publication as follows: 1) Since 1967, *El Grito* has analysed fallacious and educationally detrimental content of social science studies with the Mexican-American community 2) This Quinto Sol publication opposed publications of fatalism, underachievement, non-goal oriented ideas and stereotypes presented in other works such as Leonard Pitt's *The Decline of the Californios*. Ríos expresses his concern to counter this "modern variant of the Mexican sleeping under a cactus". The articles in this journal contributed to the eradications of non-literate passive Mexicans who inhabit the pages of social science and history studies 3) Ríos makes it clear that *El Grito* and Quinto Sol were not trying to develop talent among Chicanos or help them find an identity, there was no vacuum to be filled, but to foment the idea that both talent and identity already exist and have always existed in the Chicano community 4) Although the goals of *El Grito* and Quinto Sol was to promote Chicano writers, Quinto Sol published several anthologies in which Latin American and Mexican writers were included. A total of five anthologies were published in which only a fourth of the authors of the anthologies were Mexican-American.

According to Ríos, this proved that creative efforts in Chicano studies are largely unnoticed and usually excluded from Spanish departments across the United States. He also states, that Mexican-Americans at Quinto Sol were "receptive to those Latin Americans who have extended us their friendship, and who have united their efforts in our own and in whose works the very heartbeat of Chicano inspiration is present" (Ríos 7-11). Last, but certainly not least, one of many of Quinto Sol's objectives was not to *react*, but to *create*. Their aim was to forge new ground in literary publications, such as the work of Hinojosa and his portrayal of a space or locale that has been represented in textbooks by Americans and not Mexican-Americans. More than react, the goal was to create this area for new space and new regions with a Mexican population within the United States.

Quinto Sol accomplishments included publishing short stories, a novel, an epic poem, and an anthology in its fifth printing composed of poets and writers that appeared regularly in *El Grito*. The name of this journal, *El Grito*, signifies a scream, an attempt to put the Chicano voice on the map. For although Chicano Literature does have its similarities and shares some characteristics with Mexican and Latin American culture, it is a literature of its own, with its own qualities and its own literary personality. With the Quinto Sol prizewinners Tomás Rivera, Rudolfo Anaya and Rolando Hinojosa, Quinto

Sol confirmed that Chicano thought, cultural expression and literature fully belong among world intellectuals and artistic traditions.

Chicano Collectivity

Estampas del Valle exemplifies the efforts of Chicano literature's pioneers to publish works that were original Mexican-American works and displayed their connections to Mexico and Latin American Literature. Herminio Ríos C., editor of *El Grito* states in the introduction to Quinto Sol's publication of *Estampas*, "It is not our intention to engage in a discussion as to whether or not Chicano literature exists, even though this issue is still being debated in some university circles. For the writers who create their works within a Chicano consciousness of collectivity, and for those of us who publish Chicano literature, and who have provided ample historical documentation concerning the artistic and intellectual efforts of the Chicanos, not only the 19th century, but also in the 20th century, as well as for the people who see themselves faithfully reflected in this literature, the existence of Chicano literature is as patently clear as the existence of the Chicanos themselves" (Hinojosa Rios, Introduction). The fundamental issue at the time was the relationship that exists between Chicano literature and the rich Hispanic and Latin American literary tradition.

For some, it may come as a surprise that Hinojosa, a Mexican-American writer, has chosen to produce his first novel in Spanish. It is not surprising to find that at a distance in time of 125 years since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and in spite of living in an American territory, by choice, master works, such as *Estampas del Valle*, are being conceived and written in Spanish. "Up to the present time, many of the works of great transcendency for that Chicanos have been written in Spanish. To verify this, one need only read Hinojosa's work as well as ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra* by Tomás Rivera; *Perros y Antiperros* by Sergio Elizondo; *Cachito Mío* by José Acosta Torres; and *Tata Casehua* by Miguel Méndez. It is thus evident that Chicano culture has endured, that Chicano writers continue to create in Spanish, and that in their works one may find echoes of Hispanic works from both sides of the Atlantic" (Hinojosa Rios, Introduction).

Chicano narratives written in Spanish such as *Estampas del Valle* are a part of Greater Mexico literary works that stand on their own. They create their own literary space with their own references to culture and inter-national paradigms along the border. Hinojosa acknowledges that Chicano literature does have all of its roots in Mexican literature, and that Mexican-American writers do have their roots in Mexico. Roots, explains Hinojosa, are not to be confused with the trunk of the tree itself or with the branches that sprung from it. Hinojosa has appropriated the Mexican culture of the Valley to inhabit his writing in the way that he sees fit. For Hinojosa and other Chicano writers, despite the Mexican influences, the Mexican-American writer lives in and is deeply influenced by his life in the United States as well. The border space is multifarious and this multidimensional space that is the Valley has American and Mexican elements that are blended and fused to form what is now the culture of that specific region.

In an interview that was conducted in Korea, Hinojosa speaks about the originality of his work and the Valley border atmosphere. Through his writing, Hinojosa takes on the task of representing the complexity of a cultural phenomenon that surpasses geographical and cultural limits with all consciousness. Even though he is representing

complex terms of identitarian politics, Hinojosa's writing exhibits an air of simplicity that offers the reader something new and fresh within literature. His writings about the Mexican community display their unbreakable spirits from a cultural trans-American point of view. Hinojosa's writing has the ability to move across and beyond multiple national divides. Calderon states:

The Chicano Movement gave historical credence and cultural dignity to my basic Mexicaness – Spanish-speaking, working-class, and mestizo. I am not alone in reasserting ties with Mexican culture. In recent works, older and younger Mexican American writers are affirming diversity through their Mexicaness. [...] This is one of the greatest lessons learned in writing this book – the diversity of political views, geographical settings and cultural traditions of Mexican culture in the United States. In the past century, studies by U.S. Mexicanista scholars have stressed “lo mexicano” and “mexicanidad”, relying essentially on cultural identities from south of the border and, indeed, defined and promoted by intellectuals from the center, Mexico City. (Calderón xiv)

Hinojosa, a man of two cultures, exemplifies his Mexicaness through his writing. Belken County, culturally speaking, can be located on both sides of the border, for it is a concoction of both sides that make up his sense of place and his sense of writing.

Casa Las Américas

It is important to state that Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* provides a glimpse into the complexity of Valley life, history and culture in a way that had not done before. His style is unique and his writing deals with the lives and histories of a specific community. This is different than Rivera and Anzaldúa's writing because Hinojosa chooses to create a new imaginary space for the Rio Grande Valley. For Hinojosa, Belken County represents a small portion of the large panoramic picture of the Mexican Diaspora. His aim is to contribute to the literature of the border and the representation of Mexican-Americans in literary works, both in the United States and in Latin America. His literature is a macro study of a community that converts into a microcosmic study. Belken County and its components are an example of a single fraction of the Valley. Being a border chronicler is a difficult task. In her “From Heterogeneity to Contradiction: Hinojosa's Novel” Rosaura Sánchez suggests that Hinojosa's work is part of a continuation of Spanish and Latin American works because of his Casa de Las Américas literary prize in 1976.

In 1976 a literary jury composed of Juan Carlos Onetti, Lisandro Otero and Domingo Miliani, cofounder of the Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos, choose Hinojosa's work from more than four thousand entries. Hinojosa's extended experience and deep understanding of the Latin American intellectual world, especially in terms of literature and history, provided him with a comparative perspective on the political, cultural, and social dynamics of the various forms. He is the first Chicano to be awarded the Casa de Las Américas Literary prize and he is also actively involved in fomenting Mexican-American or Chicano literature in other countries abroad. In Cuba, for example, after Rolando Hinojosa was awarded the literary prize, a Center for the study of Chicano literature was founded in the interest of expanding studies on border

literature. Rolando Hinojosa is also an active member of the Comité Consultivo for Monterrey Tec coupled with Monterrey's annual Feria del Libro like the annual Feria del Libro in Guadalajara, Mexico. There are only two national book fairs in Mexico and Rolando Hinojosa has been part of this work for six years now. Hinojosa's work revitalizes several generations of Spanish and Latin American Literary history through his adaptation and incorporation of generic forms that date back to the 15th century. But his work also dialogues extensively with Chicano/Mexicano history and even with figures of his present history, as is the case of his ongoing dialogue with José Limón, Américo Paredes and Octavio Romano in the texts. The author's narration is a response to literary history.

The uniqueness of Hinojosa's work stems from its ability to be viewed as a transnational work that threatens the limit of the border and limited geographical barriers and can be read in abstract sense, yet his sense of place and his writing represent the Valley specifically and becomes personal and historical. In his essay, "Chicano Literature: An American Literature with a Difference" Hinojosa believes that Chicano literature can also be seen as a literature that forms part of the Americas, especially works such as his, Rosaura Sánchez's and Tomás Rivera who wrote and published in Spanish in the United States. When Alvaro Nuñez made his trip from Florida to Texas in the 16th Century, he was somehow laying the foundation of a future American literature written in Spanish, north of the Río Grande. "As the saying goes, "uno nunca sabe para quién trabaja" and this literature written by United States Mexicans is a constant reminder of Spanish presence here, in what most of us, I dare say, can legally call our native land. Chicano literature is United States literature, but it is also literature of the Americas, as Martí so clearly saw and labeled the New World" (Saldívar 43).

Belken County lies along the border of the Río Grande River, and although this geographical space is denoted as the Valley, Hinojosa has made it a point to permeate through the common misconceptions that all border studies or regions can be categorized into one. I believe that what Hinojosa is trying to accomplish in his creation of Belken County is the fact that this county is one of a multitude of counties along the border in the Valley. Through his writing he helps us understand that the Valley is a complex area, and Belken is but a grain of sand in the grand scheme of border studies and of Valley culture and of border literature in general. This does not minimize his work, but instead provides the reader with an insight into the complexities of speaking of a culture, specifically a border culture that encompasses various identities in transit.

Writing in Spanish

For Hinojosa it is not a matter of politics, but a matter of culture. Hinojosa's fiction reflects some personal experiences. Like Hinojosa crossing the line between literary traditions in his Spanish and English books, Hinojosa's protagonist, writer and narrator Rafa Buenrostro, will move, like Hinojosa himself, within both Spanish- and English-speaking worlds. In Arteaga he got a taste of independence as a young boy and as a writer. Even the names of the towns on the American side are lived in Spanish. Hinojosa's interest and go-to language of preference is undoubtedly the Spanish language. Hinojosa explains his affinity for the Spanish language and his commitment to writing in Spanish. This particular preference will inherently distinguish his texts creating an interlingual experience. He states, "In my neighborhood, *el pueblo mexicano*

[Mexican town], and in the others, *el rincón del Diablo* [the devil's corner], *el rebaje* [the pit], *la colonia Garza* [Garza section], it was in Spanish. Strictly. The movie house, the newspaper, the radio, and of course, the school I mentioned earlier. I must have been eleven or twelve when I first spoke to an Anglo boy or girl" (Bruce-Novoa and Hinojosa 106). Hinojosa lived his life in Spanish and was not aware that another form of living existed until he ran into Anglo kids as a teenager. Even though part of his family was Anglo, they had adopted a Mexican way of life. His mother lived her life in Spanish and had learned to speak it at an early age. Hinojosa did not find any differences between his parents as a young boy because his mother lived in a Mexican community and had adapted well.

Most of the names of cities and towns in the Valley still have Spanish names. Hinojosa continues, "My early life, indeed up to seventeen when I enlisted, my daily life was really lived, for the most part, in Spanish. This comes out in my writing and its no State secret. I speak both languages with equal fluency. But you're asking more fluently, so it's a tie, although I prefer to write fiction in Spanish and have for the most part" (Bruce-Novoa and Hinojosa 106). Although the author speaks both English and Spanish with the same fluency, his preferred language is Spanish. His fiction exemplifies his level of comfort with the language. He is able to manipulate fiction by incorporating double-entendres and highlighting humor and irony. Hinojosa's fiction represents his inner being. His internal capacity to write and his creativity are formed in Spanish. Chicano literature is written in Spanish and/or in English and it is colored by the regionalism, which may be due to the author's background. He is committed to writing in Spanish, although if something comes out in English, then he must write it in that language. Hinojosa expresses that he has no control on the choice of language; I have enough trouble trying to write without worrying about which language. He jokingly states that he has enough trouble trying to write without worrying about what language to choose over the other. The fluctuation between both languages is something that he lives internally. Nonetheless, he prefers Spanish.

Hinojosa's novel, more than being a Spanish creation, is a novel colored by the regionalist aspects of the border along both sides of the Rio Grande River. Hinojosa trusts his instincts and his creations to come from an internal consciousness. He does not trouble himself with what language to use at the precise moment of writing. Instead he connects with his inner self, his inner writer and constructs his art from within. His writing is an act reflecting his intimate psychological and emotional sensibilities.

Interlingual Spanish Text

Rolando Hinojosa proves that even as an American citizen he maintains a hybrid identity. Hinojosa culturally sees himself as a Mexican and therefore has maintained the Spanish language because it was an integral part of his life. It is apparent by his work in *Estampas del Valle* that communities on the Rio Grande Valley border are ingrained in the Spanish language and the border is not actually a separation but an opportunity for melding aesthetic practices. The points of interconnection between the Spanish and English language present in Hinojosa's text are an example of an interlingual text. The importance of the interlingual text lies in the ability to find a juncture between the two languages. One language is not there to obliterate the other or to overshadow it. The point of the interlingual text is to bring these languages together with equal importance.

Hinojosa does not reject the English language. On the contrary, he recognizes Belken County as a multifaceted space and incorporates linguistic combinations and variations that emulate codeshifting and Spanglish. Bruce-Novoa explains, “The interlingual text as a text that arose in the 1960s proved quite marketable then. Interlingual texts are pieces “written in a blend of Spanish and English. They are not bilingual in that, in the best examples, they do not attempt to maintain the two language codes separate, but exploit and create the potential junctures of interconnection” (Bruce-Novoa 49).

This interlingual form of expression is the true native language of Chicano communities. Even though some members only speak English or Spanish, as a whole, the language spectrum covers these and every potential blend. It is to whatever form of interlingualism he or she has experience and internalized that the Chicano writer is loyal. In so being, Hinojosa is loyal to himself, and loyal to the nurturing culture and, more importantly, loyal to writing. In addition a writer has no obligation to accept cultural, social and class determination tied to language. The writer’s linguistic preference is a choice based on his personal experiences. For Hinojosa, living in the Valley granted him the ability to navigate so freely and comfortably through the Spanish and English languages.

In addition, the independence that Hinojosa felt in Arteaga, Mexico as a young boy helped him come to his sense of place in his writing. He gained his voice through independence. Hinojosa’s independence and authorial voice began in Arteaga in Spanish. Hinojosa’s work gives the reader a new point of view of Texas history. More often than not, this space is represented in textbooks as a one-sided story. *Estampas del Valle* is meant to convey another angle. It sheds light on the history of the downtrodden. The space lends itself to Hinojosa’s configurations. Hinojosa states:

I decided to write whatever it was I had, in Spanish, and I decided to set it on the border, in the Valley. As reduced as that space was, it too was Texas with all its contradictions and its often repeated one-sided telling of Texas history. When the characters stayed in the Spanish-speaking milieu or society, the Spanish language worked well, and then it was in the natural order of things that English made its entrance when the characters strayed or found themselves in Anglo institutions; in cases where both cultures would come into contact, both languages were used, and I would employ them both, and where one and only one would do, I would follow that as well; what dominated, then, was the place. (Saldívar 23)

Hinojosa’s writing is dominated by his upbringing. His surroundings helped construct his imaginative and innovative style. His novel borrows from a number of genres including journalism, travel journals and official documents, to name a few. These varying stylistic forms mediated Hinojosa’s artistic frame of mind.

La Prensa: Spanish Newspaper

Why does Hinojosa incorporate various writing models and literary genres into his novel? How does the pervasiveness of newspapers such as *La Prensa*, *La Opinión* or *La Gaceta*, in urban and rural Chicano communities, affect local writers? Newspapers and journals cannot be dismissed claiming that they had no influence on the writing of

today. It is important to question what significance they had on some authors. In the case of Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás Rivera and Américo Paredes, *La Prensa* influenced them in ways our critics have not yet begun to consider or analyze in depth. *La Prensa* was a key component in Hinojosa's life. As a young boy, Hinojosa was a newspaper delivery boy for *La Prensa*. His whole family was involved in reading about the Mexican Revolution in Spanish. Hinojosa's narrative style has a journalistic feel to it. The narrative style of his sketches can be compared to a newspaper. They are short in length and they are divided into sections. They also bring news *of* the community *to* the community. The sketches, like a newspaper, include gossip columns, labor analysis and local encounters with the law. Reading Spanish newspapers and his personal experiences as a journalist and a radio deejay influenced his form of writing.

Rolando Hinojosa's novel mimics other forms of literature such as depositions, newspaper clippings, poems, monologues, dialogues, *estampas*, journals, etc. "We must "reevaluate, for instance, Tomás Rivera and Rolando Hinojosa, both of whom faithfully read *La Prensa*, or Tino Villanueva, who remembers how his grandfather received the newspaper. Perhaps Hinojosa's characteristic fragmentation of texts has some relationship with the fragmented texts of the literary supplements of those newspapers"(Bruce-Novoa 172). Just like his literature, Rolando Hinojosa lives his life in fragments. He grew up on both sides of the border, left for a war, pursued and professional career in academia. This fragmentation created the aesthetics in his writing. He records, creates, remembers and reconstructs aspects of this region that are unique to Chicano literature and to border literature in general. Hinojosa's first story was published in a newspaper, *El Grito*, which means that Hinojosa was also publishing in these Spanish newspapers.

Newspapers and Cuentos

Hinojosa was deeply influenced by the newspapers carrying news of the Mexican Revolution and other noteworthy occurrences in the Rio Grande Valley. Hinojosa demonstrates his form of commitments to politics and revolution through his writing. José David Saldívar, linking Hinojosa to García Márquez, says that the Chicano writer and critic has "an image ... of the writer that many Anglo centric writers and intellectuals have lost – the writer who combines the traditional intellectual's commitment to language and image with the organic intellectual's commitment to politics and revolution"(Saldívar xiii). Hinojosa's commitment to language and to politics and revolution found a new form of coming to life in his fragmentary novel. The pieces of the puzzle were put together such as traditional *cuentos* transmitted orally and concentrating on the elements of the folk existence known as the most popular literary forms used by Mexican writers living in the isolated areas of what was then Mexico's northern frontier or rural areas such as northern Mexico our South Texas. As the settlement and population of today's Southwest grew, an increasing number of creative writers appeared, and as early as 1848 literary activity began to flourish. "A number of newspapers and journals published not only the traditional *cuentos* but also literary pieces such as poetry and *actos* – short dramatic works. After the conclusion of the war between the United States and Mexico, writers (now Mexican American by token of their new citizenship) continued to rely heavily on forms, themes, motifs and settings, which are prevalent in Mexican literature" (Tatum 432). It was not uncommon for writers to seek newspapers as a point of

departure for their writing careers. It was also a form to divulge literature to the masses. Hinojosa makes his literature *for* the people by first publishing his newspapers in sketches.

Hinojosa took part in spreading news about the Mexican Revolution. As a newspaper delivery boy he inevitably and directly took part in the dissemination of information about the revolution to the local community. *La Prensa* divulged the latest information on the Mexican Revolution to Spanish speaking Mexicans in the United States. Some exiles from the Mexican Revolution, like the Lozanos and the Manguías in San Antonio, Texas, went into publishing. The presses established by the new immigrants published mostly Mexican materials. “As we could expect from the world-class authors who collaborated in *La Prensa*, the Lozano’s San Antonio newspaper, the language was often stylistically impeccable and the ideological perspective was more in tune with the concerns of central Mexico than with those of central Texas. There was a clear hierarchy of values: true Mexicans were those who identified with the texts of *La Prensa*” (Bruce-Novoa 47). Rolando Hinojosa was an avid reader of *La Prensa* constantly berated with the information provided to his community. He identified with the local newspaper on various levels. He recalls the old *revolucionarios* discussing the politics of the Mexican Revolution according to what was published in *La Prensa*. *La Prensa* became an important element in the lives of Texas-Mexicans. It became a tool for connecting the people of the Valley to their fellow Mexicans.

Hinojosa’s literary fragmented style can also be compared to precise and clean model of journalistic reporting. Bruce Novoa believes that “Hinojosa’s literary style – precise, clean, not a word in excess –; his ironic and subtle humor, so well within the Hispanic tradition; his undeniably popular and regional themes, and, thus, universal appeal; and a persistent understatement, all blend to make his work unmistakable” (Bruce-Novoa and Hinojosa 104). Aside from the newspapers that he delivered and read, Hinojosa was also influenced by radio shows that were transmitted in Mexico and in the Valley. While stationed in Puerto Rico, for instance, Hinojosa served as a radio-deejay and commentator during the very same years when his Puerto Rican counterparts Díaz Varcareel, P.J. Soto and painter Tufiño were returning from Korea, a war Hinojosa wrote about so eloquently.

His experience working on the radio conjured his stylistic form of preciseness and meticulousness in his writing. This did not come as something new, for in the Valley, one radio show that influenced Hinojosa was Américo Paredes’s *El músico y el poeta*. “Radio shows on the United States-Mexico border such as Paredes’s variety broadcast, *El músico y poeta*, and those of radio station era differed in one vital respect from earlier radio programs and from programs in other regions of the country” (Saldívar 47). The radio stations served a transnational audience and reflected a bilingual aesthetic, streaming their values and tastes across national airwaves and helping make the Rio Grande border, the romance center in America. The citizens of northern Mexico and South Texas received the same information comprised a transnational audience reflecting on a bilingual aesthetic and concise form of disseminating information. Hinojosa’s influence as a radio deejay was part of the author’s ongoing change in lifestyle and environment.

In *Estampas del Valle* the flow of time is arrested within a frame in which the perceptible, the observable is the focus of writing. Hinojosa dwells on this form having

characters represent themselves through monologues and dialogues, thus “capturing the speech of the people according to sociolinguistic strata rather than solely through a narrator’s description” (Calderón 158). The postcard, like the still frame delineates the free-flowing element of Hinojosa’s sketches. This gives the characters autonomy. Hinojosa allows the people in his sketches to explore at the margins of two nations. Hinojosa’s novel is a community’s traveling journal. His sketches act as a peregrination of wandering kaleidoscopic personalities.

Hinojosa’s Valley chronicles, or sketches, ironize religion and death. They challenge authority and highlight the weaknesses of those in power. No one is above the law in *Estampas del Valle*. Hinojosa uses variable styles and forms to challenge present hegemony in the Valley. He employs various narrative techniques to present actual historical data information. In *Estampas del Valle*, for example, he uses diaries, newspaper clippings, dialogues and monologues, letters, notes, anecdotal pieces as well as factual historical information. Hinojosa presents this information as an archive, a historical vault or treasure waiting to be found. The narrative archive is presented as a creative reality of South Texas. Hinojosa creates a geographical archive of the Valley. Derrida believes that the archive is both a place and a reflection of social and institutional authority.⁶ Hinojosa aims to breakdown historical institutional authority by showcasing a realistic approach of representation. Rolando implements various forms of writing and stylistic variations that echo Roberto González Echevarría’s work in *Myth and Archive*. In his novel Rolando foresees and creates his writing for various audiences by utilizing multiple genres and forms of transmitting historical facts. “In Spanish, a figurative meaning of the term *archive* is a person to whom is entrusted a secret or private knowledge (and who knows how to guard them) and there may be links to both arche (rule, command) and to Arcanum (secret). Thus, power, secrecy and law stand at the origin of the archive” (González Echevarría 31).

Por esas cosas que pasan: Analysis

In this section will analyze the sketch depicting the fatal stabbing of Ernesto Tamez in *Estampas del Valle*. This sketch, like the fatal stabbing of Santiago Nasar in Gabriel García Márquez’s *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, provides an epistemological archival paradigm. Hinojosa’s sketches are comprised by an array of genres and narrators. “Por esas cosas que pasan” presents the testimony of various characters that will come forward with depositions for a local crime. His writing is similar to the narratological structure of Latin American writers. González-Echevarría states, “Novels are never content with fiction; they must pretend to deal with the truth, a truth that lies behind the discourse of the ideology that gives them form. So, paradoxically enough, the truth with which they deal is fiction itself. That is to say, the fictions Latin American culture has created to understand itself. What is left is the opening up of an Archive or perhaps only the story about the opening of the Archive” (González Echevarría 18).

In “Por esas cosas que pasan”, Hinojosa provides the reader with an array of life-like situations and characters that make up Belken County. In some cases, the narrative

⁶ See Jacques Derrida. *Archive fever: a Freudian impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. Print.

pretends not to be fiction and showcases memos, depositions, police reports, diaries, monologues and confessions. The most persistent characteristic of books that have been called novels in the modern era is that they pretend not to be literature. “Por esas cosas que pasan” is an investigation that delves into the lives of several Belken County citizens involved both directly and indirectly in the fatal stabbing of Ernesto Tamez. It pretends not to be literature by providing an authentic and accurate account of a local murder case. The sketch is narrated from three points of view and incorporates an array of community voices.

As stated earlier, the creation of Belken County itself reminds the reader of other important fictional locations such as García-Márquez’s *Macondo* or Juan Rulfo’s *Comala*. This metafictional space finds an imaginary that fosters the archive and chronicle to be deciphered by the reader. “But in the writing of the novel a clearing has been reached, a metafictional space, a razing that becomes a starting point for the new Latin American narrative; the clearing for the building of Comala, Macondo, Coronel Vallejos, for the founding of the imaginary city containing all previous forms of Latin American narrative as well as the origins of the novel; a space for the Archive” (González Echevarría 17). Hinojosa’s archive, apart from having a narrative relationship with Latin American works, is also the founding archive for South Texas border literature. Hinojosa captures the essence of Valley life during a difficult historical phase. Factual documentation through fiction serves as an archive for this area and this community. Hinojosa’s novel mimics such documents to show their orthodoxy and conventionality. In the sketch of Ernesto Tamez, Hinojosa reflects on language and capers with various genres to reproduce the unraveling of a murder mystery through depositions and other types of legal documents.

The simulacrum of these official documents lends truth and validity to the sketch. The author mimics legal documents, to claim literariness. Hinojosa’s fictional archive attains narrative legitimacy by imitating historical facts through official documents. “The novel, or what is called the novel at various points in history, mimics such documents to show their conventionality, their subjection to strategies of textual engenderment similar to those governing literature, which in turn reflect those of language itself. It is through this simulacrum of legitimacy that the novel makes its contradictory and veiled claim to literariness”(González Echevarría 8). *Estampas del Valley* depends on the use of other forms of literary genres. This diverse literary experience leads to analysis of language and culture of this specific rural area. Hinojosa shares the intricate history, customs, rituals and traditions of the Rio Grande Valley. His fragmentary novel, as he chooses to call it, incorporates distinct genres as archives of history, revealing intricacies of this border. In “Por esas cosas que pasan”, Hinojosa breaks down cultural barriers by giving us an exclusive view of Belken County’s personalities. This piece demonstrates regional and rural small town politics. Like the archive, the novel hoards knowledge. Hinojosa’s novel is an exclusive form of knowledge of this region. Like the Archive’s, that knowledge is original and historically valuable. The possibility of true knowledge about the Rio Grande Valley, like the archive, is hidden in the sketches. The reader must examine the sketches as valuable historical artifacts.

González-Echevarría states, “In the beginning that power was the law, but later, other origins replaced it, though preserving the seal of that initial pact between power and writing. The modern novel retains those origins and the structure that made them

possible. While the knowledge kept there is difficult to plumb, hence its secretiveness, it is not private, but on the contrary common property. It can be read, and it is indeed read” (González Echevarría 32-33). Hinojosa’s novel holds the secret of a community. By interpreting the sketches, the reader discovers the inner workings of the Valley structure, like that of a beehive. The intricacies of the novel’s sketches can be explored through Hinojosa’s varied narrative style. The very act of reading and sharing that knowledge assumes the form of ritual, of celebrating the common knowledge, the transpersonal history. “Archives keep the secrets of the state; novels keep the secrets of culture, and the secret of those secrets” (González Echevarría 33).

In 1972, the Chicano and Spanish language periodical *El Grito* published Hinojosa’s short story “Por esas cosas que pasan”. The sketch follows the stabbing and killing of Ernesto Tamez at a local bar by Baldemar Cordero. This part of the novel consists of a number of legal documents such as transcriptions and recorded testimonies by various witnesses and by the defendant. He also uses fabricated news clippings, seemingly arbitrary footnotes, and fictitious quotations among other innovative styles to present his legal case. These legal documents are written in English and in Spanish showcasing the bilingual or interlingual nature of the Rio Grande Valley community. “Newspaper clippings from the local Anglo newspaper precede and conclude the story. The slapdash Anglo journalism, indifferent to Mexican ball room brawls, is starkly offset against the deeply personal statements of those involved and thus vividly documents the kind of justice Chicanos are bound to expect from an Anglo public and its judicial system.” (Zilles 7) Hinojosa’s juxtaposition of the contrasting elements involving the case of Tamez such as the slapdash Anglo journalism and the personal and emotional depositions of community members give the reader a unique view into a border cultural archive.

In “Por esas cosas que pasan” Baldemar Cordero, 30 years old, stabs Ernesto Tamez, also 30 in a local bar brawl. Part of this narrative is in the form of a testimony presenting depositions by witnesses. Baldemar Cordero’s lawyer, Romeo Hinojosa, bearing the same initials and same last name as the author, Rolando Hinojosa, handles these testimonies. His brother-in-law, a lawyer, raised Hinojosa and he married one too. Rolando Hinojosa’s middle name is Romeo. We can interpret Hinojosa’s literary cameo as a form of providing a voice for a community that has been historically absent from literature and misrepresented in Anglo history books. Romeo Hinojosa, the lawyer, is a close friend and confidant of many of the townspeople and knows the true nature of the accused man and the deceased man. Hinojosa the author is a mediator between the real Hinojosa and Hinojosa the lawyer. Hinojosa creates Romeo Hinojosa to further infiltrate the community he writes about. He becomes part of the fictional world that he created. His chronicle becomes more accurate and intimate. He is reporting both introspectively and extrospectively. Baldemar Cordero’s testimony portrays him as a vulnerable Mexican man that knows what he has done and is not trying to escape the consequences. Baldemar Cordero is not able to provide accurate information about the brawl in his testimony. He declares, “No hay que darle vueltas. Yo maté a Ernesto Tamez en la cantina *Aquí me quedo*. No me pida detalles porque ni yo mismo sé como fue. Pero no tiene vuelta de hoja el tal Ernesto; lo dejé tieso” (Hinojosa 70). His testimony is interesting because it seems like a written declaration, yet it is a *grabación magnetofónica*.

There are various levels of language and communication that take place within every deposition. Hinojosa the author creates multifarious levels of narrative voices in the depositions. The first layer is what we read in *Estampas del Valle*, the second layer is the recording of the depositions, the third is the transcription of the deposition and the fourth layer is the lawyer's notary of the declaration. In his deposition, Cordero admits to the crime and continues to provide his version of what happened the night of the murder. Hinojosa's fiction is blurred with a blend of reality when dates of actual newspaper clippings and other invented and created quotes and depositions are taken for a literary truth. In "Por esas cosas que pasan", Hinojosa creates legal documents to examine the case of Ernesto Tamez. In this case, fiction is aiming to emulate reality and reality is created by fiction. Baldemar Cordero justifies his actions against Tamez by describing how Tamez would bully him and other customers at the bar. Baldemar Cordero is described as a calm man, patient and with good manners. He shows remorse for his reaction to Tamez's bullying. He states, "Hice mal, lo reconozco, pero a veces también pienso que si Ernesto me insultara de nuevo, pues de nuevo lo mataría. La verdad, uno nunca aprende" (Hinojosa 95). His emotions get the best of him. Hinojosa demonstrates that everyone has a breaking point and that things are not always as they seem. Sometimes the good guys can also be the bad guys. The people of the town do not hate Baldemar for his actions; instead they provide him with support and bring him coffee to the police station where he is being interrogated. They keep him company to explain what he must do next. He does not know how to handle this matter legally so he turns himself in to police. He did not try to run from his wrongdoing, "Ni traté de correr. ¿Para qué? Y, a dónde me iba si todos me conocían? [...] Cuando llegé don Manuel yo mismo le entregué la navaja y me fui con él en su carro cuando acabó lo que tenía que hacer. Después, al bote, ya ve" (Hinojosa 95). Baldemar demonstrates that he is brave and responsible for his actions.

Cultural Misconceptions

The closing remarks for Cordero are his worries about reporting to work for his Anglo boss. "Dígale a Mr. Royce que mañana no estaré en el jale" (Hinojosa 95). Baldemar is more concerned with disappointing his Anglo boss than he is with the actual situation. He believes that he was a victim of his circumstances and the bullying of Tamez. Tamez had bullied Cordero for months and now, people believed, he got exactly what he deserved. Romeo Hinojosa takes the town's declarations in relation to this occurrence. Unlike the Anglo newspapers, Hinojosa is committed to telling the truth about Belken County citizens. He presents the real story, the real history of the area and its people. Hinojosa wants to show that what may seem as insignificant to the lawyer or even the reader is in actuality an affirmation of the work ethic and the dynamic of the communal feeling. Balde's sister states, "Balde es noble y trabajador, es más, cuando salía de casa a cervecar se apartaba de pleitos lo más que podía para no faltar en casa" (Hinojosa 96). Marta's words show a lack of control on Balde's side. Her declaration assumes that there are other natural, perhaps evil forces that will, at some point or another, force her brother into an unwarranted *pleito*. Sharing space with the enemy can lead to dangerous paths, she believes. "Conste que vivir en el mismo pueblo, casi en el mismo barrio, y soportarle tantas barrabasadas es cosa de mucha paciencia" (Hinojosa 97). One can only have so much restraint. Hinojosa demonstrates how even the calmest

and most responsible of beings have a limit when dealing with abuse or prolonged violence. Cordero's protest to Tamez's cruelty that he endured for so long is a metaphor for the cruelty that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have endured in the South Texas border. At some point, Hinojosa believes, enough is enough. The world is not a just place and Hinojosa demonstrates that in the Southwest, the citizens of Belken County and other rural communities must take the law into their own hands. Romeo Hinojosa, the lawyer in the sketch aims to clear Baldemar Cordero's name. He objectively records the depositions of the accounts in the sketch. Through his responsibilities as a lawyer, he unravels the true story of what happened at the *Aquí me quedo* bar.

Baldemar's sister Marta affirms that Hinojosa is familiar with the family and its history. He is a family friend and a local of Belken County as well. He knows the community members and their history and reputations. "Usted conoce a Balde desde niño y, como decía papá, qué quiere que le diga" (Hinojosa 96). Marta gives the reader the impression that everyone knows everyone else in town. Genealogy, once again, plays a big role in the characteristics of family and community members in *Estampas del Valle*. "Los Tamez son bastante raros. Cuando vivían en el Rebaje, parece que esa gente andaba de pleitos con los vecinos y con medio mundo" (Hinojosa 96). This proves that the Tamez family was not a family of morals, but one that brought trouble to the area. Don Manuel, the town's policeman, offers to help with the Cordero's family's expenses when Balde goes to jail. Baldemar was the sole purveyor of his family. He was responsible for providing food and housing for his mother and his sister. He was employed as a cherry tomato picker for Mr. Royce, a local Anglo agriculturist. Romeo Hinojosa records Baldemar's deposition or confession and is able to display the true nature of Baldemar Cordero. Even in his last moments as a free man, he does not worry about the consequences of the law, but instead worries about not being able to provide for his family. He also worries about disappointing his boss by not showing up to work without prior notice. He kindly asks Romeo Hinojosa, his lawyer, to relate the message to his boss. Don Manuel, the local policeman knows that Baldemar is a good man and promises to provide for his family in his absence.

Hinojosa displays the irony of law versus man. The community believes that Baldemar was only defending himself from Tamez and feels a great pain having to lose a community member to the consequences of the written law. Don Manuel, the policeman knows that what Balde did was not out of malice, but out of frustration and anger. In small rural areas, the community members know each other and can judge a crime depending on the people that have committed it. Justice is flexible and malleable because each man stands for the reputation he holds in the community.

Romeo Hinojosa, Attorney at Law, plays a crucial role in this murder case. Hinojosa and his documents flow between Spanish and English demonstrating the interlingual nature of the community members, including the lawyer. In the sketch, Romeo records the depositions given in English, yet documents them in Spanish. "Lo que sigue es la declaración en inglés que hizo Beto Castañeda, hoy, el 17 de marzo de 1970, en el despacho del señor Roberto A. Chapman, asistente del procurador por el condado de Belken" (Hinojosa 83). The criss-cross of languages is evident, yet there is a direct reference to a preference of language in Belken County and in Hinojosa's writing. Romeo Hinojosa shifts between the two languages culturally and professionally. The deposition of Mr. Castañeda, Balde Cordero's brother, in the presence of an interpreter, is

given in English. Mr. Castañeda's English is linguistically distinct and grammatically incorrect. It represents the stereotypical broken English of a Spanish speaker. Mr. Castañeda excludes auxiliary verbs, plurals and verb conjugations. His spoken English emulates the linguistic variations of the Spanish language. He is translating what he wants to say before he says it. Mr. Castañeda thinks in Spanish then shifts his thoughts to English for the deposition. He speaks of Balde as a good man and as his fellow employee as a tomato packer in the Royce-Fedders Company. He also recounts the night of the "accident" affirming that Baldemar lost his patience with Ernesto's aggressive bullying.

With each growing testimony for the *State vs. Cordero* one feels more inclined to be on the Cordero side of the case. It is also evident that Castañeda feels more comfortable and familiar with the Spanish language. "It is there where I tell Balde a joke about the drunk guy who is going to his house and he hear the clock in the corner make two sounds. You know that one? Well, this drunk guy he hear the clock go bong-bong and he say that the clock is wrong for it give one o'clock two-time. Well, Balde think that is funny ... Anyway, when I tell the joke in Spanish it's better" (Hinojosa 97). Gilberto Castañeda wants to make sure that his deposition provides his brother-in-law an image of a family man and a patient man that was brought to his extremes by a bad guy.

The last part of "Por esas cosas que pasan" is an excerpt from the *Klail City Enterprise-News* on August 24, 1970. The *Klail City Enterprise-News* is an Anglo newspaper. The Anglo newspaper states that Baldemar Cordero received a fifteen-year sentence for the fatal stabbing of Ernesto Tamez. It has an air of judgment when it accuses the men of fighting over a "hostess" at the bar that night. By adding this last touch, Hinojosa demonstrates that stereotypes do not disappear. Now, the reader has gotten to know the real Baldemar Cordero through various depositions. Hinojosa's ironic nature comes through in this narrative. His perfect navigation between two languages produces an accurate picture of the Valley community. The Anglo newspaper, once again, has misinterpreted the incident at the local bar. It pigeonholes Mexicans into a category of violent men. Hinojosa the lawyer and Hinojosa the author fight against this generalization and misinterpretation of the Mexican community by the local *gringos*. The Anglo newspaper creates an even bigger gap between Belken County Mexicans and the local Anglos. The death of Ernesto Tamez does not surprise the community. Instead it showcases the true identity of the people of Belken County.

Hinojosa uses the notion of death and the legal and historical archive to announce the truth. Hinojosa also uses the notion of death in other forms in his narrative. The false cultural conceptions that the *gringos* have of Mexican culture are also illustrated in the area of religion and folklore. The following chapter will discuss the use of folklore and superstition as a form of counter-hegemony within the Chicano community.

Chapter Five

To say that Mexico abandoned its people would not be false, because Mexico abandons all poor Mexicans. The poor choose the American dream and the American way of life on the other side of the border, because they don't see a future for themselves in their own country.

– *Elena Pontiatowska*

Folklore: Counter-Hegemony

Hinojosa's sketches render flexibility. *Estampas del Valle* incorporates a myriad of cultural elements including folklore and religion. These stories make up an array of community occurrences that expand practical knowledge and the understanding of local traditional customs and beliefs. Religion and folklore are often elements mixed in mysterious ways in rural settings. We can see this in the stories of Rolando Hinojosa, Tomás and novels such as Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*. Rolando Hinojosa, like Américo Paredes, incorporates folkloric elements of the Valley to build cultural opposition to hegemonic national limitations. "Folklore designates the continuing problematic that constitute the popular wisdoms and traditions of the folk, ones that do not always line up in neat patterns of organized opposition to the authorized histories of the nation" (Saldívar 57). Américo Paredes is a firm believer that folklore remembers, and works by building its own timeless world out of a shattered and scattered history. Folklore, then, functions as a way of preserving history.

Antonio Gramsci, for example, proposes that folklore should be studied as a conception of world and life as one. For Gramsci folklore represents a world-view that is in opposition to the official world-view, or the conceptions of the world held by the dominant hegemony.¹ In this way folklore is vital in bringing about the "birth of a new culture among the broad masses" (Gramsci, Forgacs and Nowell-Smith 189). Therefore, seeing myth as truth is the beginning of creating counter-hegemony. The amalgamation of elements of life, customs and religion in *Estampas del Valle* bring into being the folkloric aspects and Mexican traditions of the South Texas Border in the Rio Grande Valley. In *Estampas del Valle*, Rolando Hinojosa also represents a unique perspective on death, which in some ways resembles Gabriel Garcia-Márquez's and other Latin American writers. For example, for Jehú, death signifies abandonment and sorrow of bereavement. Pain, however, is not the only sentiment expressed by those affected by the demise of others because pain also brings guilt and danger.

In the case of Bruno Cano, he was unable to avoid the consequences of his death. The community, ironically, redeems Bruno Cano at his funeral by singing Easter resurrection music. The irreverence shown toward two imperatives, death and church, normally addressed solemnly, is brought about through the narrator's humoristic, matter-of-fact imagery. Through characters that succeed through intelligence and cunning, the writer asserts his faith in Chicano survival. Hinojosa's interpretation of human mortality reflects his reality as a Chicano. Through this theme he synthesizes his Mexican heritage

¹ Antonio Gramsci 1891-1937., David Forgacs, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. *Selections from*

and his circumstance in the United States. As a consequence of having this nation as his native land, he is preoccupied with Mexican American survival.

Death & Abandonment

A close relationship with death is vivid in Mexican tradition. *Día de los muertos*, or day of the dead, is a celebration of death to remember those that we've lost. This theory is presented with much eloquence in the digital short Mexican Calavera Films production [Hasta los huesos](#).² Mexico has a unique way of emphasizing that life after death exists. One of the most notable sketches in Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*, is the short story "Lying to with Sails Set" or "Huérfano y al paio". Hinojosa uses the voice of a young man and war veteran in his early thirties to speak about himself as a child. He recounts his particular experience with death and superstitious religious rituals. In this sketch, Jehú Malacara reminisces, "Conocí la muerte y su finalidad cuando no había llegado yo a los siete años de edad" (Hinojosa 29). The narrator has an intimate relationship with death.

In this sketch, death is seen as a feminine figure just as we saw in the digital short film *Hasta los huesos*. Death is personified as woman representing the untimely death of his mother at a young age. Death becomes her. Jehú first encounters the presence of death at the age of six. Jehú, a young and helpless boy, loses his mother. His father, meanwhile, is drinking at a local *cantina* and does not show moral support for his son. He is advised not to look for his father in the *cantina del Cano* at the time of his mother's death. Jehú Malacara, like Rafa Buenrostro is one of the characters that tie this novel together. Although Belken County is composed of hundreds of characters, some of them with a more prominent presence than others, Jehú and Rafa are the connecting vines of the plot in Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*. The novel follows the life of Jehú as a young man into adulthood and the adversities that he encounters as a parentless child.

Jehú's mother is the first of his parents to die. Hinojosa creates a sense of abandonment such as Juan Rulfo's "Paso del Norte". Jehú's mother's untimely death leaves Jehú in a solitary life with an alcoholic father. She was the only person that looked after Jehú, his father being a less active participant. His mother's burial takes place not far from San Pedro, a town with a Mexican name on the American side of the border, further connecting the regional space to its Mexican influences. Jehú resides in the city of Relámpago, or "lightening" in English. Hinojosa gives the reader the impression that this boy's future was truck by lightning. Jehú and his dad visit his mother's grave every month until his father also passes away. Hinojosa's ironic tone shines through in the tragic death of Jehú's father because ironically, Jehú's father passes away in the midst of telling his son a joke. The irony that Hinojosa presents in his narrative is present in the untimely death of the boy's father in the middle of a humorous conversation. He further stretches this sense of irony and dark humor when years later, the narrator, Jehú, is more bothered by the fact that he could not remember the joke his dad was telling at the moment of his death. Jehú seems more preoccupied with remembering the joke than with the actual death of his father. Death becomes a constant

² See:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR_hPPV8td8&feature=BFa&list=FLSPLLrySiqnj2KwI-ATd3Zw&lf=mh_lolz

way of life for Jehú. Death in this instance, like in other parts of Hinojosa's novel, is seen as humorous, echoing José Posada's comedic sketches about death within Mexican culture. The reader can imagine Posada's interpretation of this sketch as a skeletal figure telling a joke story to his son.

The form in which Jehú's father leaves him ironizes tragedy. Jehú's familial support system is nonexistent after the death of both his parents – his father's incomplete joke becomes a metaphor for the incomplete relationships that he lived alongside his parents. As part of his survival mode and in an attempt to suppress pain, Jehú learns to focus on the nuisances such as his preoccupation with remembering the joke his father was reciting at the time of his death. Jehú only remembers that his father died one day, "just like that" as he was telling him a joke. "A mi mama la enterramos no muy lejos de San Pedro y la visitaba cada mes con papá hasta que él, también, se murió así, de repente, sin aviso, mientras me contaba un chiste que ahora, veinticinco años más tarde, todavía no me he podido acordar de qué se trataba" (Hinojosa 29). Jehu loses his father in a double sense. He saw his father as more of an older brother than a father figure. Jehú, then, loses an older brother and a parent in the same person. His memory becomes blurred and obfuscated to hide the pain that he must feel from the loss of both his parents, his only close family. This ironic juxtaposition of the joke and death is typical in Hinojosa's writing, but as Jehú recounts the day, he does not seem to see the irony; instead, he rather naively goes on to say that the day his father died was the day that a "knockabout carnny troupe" arrived in his hometown. Jehú's apparent innocence of the black humor attending the circumstances of his father's death is also typical of Hinojosa.

Ritualistic Abandonment: Tía Chedes

When Jehú's father passed, he was brought back to the city and left alone in the park as the people of the town passed him by and continued with their lives. They left the boy alone at the park without anyone to look after him. Jehu's aunt and new guardian did not attend the funeral because she believed that anyone that went near a funeral would also encounter death. Hinojosa shows the vulnerability of Belken citizens and their dedication to cultural folklore and superstition. These rural superstitions are an integral part of this community because they define the relationship between the characters. The boy could not count on the rest of this family and is left to figure things out on his own. His relationship with death becomes a solitary one. He experiences a sense of abandonment from his dead parents, from the funeral attendants, and from the people that left him alone at the park.

Once he arrives at his aunt's house he realizes that her crying makes made him uneasy:

La cosa es que así que sepultamos a mi papá, a mí me dejaron solo esa tarde y no teniendo más que hacer fui a casa de la tía Chedes para ver a mis primos. Cuando la inútil de mi tía me vio, empezó a llorar y a hacer sus papeles. Por poco le doy la espalda y me pongo a correr porque, la verdad, aunque sentí mucho la muerte de mi papá, siempre le consideré como el hermano mayor que nunca tuve. Su memoria, pues, me era muy otra a la que se imaginaría mi tía Chedes y se me hacía que sus papeles estaban de más. (Hinojosa 30)

Her crying brings him to analyze the relationship that he had with his father – he realizes that he saw his father as more of an older brother. Jehú, then, will seek a father figure in the community. His father figure will come through the carny group that Jehú joins. Although Jehú is just a boy, he realizes that relationships differ from person to person. His aunt’s crying scares him more than the actual death of his father. He calls her mourning an act of charades and an overstated performance, “empezó a llorar y a hacer sus papeles”. Jehú realizes that his aunt’s reaction is an exaggerated version of his own view of his father’s death. The aunt’s behavior is an attempt to amalgamate her spirituality to the connection with death. She is crying for the sake of death, not for Jehú’s father.

Upon arriving at his aunt Chedes’s house, her crying puts him in distress; he does not understand it. Moments ago she was ironing clothes exhibiting normal behavior and now she was ballistic. The shift in emotions puzzled Jehú. His aunt is mourning in a way that is frightening him; he wonders why she has to cry for something that he thinks she does not feel. The aunt proceeds to stare at him and then stare into space. Jehú is alone and confused. His aunt put a finger in her mouth and filled a large glass with water. She proceeded to stick that finger in the water and make the sign of the cross in the air and then on Jehú’s forehead. Meanwhile Jehú is utterly confused. He is amazed at the spectacle before him because it is something new and out of the ordinary. The end of this sketch recounts the spiritual or religious encounter that he has with his aunt upon arriving at her house after the burial of his father in the nearby town of San Pedro:

Al rato se le quitó el llorido y se quedo con el hipo sempiterno; como la pobre era tan bruta, luego luego me preguntó que qué andaba hacienda por la vecindad. Por poco me echo a reír pero me detuve y le dije que venía a jugar con los primos. En esto estábamos cuando de repente, la tía Chedes se llevó el dedo índice a la boca y colocó la plancha en el hierro y se fue a la caja de hielo de donde me trajo un vaso de agua fría. Metió el dedo cordial en el vaso, me hizo la señal de la cruz en la frente y dijo: “Bébetela de un jalón mientras rezo un Padrenuestro al revés y hoy conocerás a tu nuevo padre. (Hinojosa 30)

Tía Chedes performs this religious ritual to present the boy to his “new father” and put him in the hands of God. Her offering to God is also a form of disconnection. She uses religion to unhinge herself from responsibilities as his guardian. She makes this prophesy hoping Jehú will find a new family. She does not plan to take part in the nurturing or raising Jehú; instead she blesses him so that others around him will take care of him. She alarms Jehú when she insists on praying “Our Father” backwards as she commands him to drink the “holy” water she has prepared by sticking her finger in the glass of cold water. Jehú’s aunt instructs him to drink the tall glass of “holy” water in one gulp. He is confused and taken back by what is happening, especially by his aunt’s behavior and with much hesitation, proceeds to drink the water. He follows the instruction of his aunt to appease her religious wishes; he does not want to offend her despite his obvious repugnance. He also does not know if what she is saying is actually true; he begins his journey with religion as a ritualistic offering. Jehú is doubtful of the

ritual, yet it is his curiosity or the need not to deny his aunt's "blessing" that made him proceed with the ritual that his aunt performed. Jehú follows his aunt's instructions for two reasons: because he does not dare say no and because he believes she may have good intentions. Ironically, she abandons him like everyone else around him.

The sketch story ends with the prayer "Our Father" being recited backwards. What is the significance of the "Our Father" recited backwards? Jehú's aunt combines her Catholic beliefs with her own folk adaptation of a blessing in addition to her rendition of holy water. It is a ritual that has been formed by local religious superstitions and customs in relation to death. Jehú encountered death at a young age. His life began full of sorrow with the death of his mother and father. Perhaps Aunt Chedes believed Jehú was under a negative spell: in the hands of evil. The only way to reverse this negativity would be to do things backwards. So, using her finger as a cross, she placed the symbol of the cross on his forehead and forces him drink the holy water while she prays backwards. In a baptism, the person that is being baptized has holy water poured on their forehead and sometimes their entire bodies.

In the Bible, for example, the bodies of those being baptized were dipped in a river. In the present Catholic Church a child is baptized by pouring holy water over the child's head. In this case of Jehu, the opposite is happening. Aunt Chedes believes that Jehú has had his brush with evil and she is attempting to flush this out of his system. Instead of pouring water on him like a baptism, she makes him ingest the holy water in order to wash his soul. This is the crucial point in Jehú's life that marks the start of his journey as an orphan. Jehú intuitively recognizes the subtle rejection intimated in the odd procedure. Although the unlikely ritual that combines superstitious folklore with the Lord's Prayer perplexes him, at age nine he takes his life into his own hands. As prophesied by Tía Chedes, Jehú meets his new father in the person of Don Víctor Peláez, proprietor of the Peláez Tent Show. The contrast between Jehú's life as an orphan to his life as a member of the *maromas* group is symbolic. This shift in his life stands for a new beginning. Jehú gets a true chance for survival, he gets a breath of fresh air from his streak of bad luck. In this group, he learns what its like to have a family, especially a father figure. Hinojosa shows that his characters are fighters; they are survivors.

The title of this sketch, "Lying to with Sails Set", relates to a journey. He is taking a pseudo-religious journey cleansing his soul and ridding his future of evil by participating in his aunt's ritual. Jehú is about to embark on a solitary journey. The narrator has set sail and is prepared to face what might come. Jehú's name is symbolic. It stands for the eleventh king of Israel and a warrior from 841 to 814 a. C. The religious folklore that is present in Hinojosa's writing is reminiscent of other folk religious rites like the following of Juan Soldado and Jesús Malverde in Tijuana, Mexico. Hinojosa finishes this *estampa* with an ellipsis, which symbolizes continuity and doubt. It signals a future that is to commence that will lead Jehú to a revelatory experience. Rolando Hinojosa has used Jehú and the story of his life as a storyline that holds the narrative together. His relationship with other townspeople and with other Belken community members gives Hinojosa's writing a clear continuity within his sketches.

This ritual is being performed on his body; his body is a representation of his ties with the community. He must cleanse himself with this holy water that will pass through his body. It is a superstitious performance that marks Jehú's body. The society that surrounds Jehú has chosen to perform this ritual as a blessing and as a form of riddance;

riddance of guilt on behalf of society for abandoning this child and riddance of supposed evil that follows and surrounds Jehú. His relationship with death changes as he forms new relationships with other members of the community particularly the *maromas* troupe. Jehú's notion of death changes as the novel progresses. The death of his parents brought confusion and abandonment. The death of his adoptive father, however, was truly detrimental to Jehú's spirit. He learned to be part of a family. His aunt's prophetic ritual brought him closer to his dreams.

Peláez Maromas Troupe

To take the notion of humor and death to the next level, on the day of his father's death, when Jehú is nine years of age, the *maromas* or the traveling circus arrives Relámpago. Jehú leaves with the Peláez *maromas* troupe. "Cuando él murió yo tenía unos nueve años y tocó la casualidad que el día del entierro llegó lo que nosotros llamábamos las maromas" (Hinojosa 29). Jehú associates this circus with the death of his father. It is ironic that a circus arrives in the town on the same day that his father died while telling a joke. Hinojosa plays with circumstances of dark humor. Hinojosa transcends linguistic space into cultural and sociolinguistic space when he uses colloquial phrases in his writing, such as the Mexican saying, "*cagarse de la risa*", then immediately goes on to apologize for the "crudeness". "En otras ocasiones, otros señores, o quizá los mismos, porque eso dependía del tamaño de la carpa y del número de tripulantes, hacían chistes de la gente que vivía en el Relámpago o en el pueblo que estuvieran y todo el public se cagaba de la risa (con perdón)" (Hinojosa 29). The death of Jehú's father coincides with the arrival of a knockabout carny group that arrived in the city of Relámpago. This traveling *maromas troupe* is reminiscent of the gypsy traveling *carpas* in *Cien Años de Soledad*. Both troupes travel along small rural towns offering entertainment for the locals. In this story there is an interesting element in terms of the character's narrative in relation to the narrative of those that have arrived in Relámpago. The death of the father has been replaced with a show by the carnies that have arrived in town. His immediate family has been replaced with a group of traveling artists eager to enthrall the community.

The *maromas* group, like the *carpas*, brought new developments to nearby towns by way of storytelling. The mocking nature of this gesture ironizes the culture of death within Mexican tradition. Humor and entertainment become an integral part of Jehú's life. Upon arrival, the carnies try their best to entertain Remlámpagans because, according to Hinojosa, they are a very difficult crowd to please. The community members of Relámpago are not easily affected by death, as they are not easily entertained. The difficult rural elements of Relámpago make this a difficult crowd. The spectators expect a unique blend of truth, irony, humor and tragedy to be entertained. The acts that pleased this community the most were stories about the actual townspeople and the people of nearby neighboring cities gossip reigned supreme. The carnival and carnies began to function as a sort of local newspaper, keeping oral tradition and the act of storytelling alive. Hinojosa contends that relativity is important. The literature of his sketches filled with portraits of the Valley is relevant within the Chicano border sphere and beyond. In this sketch, death is transformed as an opportunity to take the stage. Jehú now finds himself surrounded by a hyperbolic familial substructure.

Storytelling: Traveling Maromas

“Huérfino al paio” takes a modern spin on Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller”. Information is disseminated through a traveling oral history from the perspective of the outsider. The carny is an outsider that sees his community from afar, yet forms close ties by collecting stories and news from one local community to another in an effort to entertain. *Maromas* has gained autonomy through the voice of the community. This group will survive with success as an oral enterprise if their storytelling performances are related to the actual daily lives of the citizens of Belken County. Jehú, for example, is the personification of Hinojosa’s work and his interpretation of the Valley’s preservation of history through memory. It is Jehú, as an orphan, that must find his own place in the Valley. The *maromas* troupe entertains Replámpagans; they are very difficult to please. The acts that entertain this community were stories about the actual townspeople and the people of nearby neighboring cities. It is a traveling story like that of Walter Benjamin’s storyteller. The townspeople become oral storytellers that keep the history of the community alive. This particular sketch emphasizes the importance of an oral communication within a region. It is a sort of traveling gossip column.

Hinojosa highlights the importance of oral tradition in *Estampas del Valle* as part of disseminating culture and part of culture itself. The *maromas* and their traveling troupe provide three-dimensional images of the communities of Belken County. They form new memories and preserve oral culture through these memories. The entertainment, like the community, is always in a constant state of transition. Oral tradition was well studied – the people of the carny troupe knew these communities well enough to create humor and a storyline around the information for the purpose of entertainment. Several Chicano communities in Belken County are united through the humor of the carny troupe. Their stories are relevant and they are being carried from one city to another. Communication, particularly about other members of the community, is what thrives in this land of Relámpago. Rolando Hinojosa maintains that the lives of the people in these communities are entangled – community engagement is key. Thus, the carnies must adjust to these communities’ humoristic style to have success as oral storytellers and comedians. Jehú, like the *maromas troupe*, is a character that lives within these two spaces. He is a neutral medium malleable to his successive circumstances within the novel – just like the oral tradition of storytelling for the troupe – Hinojosa highlights malleability and adaptability as a survival skill within the community. He emphasizes how to survive on the periphery. Memory becomes a focal point of survival. Hinojosa and Rivera illustrate that memory holds a special place and families will go to any lengths to fortify that memory.

Benjamin believes that less and less frequently we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. The experiences heard, transformed and told by the *maromas* group exemplify the importance of oral history and traditional storytelling in the literature of Hinojosa. The storyteller, suggests, Benjamin, like Hinojosa, takes what he tells from experience. Storytelling is an artisan form of communication illustrating that cultural agency is a powerful tool for autonomy. Rolando Hinojosa’s *estampas* are not singular disconnected stories. They are a woven layer of tales that transport oral tradition through intricate layers. Hinojosa’s sketches are analogous to the stories carried by the *maromas* group from one town to the next. The traveling storyteller uses narrative and humor as a common thread. This particular short story emphasizes the importance of an

oral community and the value of communication within local communities. Hinojosa demonstrates that these communities are self-reflective and find relevant humor entertaining. Humor by association is a form of self-reflection and a form of bringing life's harshness into a lighter frame of thought. Humor is a form of survival. The humor that the people of the *maromas* bring to the townspeople is a survival tool. The carnival depends on the lives of the people of the community to create their entertainment. The community and the *maromas* troupe become interdependent. The information changes from one town to the next. The carny group becomes a walking encyclopedia of the local region.

This information about others is being disseminated amongst the locals. Depending on the town that the carnival is addressing or entertaining, the information must change every time. This illustrates that oral tradition was something that was well studied – the people of the carnival knew these communities well enough to create comedy and a storyline around gossip. Communication, particularly about other members of the community, is what thrives in this land of Relámpago. Since the population of Belken County has lived some hardships comedy may not be at the top of the list of priorities. Therefore they are harder to please and more difficult to entertain. In Rolando Hinojosa's novels, communities are embroiled; community engagement is essential. The relativity of the humor is the base of success for the local *maromas* troupe.

Tía Panchita & Rafa Buenrostro

Superstitious and folkloric elements comprise an important part of Hinojosa's fiction. His portrayal of matriarchal figures in *Estampas del Valle* gives us a true panorama of a Mexican Valley life. Folk-healers have long been present within this primarily peasant and immigrant population located throughout that area lying south of the city of San Antonio and east to the Gulf Coast from Laredo. Rolando Hinojosa portrays older women in *Estampas del Valle* as shaman protectors of the community. Folklore and religion blend to amalgamate culture and border traditions. The sketches of Tía Panchita and Tía Chedes represent folkloric customs and beliefs of the Rio Grande Valley combined with that of Northern Mexico.

In *Estampas del Valle* the story of "La tía Panchita" touches on rituals, rites and superstition. It is a blend of religious and folkloric elements synonymous to the blend of culture and language found in Belken County. This sketch recounts the tale of a young boy being "cured" with an egg by his "aunt". The community uses the term "aunt" in this sketch, as a term of endearment and respect. Tía Panchita's ability to gain and hold the confidence of her neighbors is due in part to the fact that she fulfills cultural expectations of the role of curer. She is the community's older aunt and matriarch that cures all. In Mexican superstition it is believed that if one is rubbed down with an egg, this takes away all the evil that has been brought to our body and soul by other people and by spirits. In Mexican folklore, it is a sound cure for a case of the "evil eye". In this case, we can look at religion as a type of folklore. Tomás Rivera, for example, has explored popular religion through the point of view of a child and the influences that adults have had on the religious beliefs of this child. Hinojosa and Rivera tell us that not even children can escape from religious thought formations, especially in rural areas. In these two works, religion and folklore are represented in a feminine light.

Religion is feminine, communitarian and performed in ritual. It is helpful to analyze this as a popular view of religion or religion of the masses such as the works by Paul Vanderwood about the reverence of Juan Soldado in Tijuana or *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gomez* by John Rechy. It is a religion by and for the people. Catholic schools of thought have been appropriated by the masses and modified to fit their lifestyles and their folkloric beliefs. In these cases, religion is enhanced by culture:

In order to perform his or her role "properly," the healer should be "at the service of the public, "and respond to each request for assistance. In this capacity, he or she should not impose a fixed charge for services, but rather operate on the basis of relative means and reciprocal exchange. In addition, the healing role should be performed without overt display of fear, doubt, or diffidence. The requirement of a relatively selfless personality is closely associated with the belief that it is basically "un-Christian" to profit from the suffering and ills of humanity. The healer should also acknowledge the omniscient presence of God as the ultimate source of health and well-being. If requested, services rendered may also include efforts toward the solution of personal and social problems. (V. Romano 1153)

Community beliefs take over the medical and religious duties of the common world. The healer role orients the individual toward communality.

Folklore: Evil Eye

La Tía Panchita reminds us of the folkloric customs and beliefs used to cure sick people in rural areas of Mexico. "La Tía Panchita extrajo un huevo pardo de la bolsa de provisión y lo cruzó por la cara de Rafa Buenrostro. Después hizo otra señal de la cruz cubriendo el cuerpo entero del enfermo y empezó su rezo" (Hinojosa 54). The notion of "curar con un huevo" or of a *curandera* are part of local community beliefs. For Rolando Hinojosa it is important to demonstrate that these types of customs exist in the Rio Grande Valley, on the American side of the border. Tía Panchita's communal responsibilities supersede that of a professional medical doctor and a local priest. With the support of the locals she embodies a combination of both. Her work is seen as an invaluable component of community life, she has the ability to combine religious and folkloric elements to find a cure for a strange illness or to baptize a child. Hinojosa creates binaries in his sketches. In the Catholic Church, folklore and superstition are frowned upon.

The figure of Tía Panchita is able to extract the positive elements of several schools of thought such as medicine, religion and superstition to provide a thorough service for the citizens of Belken County. Her "bag of provisions" exemplifies her popularity and demand within the community; she must be prepared at all times. Tía Panchita grabs the egg and rubs the boy's body; he has been sick with chills and a fever that has caused him to stutter inexplicably. When she is rubbing the boy's body with the egg, she makes the sign of the cross. Once again, Hinojosa creates an image of an existing cultural blend in the Rio Grande Valley and rural Mexico. Rafa displays serious signs of illness. The importance of Tía Panchita's role is exemplified in the trust that the

community has of the results that she renders. She knows them all personally and is able to find a specialized cure varying from individual to individual and from illness to illness. Unlike a common medical doctor, her service combines science, religion and folk tradition. There are explicit Mexican traditions and folkloric gestures that Hinojosa highlights in his writing.

In this example, a young man, Rafa Buenrostro, is brought to Tía Panchita's home for some medical help because "ayer empezó a tartamudear y ahora ahí está titereteando con calentura" (Hinojosa 41). Tía Panchita deduces that Rafa's illness could be caused by a combination of popular illness such as "susto" or "mal ojo". She does not eliminate the chance that it is a common fever that left him sick. Her prayer for the boy, then, is a combination of various elements deemed to resolve the issue. It covers a range of choices and leaves nothing to chance. "Oración y ensalmo para susto: Criatura de Dios, yo te curo y te ensalmo en el nombre de Dios y el Espíritu Santo. Tres personas distintas y un solo Dios verdadero. San Roque, San Sebastián, once mil vírgenes portu Glorísima Pasión y Ascensión dignense a curar a esta afligida criatura de ojo, espanto, calentura, o cualquier otra curación no refiriendo a tan linda persona que se refiere a su sacrosanto misterio. Jesús criatura de Dios, acuérdate de tu Dios. Cuánto amante está Jesús, cuánto amante está Jesús, así sea. Amén. Ofrecimiento, Jesús sea tu doctor, María Santísima tu doctora y que esta enfermedad sea aventada por el amor de Dios, por el amor de Dios, amén" (Hinojosa 54). Tía Panchita calls for this boy's cure in the name of God and in the name of the Holy Trinity. She also offers eleven thousand virgins as a sacrifice for this boy's health, a number comically chosen at random by Hinojosa. She calls upon various saints and angels and deems her prayer an offering in exchange for the boy's health.

Her prayer covers several layers of Catholicism and the church's devotion to particular saints. San Roque is the saint for plagued victims. San Sebastian is the saint of ill patients and of physicians. Common here is the ascription of his or her power to a divine vision or visitation, and thus the practice takes on the proportions of a divine mission both in the eyes of the healer and his followers. This divine visitant, most often displayed at the place of healing, then becomes a petitionary focus in prayers and supplications.³ As she rubs the egg on Rafa's body, Tía Panchita declares Jesus Christ is the doctor and healer of Rafa Buenrostro. When the reader thinks that Tía Panchita's prayer strictly based on religion, once again she blends *curandera* elements. Hinojosa creates a tug of war between standard religion and superstitious folkloric beliefs. The author carries the reader between the two and demonstrates that a combination of both elements is more powerful and can be more successful than separatism.

Community Curandera

Tía Panchita represents a *curandera* in the modern times, a *curandera* that is a mixture of religious and folk elements. The people of this community believe that this ritual will cure Rafa Buenrostro. "La Tía Panchita repitió la oración, el ensalmo y el ofrecimiento dos veces más y entonces estrelló el huevo en un plato verde que colocó debajo de la cama. Rafa Buenrostro respiró hondamente y empezó un sueño que duraría

³ See Octavio Ignacio Romano V. "Charismatic Medicine, Folk-Healing, and Folk-Sainthood." *American Anthropologist* 67.5, Part 1 (1965): pp. 1151-1173. Print. for a detailed description of the *curandero* or healer's role in the South Texas border, especially Starr County.

día y medio” (Hinojosa 54). The Catholic Prayer is converted into a ritual. Tía Panchita repeats the prayer three times as if chanting a song as an offering to the spirits that will cure Rafa Buenrostro. She is concentrated on the prayer, in a trance, as she rubs the egg over the boy’s body. The heat of the body on the egg will capture the malignant forces that are trapped inside his body. The ritual turns into a superstitious ceremony. Tía Panchita proceeds to crack the egg open into a green bowl that is placed under Rafa’s bed. The color green will help trap the negative forces. The “huevo estrellado” under the bed will serve as an oven to keep evil spirits away and to begin the healing process. By cracking the egg open, Tía Panchita has broken ties with the evil spirits that she captured inside the egg. After this ritual, Rafa Buenrostro slips into a deep slumber that lasts one and a half days. Rafa Buenrostro’s body has been dominated by the religious and spiritual world. Sleep will help Rafa recover from the evil spirits and illnesses that were lingering inside his body.

“La Tía Panchita se despidió apresuradamente diciendo que volvería el miércoles. Mujer ocupadísima, la tía se dirigía al bautizo del niño de Lino Carrizales” (Hinojosa 54). Tía Panchita, Hinojosa shows, is a popular woman amongst the townfolk. Like a true healer, Tía Panchita has made a social commitment to the community. For Don Pedrito, the South Texas healer, a constantly arriving clientele made it increasingly impossible for Don Pedrito⁴ the man to participate in, or to pursue the performance of, any other social role. It will be recalled that near the end of his healing days he was on 24 hour call. Under these conditions, the time demand for services was near total. Tía Panchita’s services range from curing an individual to performing baptisms. She promises to return to check on Rafa Buenrostro’s progress, but leaves in a rush to fulfill other duties she has

⁴ Pedro Jaramillo was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in August 1829. Next to nothing is known of his early years in Mexico. Accounts have it that he was an only child and raised by his mother who died when he was relatively young. It is said that he worked as a ranch hand, that he travelled to various parts of Mexico, and that much later he joined some of the revolutionary forces in the sporadic fighting that was leading up to the Mexican Revolution. It is also said that sometime during these years he had been jailed for practicing witchcraft, but that he escaped. Ultimately, his travels took him northward to Texas when he was about 52 years of age.

From this account, indications are that Don Pedrito had declared himself a healer prior to his arrival in Texas in 1881. In Texas, Don Pedrito established himself as a healer at Los Olmos Creek where a small cluster of houses existed in what was then Starr County. His work at his new home began among the families at Los Olmos Ranch and the neighboring ranches. He claimed that God had bestowed on him the power to heal the sick; to say which prescription, given in the name of God and executed with faith and in the name of God, had the power to heal. He claimed no healing power of himself. His mission was to help the sick through their faith in God's power to heal them.

One year following his death, in a newspaper in a community near San Antonio, Texas, a poetic eulogy to Don Pedrito was printed. Contained in the five-verse poem were all the essential elements of the healer's life as viewed by those who had known him. The poem mentions his divine license, a great patience, that he never asked for payment of services, that he was alone with no family or relatives, his rapid manner of prescribing, his apparent humility, that he would refuse no one, and that his followers held him in great veneration. And now that he was dead, the last line reads, "Pedrito is our mediator." Sometime later, it is impossible to discern when, a printed prayer was also widely circulated. The title is "Prayer to the All Powerful and Evocation to the Purified Spirit D. Pedrito Jaramillo" V.

planned. Her contribution to the community is an important one. Hinojosa positions this elderly woman as a matriarchal figure, mother of the community. He gives her an air of calmness and knowledge that supersedes the common individual. In this case, Rafa's family avoids both the medical doctor and the church officials. In Tía Panchita, they find an experienced and trusted combination of both elements that would otherwise contradict each other. She is in tune with the world of religion and with the spirit world making her an invaluable asset in a rural border town.

Tía Panchita represents a local shaman for the Belken County community. Her spiritual nature, the elements of folklore, and the strict Catholic practices that are blended create a unique take on religion from a rural perspective. Faith and trust are placed in the hands of this local elderly woman. The majority of the sketches dealing with death and religion are seen from a feminine perspective. For Hinojosa, it is the woman that represents religious local customs and knowledge of the Mexican spiritual world. The local community depends on mothers, aunts and *curanderas* to provide them with spiritual guidance and local customs in the name of religion. This practice continues even to this day, and it appears among neighborhood healers as well as some who are known throughout a wide geographic area. Today, in San Antonio, Texas, and in Monterrey, Mexico, healers continue to conduct their practice after that of Don Pedrito. In this manner, then, the traditional components of folk-healership have been perpetuated and relatively stabilized.

Dark Religious Irony

Rolando Hinojosa's take on religion and religious figures is both ironic and sarcastic. The sketch of Bruno Cano in *Estampas del Valle*, for example, explores the notion of corruption and hypocrisy within the Catholic Church and its religious leaders. For centuries the Catholic Church has had a strong hold on government and education, particularly in Mexico. The Rio Grande Valley is no exception. The Valley represents Catholic religion coated with rural elements and small town politics, which Hinojosa also criticizes in his novel. "Al pozo con Bruno Cano", the sketch of Bruno Cano, a native of Cerralvo, Nuevo Leon, presents us with a chilling tale about a townsman's encounter with the town priest. For Hinojosa it is important to mention that Bruno Cano is a native of Cerralvo because this shows the relationship between one side of the border and the other. The proximity of Mexico to the Valley creates individuals that fluctuate. In this sketch, Bruno Cano and his friend were drinking and digging a hole in order to look for a treasure they believed was hidden in that area. Bruno was inebriated; his mind began playing tricks on him and he started to hear and speak of ghosts present in Belken County. This conversation between two drunken men caused one of them to flee with fear while Bruno got stuck in the hole that they were digging. Hinojosa blends religion, folklore, and Mexican spiritual customs in the narrative of Bruno Cano. The whole that they were digging, for example, was on the property of doña Panchita Zuárez who was a *sobandera*, *curandera* and a *partera* causing the men to think of supernatural beings. Hinojosa makes connections between the citizens of Belken County and establishes a common thread in the formation of the community.

Hinojosa finds a way to intertwine the characters of multiple sketches. Tía Panchita, as we saw earlier, cured Rafa Buenrostro of a serious case of the evil eye. Now, Hinojosa presents another side of Tía Panchita to the reader. Apart from being a

matriarch that cures members of Belken County with her countless abilities, she is also involved in taking in young girls and using them for prostitution. This pseudo religious woman also has a dark side, Hinojosa concludes. Hinojosa ironically words the sketch as if Tía Panchita is performing a service for these poor lost souls. Tía Panchita takes on the role of the *coyote* in “Coyotes”. The men digging the hole were dead drunk, literally, on Tía Panchita’s property. Hinojosa highlights the lack of inhibition of the drunken men. Drunken men, believes Hinojosa, carry out their true ambition and demonstrate their weaknesses and true nature. In this case, greed gets the best of Bruno Cano and his fleeting friend. Hinojosa writes:

La noche que murió Cano, él y otro compañero, Melitón Burnias, habían acordado a escarbar un lotecito que le pertenecía a doña Panchita Zuárez, sobandera, partera al pasito, y remendona fina de jovencitas no muy usadas en servible estado de merecer. La tía Panchita, según la gente de Flora tenía un tesoro escondido en su patio. Esta relación, el hombre dado a los tesoros, estaba escondida desde los tiempos de Escandón, según unos; desde los tiempos del general Santa Ana, según otros; y todavía otros, más cercanos, desde el tiempo de la Revolución ... tesoro que fue ocultado por unos ansiosos comerciantes recién amigrados, etc. La cosa es que Bruno Cano y Burnias, entre copa y copa, acordaron en cavar la tierra, como tantos otros, en busca del tesoro mentado. Melitón Burnias juraba que tenía unos rezos infalibles para esos asuntos. (Hinojosa 35)

Bruno and Burnias are looking for a treasure that has its roots in the historical and political relationship that this geographical area of South Texas represents. The land was discovered by Escandón in the 1700s and then remained close in ties to Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and then in the phase of general Santa Ana. Hinojosa incorporates accurate historical elements to his narrative. He makes it a priority to reference border history from the point of view of a native. He builds a historic relationship to Mexico and creates an element of magic realism in the form of a treasure hunt. The treasure hunt is part of a larger imaginary of legends and folklore of the local community. Tía Panchita’s ties to the spiritual world and the history of the land when it was Mexican territory make this a double-faceted narrative. This adventure takes place on American soil, but with the inner mask and body of Mexican land and history.

Amidst this drunken digging for a buried treasure, the men confuse the phrase, “¿qué rezo yo?” (What am I to pray?) with “¿qué resolló?” (What has breathed?)⁵. Quickly the situation escalates into the comedic running and “escape” of Burnias from a ghost that he believes is “resollando” behind him. Meanwhile his friend Bruno Cano, fell into the hole that they had been digging in search of the buried treasure. The comedic episode quickly turns wry. Hinojosa’s fiction has the capability of capturing humor and tragedy in the same sketch. The blend of emotions creates multiple layers in the narrative. Bruno screams for help because his worst fear has come true. Bruno Cano is stuck in this dark hole all alone; his frightened friend has abandoned him. Now Bruno is in a dark hole in the middle of the night thinking about all of the horror stories that he and

⁵ My own translation.

his friend Burnias were imagining. With the help of one too many drinks, their imagination betrayed them. Bruno continues to brew horrifying ghost stories in his new solitary confinement. After Bruno desperately screams for help after an extended period of time, the town priest approaches the hole where Bruno is stuck. The problem begins to escalate when Bruno's cry for help rises to despair. His cry has created a crowd of people around him and the priest. At this point, Bruno was practically half scared to death.

At this moment in the sketch, Hinojosa focuses on the play of power and the abuse of power by those in higher positions. The priest knows that because Bruno is helpless, he is in control. He begins his power trip by asking Bruno impertinent questions about how he got stuck in the hole. The town priest wants answers before lending Bruno a helping hand. Instead of waiting until after he helped Bruno get out of the hole to ask this drunken man questions, don Pedro questions Bruno until Bruno loses his patience and comes to a breaking point. Don Pedro the priest knows that Bruno is desperate to get out of the hole. He is frustrated, scared and delirious with fear and alcohol. Bruno does not answer don Pedro's questions because before anything else, he wants to come out of that dark and scary hole. The priest, however, becomes angry with Bruno for not answering his questions directly. Ironically, the priest decides not to help Bruno. The priest claims that he cannot get him out of the hole by himself because "estás algo gordo". When Cano hears this insult coming from the local priest, he loses his patience and shrieks "¿Gordo? ¡Gorda su madre!" (Hinojosa 49). At this point, Bruno Cano loses his patience and curses at the priest. In a form of revenge, the priest ignores Bruno Cano's request and rudely suggests "Pues que lo saque su madre". Anger dominates the situation. With much irritation, Cano retaliates "¡Pues chingue la suya!" (Hinojosa 49). The priest, upset at the steaming reaction that he was getting from Bruno, remained unwilling to help him and in pure vengeance began to recite the Mass of the Dead.

Ironically, the recital of the Mass of the Dead caused Bruno Cano to have a heart attack and lose his life inside the dark hole. Hinojosa creates this dark image as an ironic way of demonstrating how the town priest condemned one of his "children of God" to hell instead of helping him out of this dark hole. The image of the priest over the hole praying the Mass of the Dead while Bruno loses his life is like something straight out of a horror film. Don Pedro refuses to put his pride aside to help Bruno. Instead, he sends him to his grave. Bruno, sardonically, is already lying in a hole six feet under. The treasure that he sought brings him death and not prosperity. Bruno Cano becomes one with the grueling history of Mexico and Texas. Hinojosa writes, "Bruno no le puso cuidado. Ni lo oyó siquiera. Bruno Cano había echado el bofe entre uno de los misterios del rosario y una de las madres. Entregando, así, su alma al Señor, al Diablo, o a su madre; a escoger" (Hinojosa 50). Hinojosa ironizes the dilemma of the priest as an example to the community. Instead of helping his local church member, don Pedro becomes angered by an irresponsible comment made in a moment of frustration. The priest recites the Mass of the Dead and is consciously unwilling to aid Bruno escape from the hole. The priest was not able to put his feelings aside or to forgive Bruno for his angry statements. Instead, he tortures him further by condemning him to death. Rolando Hinojosa combines humor and death to create a blend of dark and ironic sarcasm that is highlighted through the hypocrisy and impatience of the town priest. The priest has caused this community member's death with his "unholy" reaction under trying

circumstances. Don Pedro is unable to overcome his anger at this precise moment. Apparently, the night's evil ghosts and spirits possessed him as well. Now Bruno Cano's soul has been sacrificed to god, the devil or his mother. Hinojosa inserts a slice of humor at the time of Bruno's death.

All the screaming and shouting gathered a crowd around the hole and the priest:

Como es de suponer, no menos de treinta personas habían observado la escena. Habíanse quedado a una respectable distancia mientras uno rezaba y el otro maldecía. Pero, sea como quiera que sea, lo sepultaron y en campo sagrado. Para el pesar de don Pedro Zamudio, el entierro estuvo muy concurrido. La cosa duró cerca de siete horas. [...] La gente de los otros pueblos del Valle pronto se dio cuenta que algo había en Flora y se dejó venir. (Hinojosa 22)

The priest shuns Bruno Cano when Bruno needed him the most. Pride possesses the priest to refuse Bruno a proper burial. The priest's pride surpasses his religious duties. Hinojosa makes it a point to mention that don Pedro and Bruno Cano had been good friend up to that moment. Logic would imply that don Pedro take Burnia's drunken words with a grain of salt, especially if they were friends. Yet, the priest was unable to forgive Bruno for the insults at a time of desperation. Bruno disrespected the priest's mother. Don Pedro proves that no human being is flawless. Thirty people witnessed the event at the hole. Some prayed while others cursed the priest. The townspeople saw don Pedro willingly provoke until he ends up on his deathbed. Bruno Cano's funeral, to don Pedro's dismay, becomes a Valley-wide event. Ironically, Don Pedro has transformed Bruno into a hero.

Hinojosa is a harsh critic of the Catholic Church mixed with small town politics. If the priest cannot let go of this small grudge against Bruno, what is one to think of his function as the town priest in more serious cases? Pride, arrogance, and hypocrisy interfere with his religious duties and responsibilities. The townsmen witnessed Bruno's death in the hole and heard the priest reciting the Mass of the Dead knowing that Bruno was very much alive at that moment. If the priest accepts to render Bruno a proper funeral service, then he is admitting to the public that he is at fault. If he gives him a proper burial he must admit that he was possessed by a moment of rage and killed his fellow friend. Ultimately, he must admit that he too is a sinner. His refusal to render Bruno a proper service is the refusal to lose a battle that was lost the moment he overstepped his boundaries and abused his powers as a religious leader. He betrayed the trust of Belken County and most importantly of god.

The priest finally agrees to a funeral after much begging from Bruno's friends and family. Ironically and to the priest's distress, Bruno Cano's funeral becomes a Valley-wide event to which more than a thousand people attend including street vendors selling their candy and their *raspas* or shaved ice treats made of ice and flavored syrup. The narrator states:

Aparecieron tres dulceros y empezaron a vender raspas para combatir aquel sol que derretía las calles de chapapote. La concurrencia, y yéndose por lo bajo, no era menos de cuatro mil almas. Unos, de seguro, ni sabían

a quién enterraban; los más ni conocieron a Cano; lo que pasa es que a la gente le gusta la bulla y no pierde ripio para salir de casa. Don Pedro tuvo que aguantarse y rezó no menos de trecientos Padrenuestros entre Aves y Salves. Cuando se puso a llorar (de coraje, de histeria, de hambre, vaya usted a saber) la gente, compadecida, rezó por don Pedro. Los oradores repitieron las elegías varias veces y los de la raspa, cada uno, tuvieron que comprar otras tres barras de hielo de cien libras para dar abasto a toda la gente. (Hinojosa 50)

The funeral turns into a carnivalesque gathering. The death of Bruno Cano was carnivalesque in and of itself. This event has brought people from all over the Rio Grande Valley in solidarity with Bruno Cano. The community stands by Bruno. Even more ironic is that the priest is forced to give Bruno a seven-hour mass after deliberately causing his death. In Hinojosa's typical ironic manner, the priest is forced to pay tribute to the man that he killed. He unwillingly created a Valley legend. Don Pedro refuses to forgive and serve the commandments of God. Don Pedro's frustrations, ironically, are interpreted as regret. The people at the funeral believe that don Pedro sheds tears of repentance. Many people pay tribute to Bruno without knowing him. In the end, the feud between the priest and Bruno Cano is analogous to long-standing family feuds in rural areas such as Juan Rulfo's city of Comala. Even after his death, Bruno Cano has produced a greater following than Don Pedro in his masses. Don Pedro is unable to forget what he has done during the seven-hour funeral and ironically, one can use the old Mexican *dicho* "es que Dios lo castigó".

Religion and Folklore: Rivera

Other Chicano narratives such as *Bless Me Ultima* by Rodolfo Anaya and *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* by Tomás Rivera also provide a feminine perspective on religion and spirituality. Women such as Ultima, Tía Panchita, and the boy's mother in *...y no se lo tragó la tierra* provide the norm for spirituality in their communities. The border community is dependent on a matriarch for spiritual guidance and the children that they raise take these beliefs from one generation to the next. These women provide tradition of cultural religion in lineage. An interesting aspect of this dynamic is that the children begin to question religion and start forming their own questions and conforming their religious philosophy at an early age. Children start to rebel and question the traditional nature of the religion in their lives; they begin to doubt the weight of religion. The new generation comes into conflict with the old. In such way, religion, traditional customs and folklore continue to evolve and metamorphose to the mold of the new generation. Border communities, like religious and spiritual practices, represent constant change and transformation.

The sketch of Bruno Cano is reminiscent of a story in Tomás Rivera's novel *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra*. Both the child and Bruno Cano curse religion and what it represents. The story in this novel has the same title as the book itself. The family of this child protagonist lives the arduous circumstances of hard manual labor. Children are treated as working adults and constantly suffer, sometimes even more than adults, in the arduous South Texas climate. The child protagonist in "...Y no se lo tragó la tierra" questions God's existence because of the suffering his family encounters in this new

nation. As immigrants they are forced to live in substandard conditions. The boy does not understand the correlation between religion, god and reality. He begins to question the existence of a god prompting his mother's disapproval. The migrant community is religious and strongly follows Catholic beliefs, religion and tradition. In Catholicism, suffering is interpreted as a sacrifice for God. This type of religious psychology warrants for a close examination of reality versus perception. Injustices are justified through religious principles shifting the migrants into survival mode.

In this story, the child does not believe that there is a God because his family is suffering too much. He asks his mother several questions about God and she does not approve of his curiosity or his seeming disbelief. The new generation questioning tradition and religion is an analogy of the way in which both Rolando Hinojosa and Tomás Rivera are questioning old forms of narrative and structure and paving a new path for contemporary Chicano authors. This new form of literature can be a fragmentary novel and written in Spanish on the American side of the border. The sketches represent a questioning of standard narrative practices. Traditional aesthetics have come into contact with a new form of analysis and rhetoric.

The boy in Tomás Rivera's work, like Jehú in Hinojosa's work, ponders the notion of classism within religion. Why, he asks, must immigrants suffer, and yet there are others who don't? Who is god and why is he unfair to poor people, to his people? At the end of the story the boy wonders if god is listening to the poor. Do the poor have a voice? The voice of the boy and his family are muted before god. Just as the farmworker in Kafka's "Before the Law" in *The Trial* the boy cannot enter the pearly gates because he is of another class. Rivera demonstrates that only the privileged have access to the law and to religious blessings. The dynamic of class discrimination in the religious world cements the foundation for alternative forms of religious and ritualistic expressions. The religious world that truly understands the immigrant is one that blends cultural and spiritual guidance with formal Catholicism. The popularization of Catholicism approximates the Mexican immigrant to a more profound and spiritual religious experience. Cultural beliefs and religion merge to fulfill the needs of a community in constant transit and transformation.

When the boy's sibling becomes very ill, he curses god because he does not understand why this is happening to his family if they are religious and have always prayed for a better life. As he curses, he believes that the earth will open up and devour him for blasphemy or for forsaking God. The image that the boy creates is an interesting dichotomy believing that since he is no longer on god's side, then, he must, by elimination, belong in the flames of hell. He imagines that the earth will swallow him the moment that he curses god, but when he is not devoured; he convinces himself that god does not give him and his family the time of day. If he cannot hear him curse, then certainly he does not hear their cries for help and mercy. If he cannot hear him curse and command the earth to devour him then he must not be the all-powerful being that he imagined. God no longer represents the magnificent omniscient force that was his mother convinced him to believe. The autonomy that the boy feels when he distances himself from the abstract notion of god grants him autonomy and spiritual independence in relation to his parents. Rivera believes that "Literature provides tension. Literature represents man's life; it also reflects his inner search and his outward search. It is, in a sense, an intricate maze to provide either exteriorization or internalization of the human

involvement and evolvment (evolution) ... and the search can only exist if there is an impulse into the labyrinth of the human totality of conditions. Thus, the search and labyrinth complement each other to bring forth a vicarious sensibility to the perceiver.”(Rivera xiii) The boy’s internal religious beliefs are cracked open like the egg in Tía Panchita’s ritual. His inner search is externalized in God’s lack of power.

Autonomy: Free from Religion

Thus, the boy in Rivera’s narrative begins to feel a certain sense of self-assurance. “... por la primera vez se sentía capaz de hacer y deshacer cualquier cosa que él quisiera” (Hinojosa 104). The tensions between religious naiveté and an oppressive reality increase. The boy now believes that if god is not on their side then they must fend for themselves. He becomes powerful and determined in his thoughts. He is disillusioned by their lifestyle and feels that there is no progress in their labor because they are stuck in the same vicious cycle of working like animals. When his brother becomes very ill, the boy is aware of his mother’s suffering. He does not see this as normal and is sure that there is no such god that would allow disgrace and suffering in the community, especially in relation to his family. He becomes a logical thinker and deduces that rationale does not partake in religion. If you are a good person then God will bless and protect your family. Since his mother is a good person he does not believe that his family should be suffering, especially his mother that is entirely devoted to God. His immediate reaction is to curse God.

The religious thoughts that his mother formulated for his family have created a dependency on an abstract unreliable being. The boy was truly surprised when the earth did not devour him. His religious foundation and the faith that he inherited were crumbled when god did not hear his voice cursing him. Autonomy begins. Not because he loses all faith, but because he sees now that his actions and his fate do not depend on God, but only on himself. He has liberated himself of a religious foundation that was not his to begin with, but came as part of tradition and Mexican customs. Once the boy is released from the shackles of a religion that was not his own, he becomes his own person and can do and undo all that he pleases. He understands that the world he lives in is not just, not because there is a god, but because there might not be a god. He now knows that he cannot rely on what is supposed to represent the most reliable form within spirituality. He questions why his mother continues to be strong in her faith although her prayers are never answered.

Now, he must go on existing knowing that the earth did not devour him – he must go on existing feeling that his family and his community have been abandoned by god. Rivera, Rulfo and Hinojosa contemplate complex religious and psychological dilemmas through the eye of a child. This gives their narrative an innocent and untainted approach. The children represented in these narratives demonstrate cultural progression and constant transformation. The children are affected by the norms that their parents or their community live by, yet are capable of also forming other thoughts independent of how they are expected to live or what they are expected to believe. Existential forms of being develop in the narrative through the voice of the child, for the child is existentialism at its upmost sincerity. The sketches in Hinojosa’s narrative are realistic accounts of life issues. The multifarious border area does not divide one side from the other. The

children in the sketches will continue with their lives on the border relying only on themselves and not a divine power. They have gained autonomy.

Chapter Six

The act of writing is nothing more than the act of approximating the experience of what is being written about; in the same manner, it is hoped that the act of reading the written text is another act of similar approximations.
– *Letter to John Berger, Boar Land*

Norteño Experience

In this chapter I will analyze how Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* (1973) establishes close connections with Northern Mexico and *norteño* Mexican culture along the Lower Rio Grande Valley border. This study focuses on language, culture, identity and history. Hinojosa's novel provides a detailed description of the Texas-Mexico border history through the eyes of the Mexican population, a new take on historical perspective. I will also discuss how Hinojosa is not merely a Chicano author, but more of a "border" author with a multifarious identity. This novel highlights the importance of events such as land appropriations; the Mexican Revolution and detailed folkloric experiences lived in Spanish by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans on both sides of the border. In *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa proves that the physical border, multiple bridges, as well as marked and guarded national boundaries are not enough to keep culture, folklore and language from navigating from one side of the Rio Grande River to the other.

This novel also portrays the similarities that can be found between Mexican and Latin American works of fiction. Border literature of the Rio Grande Valley is distinct to other border literatures and to other regions inhabited by Mexican-Americans in the U.S. In the Valley, the Mexican community has close ties to Mexico because of the physical proximity to a multitude of border crossings. It was not until recently that the United States Border Patrol of the Starr-Camargo Bridge started demanding passports to cross between these two national territories.¹

Why does such a close tie exist between the Valley community and the northern Mexico community? How does Hinojosa demonstrate how this area has preserved the Spanish language and in what ways does Valley culture demonstrate that Mexican culture and folklore does indeed exist outside Mexican national boundaries? *Estampas del Valle* represents another face of Mexico and Mexico's history. The novel configures the other side of the coin showing that Mexico continues to exist outside of Mexico itself. Hinojosa, for instance, refers to himself as a borderer. "In addition to being a product of Anglo-Mexican marriage, reared as a rural *fronterizo*, and invested in with impressive academic credentials in both English- and Spanish-language disciplines, Hinojosa possesses the authorial acuteness to guarantee the successful transit from orality to literacy, as evidenced in the fragmented, polyphonic narrative fabric of his Belken County chronicles" (Zilles 77). As we saw in the previous chapter, it is important to remember that some borderers identify with a Mexican cultural identity. Hinojosa does

¹ <http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/border/sfatb2.html>

not choose one or the other. It is not a conscious decision. His borderer identity has been shaped through experiences on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Unlike other areas where Chicano culture is seen as a separation or as a separate entity from Mexican culture, the people of the Valley feel a close affinity to Mexico and identify as such. The Rio Grande Valley, for the most part, is a homogenous community. This eliminates the necessity to distinguish the community from other cultures because of the overall racial composition of the area. If you are from the Valley you are Mexican. You are also technically Mexican-American, but there is no need to hyphenate your identity when you are in the Valley. This hyphen comes at a time when a person leaves the Valley and has to distinguish who he is and what he represents for others.

Hinojosa was not directly involved in the Chicano political movement. He belonged to a different space in the Rio Grande Valley where influences from Mexico were still vivid and thriving as normality. Hinojosa's distance from the movement itself does not mean that he does not preoccupy himself with the needs of the community in his writing. He expresses these preoccupations and concerns in a subtle way. More than a Chicano author he is a border author. Hinojosa's sketches such as "Coyotes" and the land grabbing Leguizamones point out important political and ethical injustices within the Chicano community. His border identity allows him to navigate the Río Grande River that separates both nations from one side to the other, judging both sides equally and providing criticism of the land, the law and the unjust. Not being attached to the Chicano political movement of the sixties does not mean that the Valley did not suffer racial tensions and difficulties. We can read of the struggles new Mexican-Americans lived through in *With a Pistol in His Hand* and *Estampas del Valle*. Joyce Lee Glover, a critic of Mexican-American literature in the United States writes, "While Hinojosa does not reveal himself to be radical or a political revolutionary in describing the life of the Mexican-American community generally and the conditions of migrant life particularly, he does not shrink from depicting the hardship and injustice suffered by *mejicanos*. Although he depicts them artistically, rather than ideologically, such material cannot help but be seen as political, for it reveals the plight of the ethnic minority" (Lee 86).

Can one really separate the two? Not being radical does not mean that he is not politically engaged in his own cause. It does mean, however, that his literature is based on a geographical space that is so close to the border that, like Paredes, he inevitably creates a literary dynamic involving both territories. Calderón's *Narratives of Greater Mexico* includes works by Rolando Hinojosa and by Américo Paredes. They form part of a literature that has close ties to Mexico, the Spanish language and are recognized by other Spanish speaking countries. Despite being border authors, their works are not meant to be geographically limited. They appeal to other Spanish speaking countries, as well as other institutes abroad. For example, Hinojosa has received the prestigious Cuban Casa Las Americas literary prize for *Klail City y sus alrededores*. Hinojosa's writing constitutes part of Greater Mexico. Mexico and the Mexican-American identity have ceased to remain enclosed within national boundaries of separatism. For authors such as Hinojosa, Paredes, River and Anzaldúa, the border sparks new forms of living and creating art.

Mexico: Cultural Allegiance

Hinojosa's work represents the *pueblo* of the Rio Grande Valley, he is an *hijo del pueblo* and through his writing we can see a true representation of the Valley and the struggles that occur on the border. Through his sketches Hinojosa has become a border chronicler. His narrative highlights experiences both on the American and the Mexican side of the border. His writing does not hold a traditional consistent plot, but consistently builds on the idea of a community or a *pueblo*. His writing paints a vivid picture of a border community in the Rio Grande Valley. The sketch "Así se cumple" with Viola Barragán the burial of Pioquinto, her lover, in the local Mexican cemetery is a testament to the community life that Hinojosa aims to create. This sketch brings Belken County to life. His writing, like Tomás Rivera's writing, is presented in a brief and concise form. This preciseness gives the author the ability to create a high volume of content in a limited amount of space. Each word carries depth and gives the narrative density and liveliness. His writing presents a community in transit with the deep roots connected to Mexico. His sketches demand the reader's attention span and participation and can be described as "brevity with a bang".

Charles Tatum explains that it is important to note that Latin American literary independence from the mother country, Spain, was accelerated by the independence movements of the early nineteenth century; Chicano literature received (and has continued to receive) a constant cultural infusion from Mexico dating from the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 even though proportional amounts of Northern Mexico were ceded to the United States, after 1848 Mexicans on both sides of the newly created border continued to flow freely back and forth in large numbers in open defiance of the artificial boundaries between the two countries. "Due to these historical and political circumstances, Chicano writers have always enjoyed a much closer relationship to Mexico than have Mexican writers to Spain or other countries an ocean and a war of independence apart" (Tatum 432). The treaty of 1848 significantly changed the dynamics of this region. This close relationship then is the grounds for which Mexicans from the Valley and from Texas call themselves "Mexican" or "Mexican-American". Hinojosa himself has always enjoyed a close relationship with Mexico since his childhood so it is no doubt that he should do so in his writing as well.

Chicano literature is a distinct literature being constantly transformed by its position at the juncture of Anglo- and Latin America. It will be impossible to claim that it belongs exclusively to any of those two traditions - as hard as it will be, for that matter, to conceive of any of them as absolutely fixed entities, or as national cultures in the narrowest sense. The reader must approach this particular position of the literature written by Chicanos emphasizing its transnational aspect. Borderlands culture remains in continuous reshaping, with continuous (physical and cultural) crossings from one side to the other. "In fact, the perception of Chicano literature as border literature has been widely used by scholars and writers, prompting all sorts of performances, publications, and conferences on border aesthetics" (González Echevarría and Pupo-Walker 588). Border aesthetics define Chicano literature as a literature of constant transformation and change. The border community flows from one side to the other creating a perpendicular flow of migration to that of the horizontal Rio Grande River. The ethnic composure of South Texas after the Treaty of Guadalupe created binary categories: Anglo or Mexican. This disputed land no longer represents clear-cut demarcations, but instead cultivates

Mexican identities along the border. The Mexican-American communities in Texas identify with Mexico in a distinct manner that Chicanos from Arizona or California. In California, for example, the Chicano movement is geared towards a more politicized form of exercise for civil rights.

The Rio Grande Valley is, apart from the Anglo invasion after the treaty, mostly a homogenous place. It is true that some Anglos that came to the area for land acquisitions also became accustomed to Mexican traditions. Rolando Hinojosa's mother, for example, was part of an Anglo family that settled in the Valley early. As a result, his mother spoke Spanish and married his father, a Mexican from Nuevo Leon. This area is a place where individuals are still not forced to learn English to survive. In the "Coyotes" sketch, don Marcial does not speak English. His inability to do so allows the coyote to take advantage of him. Hinojosa shows how Belken County and the Rio Grande Valley are spaces where a multitude of worlds can exist. Don Marcial and other characters in the novel live their lives in Spanish.

My parents, for example, have been in Rio Grande City, Texas for thirty-one years and still do not speak English. Not out of loathing for the language, but because of a lack of necessity. Hinojosa's students at UT Austin, for instance, self identify as Mexican without thinking about it twice. They find that the question regarding their identity is peculiar particularly because they did not see other options other than being Mexican. For them, it is obvious that they are Mexican because that is the culture, customs and language that they grew up with. Héctor Calderón makes a clear point in his association of Mexican culture within the United States in relation to Mexico. He states, "We can no longer continue to think of Mexican people and culture in the United States as if they were completely dislocated from the nation of Mexico, its culture and artistic traditions. Indeed, the reader will find as the book progresses toward an ending, that the interrelatedness of Mexicans on both sides of the border is inescapable" (Calderón xiii). Greater Mexico is a term most associated with the works of Américo Paredes and José E. Limón. This term is linked with cultural studies of Texas, and especially cultural conflict along the Rio Grande Valley. Some critics such as Héctor Calderón see it as an embracing term used to define the Chicano with a strong Mexican influence across a multitude of borders.

Regional Borderers

We can begin to analyze the ties to Mexican and Latin American literary works and culture from the perspective of Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*. Rolando Hinojosa's work marks these distinctive Valley qualities that make the experience of this geographical area unique to Chicano or Mexican-American culture, especially in terms of literature. His ability to maintain an all-encompassing Chicano identity while showing the richness and uniqueness and the specificity of one border is unique to Mexican American literature. Hinojosa does not generalize. He constructs a bird's eye view that turns into a microscopic analysis of one border area. He aims to show the manner in which Valley culture and history coincides with that of Northern Mexico.

Luis Leal writes, "The culture found in the Valley, where Rolando Hinojosa's fiction takes place, belongs, according to Paredes' classification, to the regional type, a culture characterized by the presence of traits from Spain and Mexico which have been kept alive for many generations and upon which local adaptations have been made. No

less important is the fact that the space of that culture extends from Northern Mexico to the Valley, and the Customs and immigration offices at the border do not define its limits. Parts of northern Mexico are included within the boundaries of each. These regional folk cultures thus include regions of two nations” (Saldívar 101). Luis Leal understands that the culture of the Valley is unique in its relationship to Northern Mexico and that cultural limits cannot be created through physical barriers. The border is a space of constant adaptation. The rhythms and cadences of border life constitute an intricate web of interwoven connections.

Bruce-Novoa, however, has a different view of his experiences as a Mexican-American in relation to Mexicans in terms of strict nationality. He asks, “Why are Chicanos so repulsive and despicable for Mexicans? Why, despite a few exceptions, do Mexican writers tend to view us negatively? In brief, because we undermine the protective wall of national separation between Mexico and the U.S.A.; we deconstruct the fictions of exclusivity necessary for Mexicans to go on seeing themselves in terms of a solidified absolute. We are a threat because we short-circuit their national self-project, so they must reduce us to less than equals” (Bruce-Novoa 67).

This statement is in reference to Octavio Paz, David Ojeda and José Vasconcelos’s thoughts on Mexicans in the United States during the mid twentieth century. This statement generalizes all Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and border experiences. Bruce-Novoa marks a deep separation between Mexican-Americans and their allegiance to Mexico. This notion builds on the idea of a two-way street that does not fluctuate. It marks contrasts that are not applicable to all border crossing sites. Authors unlike Hinojosa, Rivera and Anzaldúa have redefined the relationship that exists between communities on both sides of the border. Although classism continues to exist among elites versus immigrants, this does not mean that all Mexicans view Mexican-Americans negatively. There are spaces in which the Mexican on the American side of the border is not a threat to its counterpart and vice-versa. Bruce-Novoa makes an interesting point when he states that Chicanos undermine the protective wall of separation between Mexico and the U.S.A. The Valley is a prime example of the spill over of two cultures along national boundaries. Calderón explains the value of the Mexican tradition and Mexican culture and its representation in U.S. literature. His prime example for this type of identity representation is Américo Paredes and Paredes’s Mexican identity found in his writings.

The reader can examine Hinojosa and his writings in a similar fashion. Calderón states, “The traditional notions of “lo mexicano”, “mexicanidad”, and the Mexican patria have been transformed, at times radically altered, by the writers in this study. We are in many ways, taking from a term coined by Sandra Cisneros, American Mexicans. There are more than twenty million American Mexicans traveling back and forth across political and cultural borders” (Calderón xv). These writers have contributed to the history of these border crossings. Américo Paredes, for example, was a borderer from Brownsville, Texas. He learned to sing and play Mexican corridos at an early age in Tamaulipas, Mexico. That early childhood education was transformed into scholarly studies of what Paredes termed “Greater Mexico”, Mexico in a cultural sense. Brownsville and other cities from the Rio Grande Valley cultivate writers with a strong sense of identity tied to their experiences in Mexico. The characters of *Estampas del Valle* exemplify this constant shift and movement.

Rolando Hinojosa's literature, just as the literature of Tomás Rivera and Gloria Anzaldúa, are crucial because they are a form of social anthropology and an ethnographical and cultural study of the Valley. These authors write what history has left behind. The Rio Grande Valley's unique history with Mexico and Texas gives the Valley a distinct perspective compared to other Chicano experiences in the U.S. Apart from the generalization of experiences, Bruce-Novoa holds a controversial view of what it means to be Mexican or American or Mexican-American. Bruce-Novoa believes that Mexicans in the Valley are not and cannot be Mexican even though they desire to be identified as such. Many inhabitants of the Valley, though, have family on both sides of the border and have double citizenship.

What then, does Bruce-Novoa take into consideration in the making of an identity? What or who defines you? Is it culture, language, or a passport? Bruce-Novoa boldly claims that, "There are those like the Chicanos of South Texas, who insist they are Mexicans. To accept that they are not, and cannot be, threatens their world image, displaces their illusory centrality – ironically based on a pejorative peripheral status – and supersedes their survival strategy. They do what they can to deny the dialectical process and infuse doubt onto synthesis, but they are living proof that they cannot be what they delude themselves into believing that they are, Mexicans. True Mexicans have satirized and attacked Chicanos" (Bruce-Novoa 38). With this claim, Bruce-Novoa is doing that which he finds conflicting. The geographical location of the Valley gives the people of the Valley a unique standpoint in terms of identity. By attempting to extract Mexican culture and identity from the Valley, Bruce-Novoa's abandons the Chicano of the Rio Grande Valley. Like Hinojosa, the Mexican-American of the Valley knows that he or she is American by birth, but feels culturally Mexican. Hinojosa, Paredes, Rivera and Anzaldúa are a testament to this duality. By discrediting the Mexican experience in the Valley Bruce-Novoa discredits border literature of the Valley and the uniqueness of this particular border experience.

According to Hinojosa, the Mexican of the Valley is constantly reminded by history and by racial tensions that he or she is Mexican. Chicanos or Mexican-Americans that self identify as Mexicans are not a mirror image of the "Malinche", but an example of the multifarious elements that comprises the Chicano identity. The Mexican-American has a unique experience in relation to Mexico and the United States. The Mexican-American should no longer be pigeonholed into identitarian categories, but instead allowed to freely navigate through the cultural and national spaces of Mexico, the United States and beyond. In his introduction to *Rolando Hinojosa-Smith: A Reader's Guide*, Zilles states that, Hinojosa's works "attest to 250 years of Spanish-Mexican presence in the Rio Grande Valley in the southernmost region of the present state of Texas" (Zilles xi). This growing presence creates a community filled with Mexican culture and rich tradition. A marking quality of Hinojosa's work is his ability to capture the presence of rituals, rites and superstitions. He treats these cultural elements as a form of transporting the reader to a space where the border experience is a shared one. He demonstrates that the traditions of the Valley are very well the traditions of northern Mexico. Hinojosa's *estampas* also aim to call attention to the difficulties of immigrants living in the United States or traveling north to do so.

Going North

The border culture, Hinojosa explains, is a multifarious culture. One must live these cultures inherently to become a product of the effects. Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas* demonstrate the multiplicity of borders as well as the difficulty that it has been for some members of the Mexican-American community to get through those borders. The United States and Mexico inevitable intermingle with the migration of Mexican citizens to the "north" or to the States. Hinojosa, like Rulfo, is able to capture the physical and emotional complications of this travel. Rolando Hinojosa portrays several forms of injustice in his work. He is concerned with providing the reader with a wide spectrum of varied experiences and points of view. Hinojosa's work reveals the heterogeneity of a Mexican community and the problems that can be encountered within it and outside of it. The sketch of "Beto Castañeda", for example, is comparable to Juan Rulfo's "Paso del Norte", because they both focus on the hardships and injustices faced by Mexican immigrants traveling to the United States in hope of a better future. In both texts, it is not explicit at what point the characters are on one side of the border or the other. The rural aspect of border towns in the South Texas Valley are similar to those presented in *El llano en llamas*. In Hinojosa's work, Beto Castañeda made some trips to the "north", yet one does not know for certain if Beto lies on the American or the Mexican side of the border. "Ir al Norte" is a common phrase used among Mexican immigrants coming to the United States. Such expressions are showcased in documentaries such as, *The Other Side of Immigration*.²

Although some families on the American side of the border live in United States territory, this phrase is still utilized for their migrant journeys across various northern states, so in this case, the Valley is also part of Mexico:

A los quince años Beto Castañeda ya había hecho no menos de seis viajes al norte: uno con Víctor Hara, el Pirulí, que se portó mal y medio robó a la gente quedándose con buena parte del dinero que la Skinner Produce Company había dado como adelanto. El dinero se mandaba a un banco en San Antonio, el troquero lo recibía y debía repartirlo a la gente dando tanto y tanto por cabeza. El Pirulí repartió el dinero, sí, pero no todo, ni como debía: que no se vayan a creer que el resto se lo volvió a Skinner Produce. (Hinojosa 129)

Hinojosa shows the negative aspects of the people in the Mexican community as well. He does not focus on creating a romanticized view of the immigrant, but instead demonstrating that there are both 'good' and 'bad' people in a community regardless of their background and ethnicity.

Beto traveled to the North many times in search of employment and was an asset to the drivers since he was one of the very few that could speak broken English. "Tres [veces] viajó en troques de Cantú Hnos., el último como asistente de chofer: ya manejaba un poco y como hablaba inglés allanaba el camino en la ruta Klail City-Texarkana-Popular Bluff-Kankakee-NewBuffalo, Michigan" (Hinojosa 130). In this sketch one becomes aware that they are traveling from Klail City and that speaking English is a

² Germano, Roy, and Conor Oberst. *The Other Side of Immigration*. New Paltz, NY: RG Films, 2010.

rarity. Others use Beto's knowledge to help them communicate along the way. His English is not grammatically perfect, but he "gets by". Beto Castañeda dies of cancer at the age of 30 leaving his mother and sister alone to fend for themselves. Beto Castañeda's last appearance in Klail City was his Mexican burial. He returned to Klail as a spiritual entity *con una despedida mexicana*. "Se le despidió en el cementerio católico mexicano en Klail y los Vega estuvieron encargados del entierro. El orador fue don Rosendo Estapa, el que trabaja con la ciudad" (Hinojosa 130). Hinojosa chose a grim ending to Beto's seemingly positive and successful life. Traveling north can become a grueling experience. Hinojosa demonstrates Beto's vulnerability and the responsibilities that he carried. Beto Castañeda, like many immigrants traveling north, had a family to support.

Juan Rulfo's "Paso del Norte" also discusses death and a journey to the North by a young man trying to feed his starving family. The young man's father is not supportive of the idea because he is not going through the same difficulties. Rulfo's focus is on the *sobrevivencia* of these rural families, the idea that every man fends for himself despite familial ties. Hinojosa also focuses his sketches on the willingness of characters to enter a survival mode. In this case, the young man does not have the support of his father emotionally or economically. Hinojosa and Rulfo produce a sense of abandonment in their writing, a sort of desperation that would make an individual seek other measures to survive; to drop their quotidian lives and head to a "better place". The irony of these texts comes into play when the reader discovers that this so called "better place" is also a place of nightmares and injustices. "Padre, nos mataron" (Rulfo 130), says the son to his father. The son's journey to the North resulted more disastrous than he had ever imagined because border agents shot at him and his friend; his friend as they tried to illegally cross the border. Their blood becomes part of the river, like the soldiers in Hinojosa's first short story.

The naiveté of the character's rural upbringing comes into play when a border agent in his suit with "águilas" mocks the son and claims that it was not the border agents who shot at them, but instead the apaches. The young man does not know what an apache is which causes him even more violence and aggression in the hands of these agents. The border agents, Spanish speaking and also of Mexican descent, demonstrate no sympathy or mercy for the immigrants' trials and tribulations. While this young man is trying to cross the border to bring home some money, his father sold his house and refused to care for his children after his wife ran off with another man. The father in this narrative acts like the land developers on the South Texas border. His son was damned if he stayed and damned if he left. Rulfo and Hinojosa paint a vivid portrait of an immigrant's struggle to make a better life. Their literature speaks a truth about the trials and tribulations that migrating to the "North" entails. The American dream becomes unrealistic and distant for Mexican immigrants on both sides of the border.

While Hinojosa does inherently take part in two cultures, he lives them internally, he does not live between them nor does he flow from one to the other. Hinojosa's dialogic formation of identity lives two cultures internally and through his writing and his use of both languages creates his prime and central identity through the navigation of these cultures. Like the men traveling north in the *estampas* Hinojosa also makes his trip north for his educational career. Essentially Hinojosa creates another world; a world that is familiar to him and that is able to encompass his self-interpretation, his experience and

his vast knowledge of Texas and Mexico history and the dynamic of the two in border life. This dialogism is indispensable when creating his work *Estampas del Valle*. This novel was his first publication written in Spanish and it was the commencement of what would become a historical and folkloric account of the South Texas Rio Grande Valley border lifestyle. The border does not separate culture as it does the boundaries of a nation. These physical boundaries represented with bridges, border crossings, border patrols and pay tolls are not necessarily separating cultures, but instead building physical boundaries that may or may not permit cultural infiltration from one side to the other. This is based on the individual experience of border peoples.

Hybrid Cultures: Distinction and Regionalism

Although it is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States, the Valley remains a widely secluded and rural place. This type of setting has helped conserve Mexican traditions that are still vivid. The proximity of the border and the rural aspects of this area allow the infusion of culture and identification with the “other side” of the border. Native Valleyites inhabit both sides of the border, linguistically, culturally, and geographically. In the Valley, the border has become more of a metaphor than a true partition. Immigration issues, however, do not disappear. Instead of dividing two countries, like Canclini states, this has become an opportunity for hybridization, especially in regards to the social and historical conditions of the area.

Identity is personal and is created by the individual. This border space creates a three dimensional space, which we can denote as a hybridization of the Mexican and the Greater Mexico. Paredes’s work allows Mexican-Americans to form part of a community that they feel an affinity to culturally and linguistically. If the Chicano of the Valley feels that he or she is Mexican, then he is Mexican. In Hinojosa’s novel, the Mexican of the Valley is still very much in touch with Mexican traditions and customs, including myths and folklore as we saw in the sketch of Tía Panchita. The borders of a nation do not define an individual in totality. Paredes, like most Valleyites, also identifies as Mexican. This explains the creation of Greater Mexico and the possibility of a Mexican community outside of Mexico. These regional spaces account for something more than an ethnic bubble in the United States.

In this case, I am in accordance with Edward Said in his *Reflections on exile and other essays*. He states, “Seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal ... For an exile, habits of life, expression and activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally” (Said 366). The history of the Valley is the vision of an exiled community, historically speaking. In 1848 after the Treaty of Guadalupe many Mexicans were left to live as exiles in their own land. The only difference is that in this case the situation was more drastic and long lasting. Their exiled nature was not by choice, but by force. They became foreigners in their own land. The Mexican people were abandoned by two nations. Elena Pontiatowska states, “To say that Mexico abandoned its people would not be false, because Mexico abandons all poor Mexicans. The poor choose the

American dream and the American way of life on the other side of the border, because they don't see a future for themselves in their own country” (Pontiatowska 37). Mexicans lost their sense of belonging. Poverty, believes Hinojosa, is always an offense. The displaced Mexicans of the Valley were Indians, mestizos, not white like Anglos, and, even if they were, they were not Anglos, for they did not know that life could be conceived of as one great big business. “Suddenly they discovered that time is money – a philosophical contribution that Americans have made to the world – that technology was sacred as any religion, and that they Catholic religion did not have the same importance in the States as it had in Mexico. In other words, they had lost their sense of belonging” (Pontiatowska 38). The Valley and Belken County became a space that enables the individual to feel at home, to feel surrounded by their people and their culture, to form a community with which they can identify.

In *Estampas del Valle*, Hinojosa creates this Mexican home for the community. Belken County citizens live a multilingual and multidimensional form of existence. This multidimensional existence means that a person is always already aware of at least two worlds. These worlds, physical and abstract, build simultaneous dimensions that are represented vividly. Rolando Hinojosa’s writing is multidimensional in space and language. The author’s life experience as a borderer who leaves his home for university studies and then to serve in the Korean War can then be seen as a writer in exile; a writer who’s imagined community gives way to a multidimensional way of seeing the world. This period of distance and exile from his native region that gave way to his writing and to his sense of place as a writer of Greater Mexico.

Present Cultural Contact

Nestor García Canclini defines hybridization as “sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects and practices” (García Canclini xxv). Canclini cites border cities as a space that lends itself to intermixed cultural practices; in essence, the borders of the nations of Mexico and the United States have become porous. The culture and narratives of the Río Grande Valley have undergone a figurative cultural osmosis or a process of gradual or unconscious assimilation of ideas and knowledge. By assimilation, I do not mean that the people of the Valley have assimilated solely into the American way of life or solely into a Mexican way of life, but instead, both cultures have entered a semipermeable spatial membrane. This porous membrane is flexible and adaptable to border life. The border has become porous and thus allows this type of cultural exchange between two nations in this specific geographic space. Belken County traits highlight the cultural osmosis between the Rio Grande Valley and northern Mexico. Mexican traditions and sociolinguistic customs have remained present and now even more prevalent through local radio stations such as La Lupe 89.1FM, which plays rancheras, norteñas, and classic Mexican folk music, and Digital 101.5, which plays *rock en español* for the new generations. Local television networks such as Telemundo 40 and Univisión and local Spanish newspapers such as *El Enlace* from Rio Grande City and *El Mañana* from Reynosa, Tamaulipas remain an institution in this region. Radio stations in this area are made to serve both sides of the border, constantly reminding the community that they are bound through arts, music, language and culture.

Martín Barbero writes, the “Radio nationalized the language; television unifies the intonations, gives repertoires of images in which the national becomes in tune with the international” (Martín B., Jesús (Martín Barbero) Part 3). Hinojosa also has experience as a disk jockey for the naval academy in Puerto Rico. His experience as a Mexican-American was internationalized not only through his writing, but also through the airwaves. The infiltration of culture across mass media account for such a strong following of Mexican *telenovelas* and other shared news and forms of entertainment. Canclini states, “From both sides of the border intercultural movements show their painful face: the underemployment and uprooting of peasants and indigenous people who had to leave their lands in order to survive. But a very dynamic cultural production is also growing there. If there are more than 250 Spanish –language radio and television stations in the United States, more than fifteen hundred publications in Spanish, and a high interest in Latin American literature and music” (García Canclini 231).

Latin cultural productions such as films, music and newspapers make their way into the Rio Grande Valley without fail. Musical groups such as Intocable, Duelo, Sólido and Súper Odisea, to name a few, write and create their music in Spanish and through their art disseminate and promote Mexican culture in the Rio Grande Valley and in northern Mexico. Just as there are northern Mexico elements in the Valley there are also Valley elements in northern Mexico. Such an example can be seen in the depiction of *música Tribal*, a blend of African and Aztec rhythms that has popularized the wearing of particularly long and pointy boots. This *música Tribal*³, although now most successful in Mexico City, was created and popularized in Texas and in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. The idea of fashion at its extreme, such as the pointy boots that are worn to perform these musical pieces, is a cultural appropriation of traditional dance rhythms and stylistic aesthetics. The rhythm and the boots function as a form of traveling storyteller, giving the Mexican oral tradition popularity and notoriety across borders. This artistic performance echoes the traveling circus of Belken County. The *música Tribal* rhythm, now made hip by Erick Rincón, a teenager from Mexico City, has gained its popularity across Mexican rodeos in Texas. In fact, he states that these events and competitions happen at a grander scale in Texas than they do in Mexico. Mexican-Americans in the United States and particularly in the Texas Valley are extremely conscious of cultural details and are more inclined to practice them at a larger scale precisely because it brings them closer to their identification with Mexico and Mexican culture. The fixation with having the longest and pointiest boots equates the necessity to feel closer ties to the motherland.

Fluctuating Identities: What’s Next?

Identities fluctuate and change; Hinojosa demonstrates this in his written work as well as in his life trajectory. In an interview with *La línea quebrada* editor, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Canclini asks Gómez-Peña about his border identity and how he identifies. Guillermo states: “When they ask me my nationality or ethnic identity, I cannot respond with one word, since my “identity” has multiple repertoires: I am Mexican, but also Chicano and Latin American. On the border they call me “chilango” or “mexiquillo”; in the capital (of Mexico) “pochó” or “norteño,” and in Europe “sudaca.” Anglo-Saxons

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pSV3jvcjKY>

call me “Hispanic” or “Latino” and Germans have more than once confused me with being Turkish or Italian” (García Canclini 238-239). Gómez-Peña feels that identity is relative to location. *Estampas del Valle* is a testament to this theory of the importance of place.

Rolando Hinojosa, for example, grew up speaking and writing in Spanish and self identifies as Mexican. Now, as a professor at the University of Texas at Austin, Hinojosa’s customs have shifted. Most of his days are spent speaking and writing in English. The uniqueness of Hinojosa as a Chicano writer, now familiar with the term Chicano, lies in his never-ending interest in being involved in Mexico. He is involved with the Tec of Monterrey as a board member of their literary fair and the Guadalajara annual book fair. Although Hinojosa’s routines, customs and languages shift often, his Mexican identity stays intact. Canclini states, “Studies of identitarian narratives conducted from theoretical perspectives that take into account processes of hybridization show that it is not possible to speak of identities as if they were simply a matter of fixed characteristics, or to posit them as the essence of an ethnicity or a nation”(García Canclini xxviii). Identities shift and transform. They remain true only to their subject and geography.

Identities are not homogenous. Identities are malleable and account for intimate personal experiences, such as the *estampas* in *Estampas del Valle*. Néstor García Canclini aims to emphasize borders between countries (especially the U.S.-Mexico border) and large cities as the formation of a hybrid entity. To him these cultural contact zones condition specific formats, styles and contradictions of hybridization. The rigid borders and boundaries established by modern states have become porous. Only a handful of cultures can now be described as stable units, with precise limits based on the occupation of a closed territory.

“Hybridization occurs under specific social and historical conditions, amid systems of production and consumption that at times operate coercively, as can be appreciated in the lives of many migrants” (García Canclini xxxiv). On May 14, 2010 in Hudspeth County, U.S. Border Patrol agents in that area found a “secret” border crossing. Two ‘footbridges’ that were once built for flooding purposes were now being used illegally as border crossings. The modern nation, with all its force and might still cannot keep the Rio Grande River from being crossed. Currently there are eleven bridges and border-crossings across the Rio Grande River in the Valley. They are the following: Brownsville-Matamoros, McAllen-Reynosa Falcon Dam/Nuevo Guerrero, Roma/Ciudad Aleman, Rio Grande City/Ciudad Camargo, Los Ebanos/Diaz Ordaz, which has the last hand-drawn ferry on the U.S. border, McAllen-Hidalgo/Reynosa, Pharr/Reynosa, Progreso/Nuevo Progreso (south of Weslaco and Mercedes), The Free Trade Bridge (south of Harlingen and San Benito), and Brownsville/Matamoros.⁴ Hinojosa’s literature and life experiences in Arteaga, Mexico are a testament that some boundaries are not a division, but an opportunity for cultural fluidity.

What is the next step for identification in the Chicano community? With the expansion of border crossings and the industrialization of rural areas, the border is constantly shifting. Rolando Hinojosa’s fiction also shifts in this manner. The modern Chicano community is a place of constant change. Transitory identities will mold the

⁴ <http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/border/sfatb1.html>

new terms for identification within the Chicano community. With the constant influx of immigrants from Mexico, the Chicano community grows every day.

Don Manuel Guzmán: Valley was Mexico

The sketch of don Manuel Guzmán is reminiscent of Manuel Guzmán-Hinojosa, Rolando Hinojosa's father. Hinojosa ties the personal history of the Hinojosa family dating back to the 1700s to the history of Belken County. *Estampas del Valle* is connected to the history of his own family. "Nacido en Campacuás, condado de Hidalgo, estado de Texas, jugaba al monte de tres barajas con albur" (Hinojosa 58). The Hinojosas lived through the many historical and territorial changes in the Valley. Hinojosa's father was born in the *Rancho de Campacuás* in Hidalgo County and remained there until the time of his death. They were there with the first settlers and they remained there as the land shifted from Spain, Mexico and then to the U.S. after the Treaty of Guadalupe. Even though the territory shifted in possession that did not shift their cultural associations with Mexico, don Manuel and his family retained their Mexican customs such as the *monte*⁵ card game with *albur* that Hinojosa's father played very well. The card game *monte* is a cultural artifact that was brought by the Spaniards during colonization and remained present in the practices of the Mexican population.

The space of don Manuel in this narrative is to connect all of that history and through it to demonstrate why the Valley's connection to Mexico prevails. Don Manuel Guzmán represents the shifting history and the unbreakable cultural instrument of these longtime citizens of Hidalgo County in the Valley. "Aquí va otra. Peón, domador de caballos, ex revolucionario, siguió esa huella tan conocida: Villa, Obregón, decepción" (Hinojosa 58). Hinojosa speaks of don Manuel's experiences as a revolutionary only as part of his long life. The author makes it a point to demonstrate that this man has had many experiences and through them, has lived multiple lives. Hinojosa associates don Guzmán's life to the life of his actual father, the resemblance is uncanny. Hinojosa's father held various jobs as a young man including laborer, a horse trainer and a policeman for the town. Don Manuel is also a keeper of oral history; he was a living archive for Hinojosa the author. In this sketch, don Manuel is also a great storyteller. "Don Manuel no tomaba ni fumaba pero era muy maldiciente, corajudo, mal sufrido y corto de paciencia. Gran contador de cuentos que no de chistes, nunca oí que se la recargara. Si llegaba a cansar a la gente sería cuando se ponía a alabar a sus cinco hijos. No contando el menor, vio a todos casarse y hasta llegó a conocer a varios de sus nietos" (Hinojosa 58). He was an avid family man and storyteller. Like Hinojosa's father, don Manuel also had five children. Hinojosa makes this sketch is an ode to his own father in commemoration of Valley history and the time that his ancestors spent in

⁵ See: <http://www.acanomas.com/Reglamentos-Juegos-de-Naipes/1067/Monte.htm>

El juego del monte nació en España, se extendió por América durante la conquista de este continente y se convirtió en uno de los juegos más populares en el legendario Far West. En la actualidad permanece como uno de los testimonios de la antigua presencia española en los territorios que constituyen el sur de Estados Unidos. Es un juego muy practicado en Norteamérica, donde se conoce como Monte Bank o también Spanish Monte, es decir, monte español o simplemente monte. Asimismo se practica como un juego de círculo, al estilo de las siete y media.

the Hidalgo County area. Hinojosa was brought up with stories about his county and about the Mexican Revolution. With this history it is no wonder Hinojosa and his family identify as Mexicans even though they are now on U.S. soil.

When speaking about Mexican roots in the Valley, Rolando Hinojosa makes it explicit that he identifies as a Mexican living within the United States and that because of his upbringing and his proximity to Mexico in the Valley, it is of the most natural nature to feel this way. Hinojosa explains the Mexican roots that exist in the Valley and they way in, which others from this region see themselves. For Hinojosa it is important to write about a unified Valley identity. The innovative quality of Hinojosa's work demonstrates the ability to create a unified regional identity and in the process break it down to a local area within that region. The history continually intersecting the Hinojosa novel is the history of the population of Mexican origin in the Texas Valley. "The novel captures the racial, national and linguistic fragmentation of the Valley, as well as its bilingualism and the inter-ethnic alliances established within the propertied classes" (Saldívar 80-81).

Belken County is a regional space that is comprised of multiple areas and multiple identities. Each city in Belken County has a unique identity, yet still form part of the regional collectiveness. Hinojosa's Belken County, one single county that forms part of the Rio Grande Valley exemplifies the multifaceted experiences, peoples, folklore and culture that can exist in one area. This is what Rolando Hinojosa successfully provides in *Estampas del Valle*. Rolando Hinojosa's writing displays the a Mexican world in the Rio Grande Valley, specifically Belken County and the people that inhabit it. "The Spanish-speaking, Mexican world of the fictional Belken County will emerge as Rafa wanders between the Valley and the University of Texas, Austin, memorializing the Valley elders, friends, and las familias mexicanas of the previous generation, many of whom saw him leave for and return from the war" (Calderón 166). Rolando Hinojosa's is closely related to that of Rafa Buenrostro. In Rafa, he exemplifies the perseverance and cultural magnetism of the people of the Valley. In the end, Rafa is just *an hijo del pueblo*.

Conclusion

Hijo del Pueblo

Hinojosa portrays folklore, religion and Mexican traditions through the eye of the community in his sketches. Each story has a different point of view and contains a myriad of characters. In this manner, Hinojosa's writing encompasses the northern Mexico and Rio Grande Valley musical worlds. The Rio Grande River has blended the rhythms and sounds of these two national territories. For Hinojosa, writing of the *pueblo* or the community was a way of writing his own *corrido*. Like Américo Paredes in *With a Pistol in his Hand*, Hinojosa creates the norteño imaginary in his sketches. The Mexican *corrido* speaks of the townspeople. Through his writing Hinojosa creates a culturally musical narrative exemplary of *norteño* and *corrido* music present in northern Mexico and across the Rio Grande Valley. Hinojosa's style of writing is reminiscent of Texas-Mexican oral tradition just as the *corrido* of Gregorio Cortez. Each *estampa* can be viewed as part of a *corrido's* narrative. They function as stanzas that make up the rhythm and cadences of a song.

The fragmentary narrative style presents a musical historicity, as does all of *Estampas del Valle*. Hinojosa builds on Mexican musical traditions to compose his narrative and his view of the *pueblo*. Hinojosa's relation to his community is a form of meta-identity. He is an *hijo del pueblo* and sees himself as an integral part of the community of Belken County that forms his sense of place. As we saw in an earlier chapter, the character of Romeo Hinojosa, the lawyer in "Por esas cosas que pasan", represents Hinojosa the author.

These arrays of meta-identities are neither transferable in history nor time, but are mutable and adaptable to the circumstances of his position first and foremost in relation to his community. The history of the Valley is an oral one. Hinojosa states, "And the Border was home; and it was also the home of the petty office holder elected by a uniformed citizenry; a home for bossism and for old-time smuggling as a way of life for some. But, it also maintained the remains of a social democracy that cried out for independence, for a desire to be left alone and for the continuance of a sense of community" (Saldívar and Hinojosa 20). Many of the people in Hinojosa's generation were raised with the music written and composed by Valley people, and he learned the Ballads of the border, not realizing that it was a true native art form.

To write, or the act of writing, is to approximate the experience of what is being written about. Similarly, it is hoped that in the act of reading, the reader too, will feel an approximation to the written text. I want to begin by examining the renowned musical piece [El Hijo del Pueblo](#)¹ in relation to Rolando Hinojosa's essay "The Sense of Place" and *Estampas del Valle*. *El Hijo del Pueblo* is a musical composition composed by the Mexican legend, José Alfredo Jiménez and later interpreted by various artists. Both of these works propagate a sense of space, a dynamic identity and a position of belonging within their community. However, before this musical piece can be seen as merely a form of entertainment, it must be seen as a literary arrangement. "Music and literature

¹ LosTigresNorteVEVO. "El Hijo del Pueblo." *YouTube*. Web. 2007.

² <http://video.latino.msn.com/watch/video/los-tigres-del-norte-presentan-su-disco->

are viewed as closely akin, because they are auditory, temporal and dynamic art forms” (Scher, Bernhart and Wolf 182). Hinojosa’s *estampas*, like Mencho Saldañas’s *greñas*, are a dynamic form of art. Its literature can be arranged to a *corrido* rhythm to follow the lives of the community members.

Tigres del Norte

The following musical piece has been interpreted by artists such as Jorge Negrete, Vicente Fernández and most recently by the Tigres del Norte in their 2008 musical album *Raíces*. This album was recorded in Menlo Park, California in November and December of 2007. Their interpretation of this piece by José Alfredo Jiménez, exemplifies the Leitmotif of Los Tigres del Norte’s efforts to promote regional musical culture locally and internationally. Their music also aims to articulate their political position on the struggles of Mexican immigrants in the United States. The double-voiced musical composition contains the narrator’s axiological judgment about the society represented in his story. The value of the musical group’s effort to unite the Mexican community is present in this piece.

El Hijo del Pueblo:

*Es mi orgullo haber nacido,
en el barrio más humilde;
alejado del bullicio,
y de la falsa sociedad.*

*Yo no tengo la desgracia,
de no ser hijo del pueblo;
yo me cuento entre la gente,
que no tiene falsedad.*

*Mi destino es muy parejo,
yo lo quiero como venga;
soportando una tristeza,
o detrás de una ilusión.*

*Yo camino por la vida,
muy feliz con mi pobreza;
porque no tengo dinero,
tengo mucho corazón.*

*Descendiente de Cuauhtémoc,
mexicano por fortuna;
desdichado en los amores,
soy borracho y trovador.*

*Pero cuántos millonarios,
quisieran vivir mi vida;*

*pa' cantarle a la pobreza,
sin sentir ningún dolor.*

*Es por eso que es mi orgullo,
ser del barrio más humilde;
alejado del bullicio,
y de la falsa sociedad.*

*Yo compongo mis canciones,
pa' que el pueblo me las cante;
y el día que el pueblo me falle,
ese día voy a llorar.*

The music of Los Tigres del Norte represents an important struggle for Mexican communities in the United States and across the globe. Literary critics such as José David Saldívar and Héctor Calderon have researched the cultural importance of this musical group. Their personal struggles as illegal immigrants and their musical lyrics are dedicated to understanding and helping the community they aim to represent. Hinojosa, Paredes and Rivera do the same through their writing. In an interview with MSN Latino² in which they debut their album *Raíces*, the artists express the significance behind their new musical compilation. Los Tigres del Norte and their musical career in the United States illustrate an identity and a body of work travels through many national boundaries. The message of their music conveys the tradition and the *arraigo* of the Mexican community, especially that of the migrant community. The members of Los Tigres del Norte explain:

El disco *Raíces*, es un homenaje a la música mexicana, con el cual se busca engrandecer la cultura musical de México. Se hizo, con todo respeto y admiración a todos los músicos, compositores e interpretes que han hecho de estas canciones parte de las raíces musicales de México; son las raíces culturales, musicales y de mucha tradición. No sólo para Los Tigres del Norte, sino para todo el pueblo mexicano donde sea que se encuentren. Con *Raíces*, el compromiso es que *las tradiciones musicales de México se difundan internacionalmente*.

Como cada producción discográfica de Los Tigres del Norte, *Raíces* es un concepto tanto musical como visual, el cual representa las raíces musicales y culturales de México. En esta ocasión se escogió un sol prehispánico en conjunción con un tigre el cual simboliza a los Tigres del Norte. Es una invitación para que descubran el folclore de la música mexicana. Los sentimientos fueron de alegría, orgullo, nostalgia y de mucho amor a nuestra música tradicional mexicana. Estas canciones no sólo se identifican con el pueblo de México, son inspiración para todos los latinos que radican en cualquier parte del mundo. Estas canciones transmiten sentimientos de orgullo e identidad, que en momentos tan

² <http://video.latino.msn.com/watch/video/los-tigres-del-norte-presentan-su-disco-raices/9ncz7689>

dificiles para los migrantes que se van a los Estados Unidos u otras partes del mundo, son una motivación para seguir adelante con los sueños que ellos se han forjado. (Tigres del Norte, Entrevista)³

Like Rolando Hinojosa in *Estampas del Valle*, Los Tigres del Norte strive to provide a voice for the community. They hope that their music, like Hinojosa's writing, can transmit a sense of identity and serve as a motivating force.

The captivating sound of the accordion in this musical selection is typical of *norteño* music along the border. This rhythm comes from Northern Mexican music coupled with Río Grande Valley style. Musical composition of local Valley *norteño* groups such as Sólido, Duelo, and Intocable produce their *norteño* music on the American side of the border. The Valley has become a space for Mexican cultural expression. The melody is rhythmically slow and drawn out to demonstrate deep emotions and solidarity with ones local community. This musical style emulates the movement of life and the lives of those sharing the same struggle. The lyrics are a combination of simplicity and humility that form part of a sincere and hard-working society. José Alfredo Jiménez longed to return to an old way of life in which everything was sincere and simple people were not overshadowed with the riches and falsehood of a glamorous life. Simplicity is seen as a true form of sincerity.

The lyrics to "El Hijo del Pueblo" state, "No tengo dinero, tengo mucho corazón" to signify that even a millionaire could not live life to the fullest like a humble hard-working community man. Money cannot buy the unwavering support of a community that becomes a family. The narrator's ambition as troubadour leads us to relate this song as reminiscent of the old-timers of Belken County in Rolando Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle*. The old-timers are proud to be Mexican and to have taken part in the Mexican Revolution. They long for those days, reminiscing of the past and of the meaning of their lives. The new generation is more concerned with accumulating riches instead of serving the community, being humble and living an honest life.

People's People

An *hijo del pueblo* can be someone that is dedicated to his community and lives a life that uplifts this imaginary community. The man in this *corrido* finds himself among his people and between his people, not as an outsider looking in, but as an integral part of the community. This man's destiny is with his people taking part in a simple lifestyle that has more to do with living a full and honest life and less with fame and fortune. This musical piece creates sadness and fights for the struggle of the simple man especially the rural hard-working man belonging to the working class and struggling to survive in his day-to-day living. It is a reminder of the narratives provided for us by Hinojosa, Rulfo and Rivera. It does not mean that man will settle and not strive for a better life; it simply means that he will not ignore the needs of his community or abandon his people in the process. Both Rivera and Hinojosa left the Río Grande Valley in search of other opportunities. Both of these authors returned to their community through literature.

³ <http://video.latino.msn.com/watch/video/los-tigres-del-norte-presentan-su-disco-raices/9ncz7689>

Hinojosa and Rivera are proud of their roots and the place where they grew up. They are *hijos del pueblo*.

The corrido also focuses on the roots and identities of the people of these *pueblos*. Like Gloria Anzaldúa, another Valleyite, this song embraces Mexican indigenous roots focusing on the pueblo's relationship to Cuauhtémoc, an indigenous hero. The simple man, in this case, represents a hero. The song displays an honor about being part of the Mexican culture, especially during difficult political times that immigrants are facing in the United States. The richness of the culture and the heart of the people are represented in this rendition by Los Tigres del Norte, who have preoccupied themselves with serving the community and disseminating Mexican culture and Mexican musical traditions throughout the United States and all over the world. As immigrants themselves, this song represents a true personal struggle by the musical group paying tribute to the Mexican communities in Mexico and in other areas that are part of Américo Paredes's Greater Mexico.

Hinojosa and Rivera represent modern troubadours through their writing. Their narratives contain musical elements that are similar to *corridos*. In fact, the fragmentary style of their narrative garnishes their writing with musical elements. The experiences that we read about in the works of Rolando Hinojosa are lyrics to life and life's experiences. Hinojosa provides his literature in fragments because it is a chronicle of the community like the music of the Tigres del Norte and the *corrido* genre in general. The multitude of characters in the novel can be read as the chorus for the *corrido* of Belken County. The troubadour provides lyrics in their most pure form. They can be read as a form of poetry. Hinojosa forms his characters with authenticity and musicality. The combination of these two elements allows the reader to enter a place that can be seen from an insider view, yet from an objective perspective. In his interview with 60 minutes Julio Scherer García⁴, Mexico's foremost journalist on border violence in Mexico emphasizes the importance of living among a culture to truly get to know it. Only the poor truly know poverty, those that speak about the poor are merely tourists of poverty. Hinojosa's position within the Mexican community of the Valley gives us, the readers of his works, unique access to cultural information from the inside, which can then help create a theoretical and analytical vision from the outside.

In "El Hijo del Pueblo" the artists sing of poverty without feeling alienated. They sing of real circumstances within the Mexican community, particularly the Mexican immigrant community. In this case poverty does not represent negativity, but instead can be seen as experience. Rolando Hinojosa is proud to be part of the Rio Grande Valley. He comes back to his sense of place through his words and through the musical composition that he has inevitably created through his writing. The community has molded Hinojosa and his creation. They live for their pueblo and their pueblo lives for them. Hinojosa has an important story to tell for literature and shares his experiences in a way that foments creativity and preserves Mexican culture and tradition through the arts.

The relationship between the regional literature of South Texas and regional music goes hand in hand. Los Tigres del Norte and Hinojosa present fidelity to history and to promulgate the Mexican-American community experience. Just like literature, the *corrido* is a historical chronicle, or a history created by and for the people. The *corrido* is

⁴ <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4841395n>

also an archive full of secrets. Music unveils historical occurrences and broadcasts the preoccupations of the people. This demonstrates the authors' recognition of their public role as truth tellers. The musical pieces are a form of expression about the community and for the community. A *corrido*, for example serves to inform the listener of the collective inhabitants of that certain community and it has served to document epic events, serving the same purpose in the countryside or rural communities as the newspaper did in urban cities. Hinojosa possess the unique psychology of the *pueblo*, which comes as a result of belonging to the community. The *pueblo* has begun to show signs of political maturity.

These ballads also contribute to the idea of an imagined community because they serve to mobilize and uplift the masses. For example, it is impossible to imagine the Mexican Revolution without also imagining the ballads that accompanied the men that fought as well as the ballads that informed the community of the latest occurrences. In *Border Matters*, José David Saldívar states, "The nature of the *corrido* as form and content is social and revolutionary, drawing heavily on the deepest levels of what Frederic Jameson (1981) has called "the political unconscious," defining relationships between temporal and the eternal. Chicanos who live throughout the US-MX borderlands in the southwestern United States, as Paredes has taught us, sing the *corrido*. Its function is to reconcile individual experience into a collective identity" (Saldívar 66). In his study, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, Ramon Saldívar provides an insightful discussion of the ideological and historical ground for the border *corrido* tradition. About Paredes's *With His Pistol in His Hand*, Saldívar notes:

With impeccable scholarship and imaginative subtlety, Paredes's study of the border ballads, that concern the historical figure of Gregorio Cortez and his solitary armed resistance to the injustices Mexicans faced in Anglo Texas, may be said to have invented the very possibility of a narrative community, a complete and legitimate Mexican American persona, whose life of struggle and discord was worthy of being told. (Saldívar 26)

Saldívar finds that the community itself is personified in the *corrido* hero, so that, in the case of Paredes, Gregorio Cortez stands as an epic construction of the society that constitutes him. Like Jehú and Rafa, among other characters, he cannot be disconnected from the communal fate. The *corrido* is an important folkloric element appreciated in the works of Hinojosa, as is the importance of a Mexican community. In *Estampas del Valle*, Rolando Hinojosa writes the *corrido* of Belken County. He becomes the composer of a musical piece highlighting the fight and struggles of a Mexican community. Rolando Hinojosa's border is full of Mexican imagery, tradition and folklore. His writing is a true representation of Américo Paredes's notion of Greater Mexico. Hinojosa's writing transcends figurative and literal borders. Apart from forming part of American literature, *Estampas del Valle* is comparable to other Mexican and Latin American regional and rural oeuvres. This novel highlights the importance of the community and how it imagines itself when faced with the hardships of arduous labor, rustic atmospheres and sweltering life-threatening temperatures. Hinojosa combines literary elements, language, local customs, traditions, religion and folklore to embrace the Rio Grande Valley.

Closing Remarks & Future Projects

Like the *corrido* in *norteño* music, Rolando Hinojosa's place in Chicano literature marked the beginning of a new era for contemporary Chicano writers. With the exception of a handful of studies by critics such as José David Saldivar and Luis Leal, *Estampas del Valle* has been overshadowed by the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. This novel deserves more attention because it provides an accurate account of the historical South Texas border region and its inhabitants. It is my intent to continue my investigation of the novel in order to investigate different concerns with more depth. As we have seen in the sketches, the Mexican Revolution brought a multitude of exiles to the Rio Grande Valley. The Shary Collection at the University of Texas Pan American holds valuable photos and newspaper clippings of Mexicans that crossed the Rio Grande to find refuge and a new beginning in the Rio Grande Valley. The librarians at the University of Texas Pan-American graciously helped me obtain the university's permission to publish the photographic material of the Shary excursions in the introduction and they helped me find the Portal to Texas History, an important online database with photographs that will be helpful to my research.

Hinojosa's novel raises questions about the manner in which these refugees affected the socioeconomic and cultural composition of the area. The following photograph is a testament to the importance of finding more information on this topic. This is a photograph of refugees walking across the Rio Grande. This refugee is pulling her donkey and her personal items across the river.⁵ Mexican refugees were not limited to the poor and helpless. Some of the refugees that came to the Valley were also



⁵[Mexican Revolution Refugees], Photograph, 191?; digital image, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph63521>: accessed February 15, 2011), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting El Paso Public Library, El Paso, Texas.

well-to-do Mexican citizens. These families remained in the Valley and became part of Hinojosa's sketches. For me, Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* has generated fascination and curiosity about the lives of these Mexican refugees. There has been plentiful research on the Mexican Revolution, but not enough research on the families that had to leave their own country as a repercussion of the revolution. The revolution affected the rich, the poor, women, men and children. No one was exempt from the repercussions of an event so grand that it affected communities on both side of the border. The following photograph⁶ demonstrates a wealthier refugee family. The contrast of this photograph to the previous one is alarming and worth researching more profoundly.



It is my intention to continue my work on archival photography in relation to Hinojosa's early journalistic work on the Mexican Revolution. Some of the refugees in South Texas were Hinojosa's teachers in the *escuelitas* that he attended as a child. This fluctuation of immigrants impacted the cultural life and the literature of the Valley.

How does the Valley of the Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* compare to other contemporary fiction writers? What is the future of Chicano literature? The trademark of Quinto Sol writers was the rural setting of their novels and the autochthonous feeling of their characters. The agrarian and pastoral setting of Valley Chicano writers is slowly disappearing. Contemporary literary works are metropolitan and less preoccupied with focusing on geographical specificities. The work of contemporary fiction writers like Helena Viramontes and poets like Gary Soto incorporate modern societal elements of the

⁶ [Refugees], Photograph, 191?; digital images, (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph63534> : accessed February 15, 2011), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <http://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting El Paso Public Library , El Paso, Texas.

Chicano community. Chicano literature is fairly new to the literary sphere. As literary critics we must focus on making Chicano literature more central in academia and beyond. Apart from literary criticism, which is gaining a strong force in Chicano literature, we must also focus on creating literary works. As academics we must foster an environment that encourages creativity and literary criticism with the same rigor.

Chicano literature from rural border spaces is becoming less and less prominent. The Paredes, Hinojosa and Rivera trio set a precedent for literature of the Rio Grande Valley. The South Texas border has multiplied in size since the decades of Paredes and Hinojosa. Is it still possible to create border literature based on rural spaces in areas that are becoming increasingly developed? The Valley is no longer exclusively rural, yet cannot be pegged as metropolitan such as Juárez or Tijuana. The Mexican side of the Valley border is underdeveloped in comparison to the American side. Many Mexicans travel to family ranches in Mexico, like Hinojosa traveled to Arteaga, and are still in touch with the simple form of living depicted in literature of rural spaces. Access to more rural places in Mexico is becoming increasingly threatened by border violence. The border is now marked with fear. People are more hesitant to cross over to the Mexican side for fearing the prominent violence in this area at the present moment. The border has finally become a separation. Not a separation of culture, but a separation of nation-state cultivated with fear. Now, the refugees that cross the border are families that have lost their homes to the drug war and cartel violence.

Several of my family members including my grandmother lost their homes in Camargo, Tamaulipas. How will this new influx of immigrants affect the Valley area? What effect will this have on border literature? What will future generations write about and will current politics impact literary works? There is no doubt that Chicano literature will continue to flourish. Chicanos must have a more present voice in creation and criticism. The questions above can only be answered in the next few years as Chicano writers leave their mark in literary history. One of the difficulties of placing Chicano literature in a more centralized position in the literary map is the lack of a singular voice. Hinojosa's *Estampas del Valle* demonstrates that even within one community there can be many fragments and many pieces.

The Chicano voice represents an array of diasporic experiences in the U.S. I do feel, however that we must have more contemporary Valley authors representing the Chicano community within literature. This dissertation has answered many questions for me in terms of identity, space and culture, yet it has also conduced me to formulate questions on the future of Chicano literature, especially literature of the Rio Grande Valley border region. Will we have another generation of Hinojosa, Rivera's or Anzaldúas? As much as I would emphatically like to say *YES*, only time will tell. Authors like Rolando Hinojosa have a purpose. *Estampas del Valle*, for example, helped us think of national and international dilemmas from the perception of art. I would like to conclude this study with a lingering and though provoking question: What will be the purpose of the new generation of Chicano writers? That, of course, depends on the younger generations. "The U.S.-Mexico border measures 1951 miles and the diverse historical events that take place between Brownsville-Matamoros those of Tijuana-Imperial Beach, California, could be a productive field for future writers. Whether that

will be the case or not is something I can't comment on with any degree of accuracy".⁷
Veremos.

⁷ Interview with Rolando Hinojosa, personal correspondence with the author. Please see "Appendix".

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Appendix

Interview with Rolando Hinojosa

November 14, 2011

Rolando Hinojosa and I have been in contact for the last five years. The following interview questions were sent via e-mail. Hinojosa's responses were left in tact to authentically represent his narrative structure and train of thought. I would like to thank don Rolando for his help.

1. How did you become a creative writer? Do you feel that it is a learned experience or an innate quality?

I can't remember exactly when I decided to write, however, because I come from a family of readers, this is what may have led me to write. I wrote my first story at age 14, in Spanish. I was spending my summers in northern Mexico in Arteaga, Coahuila, population 1200, and I wrote of two field hands, campesinos, who died when they attempted to evade soldiers who meant to impress them in the army. I set it during the Mexican Revolution of 1910; this, in great part, because I listened to all manner of stories from the old men and women who either participated in the Revolution or lived as exiles in the United States because of the Revolution. Added to this, during our junior and senior years in high school I wrote five pieces for Creative Bits, a program that encouraged the students to write. Those five pieces are stored in the Mercedes High School library.

Writing is something one acquires by reading; there's no other way to write or to begin writing. In this, I believe in Faulkner's advice, which reads, in part, "Read. Read. Read. Trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it." Whenever I'm asked that question during Q and A sessions when I read somewhere, I quote Faulkner. It's sound advice. I also believe that imagination alone won't do it in the long haul.

2. How did find your authorial voice? What has been the process of transformation from your authorial voice to becoming a *portavoz* of the community?

I never thought on having a voice. If I have one, I owe it to the many writers I've read in my lifetime. Eventually, one finds one's way to write and that's it. In re to the portavoz of the community, I write about what I know and what I've learned in life, in life's experiences, and serving as a witness of what I observed and heard at home and in my hometown; as one grows up and matures, one's view does not necessarily change, instead, it broadens one's horizons.

3. How did you internally experience border life? How have your views of the Valley border changed from your days in Arteaga to your days in Austin?

I'm no longer that mid-teen ager who spent his summers in Arteaga, but that experience, away from my family for the three summer months for three years in a row, also helped me to grow and to learn. The Valley now is that the one in which I was born, it couldn't be, obviously, but it is the Valley, and new history has been added to the one in which I matured and hence the Series I'm engaged in. As you know, despite the many fiction prose genres I use, it begins in the '30s and am now closing in on the '90s. Sitting in the evenings after supper and hearing men and women in their '50s and '60 tell stories of their lives in the Valley served and continues to serve me. I too have a life; I left the Valley for military service, returned after three years, entered and graduated from the University of Texas, taught school, worked for a chemical company, worked as an office manager and then as the sales manager for a work-clothing manufacturing company, worked as a civil servant for the Bureau of Old Age Survivors Insurance, and, then, nine years after I had earned my baccalaureate degree, I returned to school to earn the higher degrees. I met and worked with all manner of people from many stages of social and economic life. During all that time, I continued my reading; the writing was desultory but helpful.

4. As a young man you left the Valley for war and then for university studies. How did seeing the border from afar give you another perspective of the Valley? What did you miss the most about the Valley at that time?

Unlike current undergraduates who go home during weekends, I chose to stay in Austin. I worked at the library and that was like putting a rabbit to watch the garden patch. Oh, I'd go home for a few days during Thanksgiving and for two or three weeks during the semester break. But that was it. I don't believe got or manufactured another perspective of the Valley. I could see social and political changes in the Valley, and all of this appears in whatever I write. There's nothing static in life, and the characters' perspectives change, of course, and this is what I use as models. The essays I write between novels serve me well, as do the trips to the Valley to be with family and old friends and new. So, I don't miss it because I drive down, I also call, and now, via email, this brings me close to the place and the people.

5. How did other Mexican-American authors inspire you to write about the border? Did you also find inspiration in Latin American literature? How did this shape your writing?

Influence? Yes, in my hometown, a man named Pepe Díaz, worked as a stringer for *The Brownsville Herald*, and he also published in San Antonio's *La Prensa's* Literary Mondays. He wrote poetry and the occasional short story. A friend of my father's I would sit and listen to them. My father was a great reader

as was my mother; they also read to each other. The late Américo Paredes, as a youngster, wrote and edited for the Spanish edition of *The Herald, El Heraldo de Brownsville*. He was a friend of the family, but he was kin too; he discovered two corridos celebrating the marriage of the Hinojosas and the Paredeses in the mid 1850s. I memorized a longish piece of doggerel, The Mexico Texan he wrote as a teenager. And so, what the Valley enjoyed were the parallel structures: the Texas Anglos held dances, so did we, they had social clubs, as did we throughout the Valley such as The Stardust Club, The Triple L Club (Lovely Latin Ladies), and so on.

As an undergraduate at The University of Texas, the Department of Classical and Romance Languages offered some Latin American literature courses. I read Don Segundo Sombra, La Vorágine, Doña Bárbara, Amalia, As well as Mexican and Peninsular Literature. This, of course, also helped since I was reading European writers on my own at the library. My writing was shaped when I attended a Mexican school in Mercedes. The teacher was an exile from Mexico and he earned his living as a teacher. He also taught us how to write in Spanish, and he would read poetry to the class. All in all, a variform education, which, I'm sure, in great, shaped my writing.

6. Did your experience in journalism and radio influence the narrative style and organization of your *estampas* in *Estampas del Valle*?

Journalism helped me to edit and to avoid verbiage. As for radio announcing, that helped in a great way. I learned to speak clearly and this has been helpful in the classroom and whenever I'm invited by universities to read from my work. As for *Estampas* and the second novel, these are fragmentary novels. I introduced the reader to a great number of characters, all of whom would serve as protagonists. The place, too, was a protagonist. I didn't want a main character in either novel and I was also avoiding the 19th century novel and its linearity. Later, by the third work, Korean Love Songs, Rafe Buenrostro serves as a narrator as he does in *The Useless Servants*. In that regard, the voice of a character- narrator. At other times, a first or third person point of view.

7. Your sketches have been compared to Julio Torri's *estampas*. I believe that your fiction exhibits brevity with a "bang". Why does brevity play a significant role in your writing, especially in your sketches?

I had never heard of Julio Torri until Herminio Ríos, at Quinto Sol Publications, wrote and compared my work with Torri's. Later, I asked Luis Leal who filled me in on Torri's work. I've not read him, but no one should dream up stories why I haven't read him; I just haven't read him, that's all. As for brevity, I decided in the first two novels I would write brief sketches by way of introducing the reader to this new world, The Lower Rio Grande Valley and its people. And so, by avoiding the 19th century novelistic technique, I turned to dynamic, or ever-moving, settings and characters.

8. The words that you meticulously selected to write your sketches often have a double meaning and a hidden dark irony. How did your own personality affect the personalities of the characters in Belken County?

I have to believe that every writer has or leaves something of himself in his writing. I'm writing a historical work, but it's fiction; and what is fiction based on? On true events, on real people, as imagined by the writer. There's a lot of truth in the scenes throughout, but, in the end, it's fiction. Why? Because, as said, fiction is based on reality. Whose reality? The writer's, and the writer's take on life. One's opinions, biases, beliefs, etcetera, are in every piece that any writer comes up with. Take Faulkner's Mrs. Hait in *Mule in the Yard*. What happens in the story could happen in real life. Or not. But it isn't important. It happened in Faulkner's work, and there it is. Many of his short stories later became full blown novels. And now, when someone reads this they'll say that Faulkner was my biggest influence. Well, that's not fair to Benito Pérez Galdós, on whom I wrote my doctoral thesis, or to Anthony Powell and his series *A Dance to the Music of Time*, or to Evelyn Waugh's trilogy, or to Heinrich Böll, or Proust, and so on. Writers influence other writers, and I'm no exception. I've been reading since I was a child and I'm sure that some of those people I read then influenced my speech and my writing.

9. The psychology intricacies of language are a crucial element of the sketches. What cultural impressions are transmitted through language or the shifting of languages amidst borders?

Language. Well, it's what one works with. And, one's characters develop by what they say and by how they say it. In the same way one imitated one's parents, later on, one's friends, and environs. Writers may be more sensitive to this or are more aware about the psychological content in the language. It's important; but it's more important to the writer than to the reader. The reader, then, is the one that must be convinced that what is being read could have happened or is plausible enough for the reader to be engaged; and, once engaged, the reader is in league with the writer.

I do not think or carry with me the above. When I'm writing, I'm in the world I'm writing about. If it's an academic novel such as *We Happy Few*, I was in that world because I was and am of that world. When I write about the military that too falls as part of my experience. The writer can't get away from the world unless the writer is a specialist in Science Fiction. And, even in that genre, much of what the writer has witnessed, heard, or read has been of this world. Those writers will be successful, if they have the talent to convince his readers.

10. *Estampas del Valle* is a cultural archive of the Rio Grande Valley. Why was it important for you to put this particular border region on the literary map?

I was born there, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, not far from where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf. It was the last of the Spanish colonies, and in

the Crown's first census, 1750, there are five Hinojosas who form part of the census. We descend from José María Hinojosa who, along with a younger brother, crossed into the northern bank of the river, and the other three stayed on the southern bank. There is much history there, and it has been written and is readily available in any creditable library. My parents were steeped in the history of the place and they passed this on to us, not force-fed, but as a matter of course in conversations, remarks, instances, and so on. Look at Hemingway's best works; aside from his early novels, which are his best, his short stories are first rate. He was born in Oak Park, Illinois and he wrote and published about the Midwest. That World War I came along and he formed part of the ambulance corps gave him a world view and he wrote about Spain as witnessed in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or, much later, when he wrote *Death in the Afternoon*, in re bull fighting. But his short stories, say, *Hills Like White Elephants* and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, for two, will survive some of his longer works and will be taught in schools and universities.

11. *Estampas del Valle* also serves to de-generalize borders and border studies. Why was it important for you to show the uniqueness of *The Valley* in your literature?

I wanted to write about what I knew: the Valley. Its history, its people, the bilingual, bicultural, and biracial population of which little had been written and less had been published. I didn't want a Hollywood view of the place, far from it. I wanted to and wrote about family relations, the hard work people who work the land are engaged in, old friendships, old enmities, the culture of an international borderland, how one country influences the other, how the region produces its own culture being isolated from Washington and Mexico City. In brief, the place and its people for close to a century. What and of whom does Flannery O'Connor write about? Or Eudora Welty? Their place. The Valley wasn't known as well theirs, but I thought and still do think, that the Valley's history and its people are worth writing about. That a revival of Mexican American literature came along in the late '60s decided it for me. Writers from New Mexico were writing and publishing by the mid-19th century, in English and Spanish. Not only that, many New Mexicans know more about their history than Valley people know of their own. Tomás Rivera had covered the Winter Garden Area, some 200 miles away from the Valley, and he wrote of the migrant farm laborer society, its hardships, its hard won pleasures, weddings, and dances, but also of discrimination and small victories, and so on. In brief, life; their life.

12. How do your sketches represent the human experience on the border?

The Valley is part of the world as was Mrs. Hait's when she complained about the mules that ran across her yard causing all manner of botheration; it's a funny story and it's true, and some of my stories are also funny and true, but both are fiction, but that doesn't make them less acceptable, by no means.. Mine isn't a cry for recognition of the place; I write about it, and that's it. Who reads what I

write? In the main, university professors and their students, and I find that gratifying. The Valley is unique but only in the sense that New York or any major or minor city is unique.

I try to be as faithful to the Valley as I can; a murder in a cantina, say, I'll change the names and, as in "Por esas cosas que pasan", will use three different points of view. I took this from Ryunosuke Akutagawa's *Rashomon*, later made into a movie by Akira Kurosawa. Well, the murder did take place; I was a child at the time, and the violence shocked me. So much so, that *Cosas* was the first writing I published. To be faithful doesn't mean I'd make angels out of the characters that appear in my writing. In prologue after prologue, I explain that there are all manner of people who live and die in the Valley. Therefore, if I'm to be true to the place and its people, the good, the bad, the indifferent, the fools and knaves at the breakfast table, I also show hardworking Texas Mexicans who fight and work daily to survive. But, I also show politics and money's influence in that and other spheres of life. As a writer, I seek no one's permission. I'm a writer and my presentation and representation of the Valley is as close to the history of the place as I can make it.

13. Fiction recounts what history has left behind. Does your work provide an alternative history to other manners in which Mexican-Americans have been portrayed in the past?

An alternative history? Yes, but also the real history one gathers from conversations, readings, written records; in brief, anything that will help and serve me to write about the Valley. I try to be as fair as I can. If there are Texas Mexicans who are cowards, fools, and betrayers, they'll appear in the writing. I will also go back in time and bring it up to the present to show a segment of the United States' population that works hard, that has been betrayed by their own, and who have served in as many wars as this country has been engaged in. It's not, I don't think, an alternative history, it's a history that has been ignored and, in many ways, has left many Valleyites in the dark about their history. The writing is serious and comic, at the same time. Why? Life's that way and that's the way I see it. If someone disagrees, they're free to write their own history.

14. Romeo Hinojosa, the lawyer in "Por esas cosas que pasan", is knowledgeable about the Belken County community. He aims to reveal the truth and retell history from a different perspective. Does Romeo Hinojosa, the lawyer, reflect the views of Rolando R. Hinojosa the author?

Yes, it's a reflection, and reflection is one of the many products of the baroque. My writing is a product of my life and the lives of those who were either born on the Texas side or across the river. Hinojosa, as a last name, is as common as dirt; the Valley has one telephone directory and one can go the town of Alamo, and upriver, to Zapata, and see the name on both banks of the Rio Grande. It wasn't vanity that I introduced the lawyer. After my father's death, my brother-in-law, an attorney, raised me and I married one as well. As for

views, those belong to the writer, for good or for bad, but there's no going back once the work appears in print. The Valleyites are, for the most part, descendants of Asturians, Basques, Castilians, and Galicians with a sprinkling of Catalonians. The Series reflects the wide variety and it also reflects my point of view.

15. In the case of *Estampas del Valle*, does the community have a collective voice or do the sketches pertain to the actual fragmentation of a border region?

You're on target there; *Estampas* and the Series represent the collective voice of the Valley's inhabitants. Folklore usually represents the history of a place, but it also encompasses the various socio-economic aspects and status of the population. History, then, will clear some matters up, but it isn't all inclusive or proper or correct, hence, a writer tries to even the playing field with the writer's sense of place, the writer's views, and memories, a field which is usually allied with history.

16. Death and humor constitute a salient element in *Estampas del Valle*. How did you choose what folkloric elements of the Valley you would highlight in this novel?

Death and humor are found throughout the Death Trip; it's quite simple: one is born and one dies. What happens in between is what the writer focuses on by bringing history and whatever else the writer finds and uses to tell the story or the history of the place. *Estampas* and the second novel, *Klail City*, served as an introduction to the Valley. A place not known by many Texas Mexicans although many of them are descendants of Valley people who now live in Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, and so on. Both novels present past and current oral and written social history. After that, the novels that followed show Valleyites in all spheres of life: working class, middle class, upper middle class, members of the free professions (lawyers, accountants, dentists, physicians, etc.) engaged in living and earning a living. Politics are also involved as are family matters, such as old feuds, interracial marriages, marriages among families from both sides of the Rio Grande, the new and newer generations, and so on. It isn't Dos Passos' *USA*, it's not as ambitious as that, but having fiction rub shoulders with history is about as close as any writer can get to his characters and their daily lives.

17. Aside from being the first novel that you published, what other significance does *Estampas del Valle* have for you?

One significance was that *Estampas* presented itself as part of the 20 or 30 million U.S. citizens of Hispanic blood. The novel didn't represent them all nor was that my intent. What *Estampas* did for me was that it was accepted and taught in colleges and universities not only or narrowly in Ethnic Studies programs and departments, but also in the other liberal arts departments: English,

History, Political Science, and so on. Quinto Sol Publications was instrumental in its inclusion in the curricula followed by Bilingual Review/Press and Nicolás Kanellos' important contribution through Arte Público Press at the University of Houston. Majority houses such as MacMillan and Norton and others publish that some of my work as well as smaller presses indicates that this American literature is reaching maturity. There'll be a period of decadence, no doubt, but for now, its production continues.

18. If you could travel back in time, would you change anything about the novel?

No, I wouldn't except for errata such as misspellings here and there, but for the body of the written material? No.

19. Do you return to the Valley often? What are your thoughts on having left the Valley only to return to it in your writing? To this day, does it still constitute a part of your sense of place?

Yes, I go to the Valley quite often; I drive and I find that better than wasting my time at airports and putting up with the claptrap that that entails. I've one surviving sister, and she's a sprightly 92; no Alzheimer's there, thank God. The Valley stands some 350 miles south of Austin, and I find the drive relaxing and interesting. The trip, if I were to drive with no stops along the way would take me some five and a half hours. I take a longer trip, stopping here and there, at Palito Blanco's cemetery, for one example, to see the grave of the first soldier killed in the Vietnam War; I'll stop at small restaurants, drive around small towns in South Texas, Premont, Three Rivers, and so on. It's a leisurely trip and that is why driving one's car is such a pleasure. What awaits me in Brownsville is my sister and old friends, some of whom are professors at UT-Brownsville, a city with a long shared history with its sister city, Matamoros, Tamaulipas. I also make it a point to go to Mercedes' high school and talk to students and, when time allows, I'll drive to other Valley towns. As far as a sense of place, yes, I don't see how or why I would want to escape that.

20. Your contribution to Chicano literature is indispensable. What are your thoughts on the future of this field? Do you feel that border literature must create new avenues for fiction?

The future? That, of course, will depend on the younger writers. As you know, some have been publishing with majority houses, however, Arte Público Press continues to publish established and non-established writers. The same goes for Bilingual Review/Press. What may continue to be an avenue for readers and writers are those universities who offer degrees on Chicano literature. The U.S.-Mexico border measures 1951 miles and the diverse historical events that take place between Brownsville-Matamoros those of Tijuana-Imperial Beach, California, could be a productive field for future writers. Whether that will be the case or not is something I can't comment on with any degree of accuracy.

Are there new avenues? Again, that will depend on the writers and, as always, on the socio-political climates of the recent past and the times in which they are living.

21. What are some of your current and future projects in the field? Do you feel that you have left a mark in the literary community?

At present, I'm working on a novel, which does not form part of The Klail City Death Trip Series. I've seven chapters in Spanish and one in English. Two weeks ago, I decided to add three more to the Spanish version and this will call for ten chapters in each language. It focuses on an Irish homicide policeman who retires after 20 years; his grandfather-in-law, a retired capo in a branch of the Sicilian Mafia, had told him that he'd never rise above lieutenant. The old man was right; the conversation took place when the main character, Timothy Matthew O'Hara asked for the granddaughter's hand in marriage. The reason? O'Hara never took a bribe; the old man reminds O'Hara's that his grandfather and his father didn't either, and thus, they too suffered for being honest. O'Hara adopts an Italian name, Rienzi, and becomes a hit man.

I should finish this by May '12. After this, back to the Series. *Veremos.*