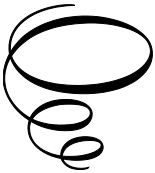
The Many Voices of the Los Angeles Novel

The Many Voices of the Los Angeles Novel

Edited by

Julia Stein

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



The Many Voices of the Los Angeles Novel

Edited by Julia Stein

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8182-9
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8182-1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTORS

Hector Calderon is a specialist in Chicano and Mexican literature at UCLA. He is widely known for his contributions to Chicano literary studies*: Criticism in the Borderlands* (Duke 1991), *Narratives of Greater Mexico* (Texas 2004), *The Aztlán Mexican Studies Reader* (CSRC 2018). He just completed "América Mexicana: Essays on the Mexican Cultural Diaspora in North America.'" Calderon has a doctorate from Yale (1981) in Latin American literature. Prior to coming to UCLA in 1991, he was a Professor at Scripps College 1989-1991 and Associate Professor at Yale 1983-1989. He was accepted into The School of Criticism and Theory at UCI in 1978. He has been a Visiting Scholar at Stanford Humanities Center (1986-1987) and Visiting Professor at Harvard (1996).

Norma Cantu is the Norine R. and T. Frank Murchison Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, serves as President of the American Folklore Society (2019-2021). She is Professor emerita in English at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Founder and director of the Society for the study of Gloria Anzaldua, she organized El Mundo Zurdo, a gathering of Anzalduistas from 2007-2019. She is a folklorist, scholar, poet, and novelists whose scholarly and creative focus is on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Her most recent publications include the novel *Cabanuelas; Meditacion Fronteriza: Poems of Love, Life, and Labor,* and coedited the anthology *Entre Guadalupe y Malinche: Tejanas in Literature and Art.*

Chris Freeman holds a PhD from Vanderbilt University and teaches in the English department at the University of Southern California. He has co-edited several books on Christopher Isherwood with James J. Berg, including the Lambda Award-winning *The Isherwood Century*, *Conversations with Christopher Isherwood*, *The American Isherwood*, and, most recently, *Isherwood in Transit*. He current project focuses on the life, work, and legacy of another Los Angeles writer, the National Book Award winning Paul Monette, author of *Borrowed Time* and *Becoming a Man*. He lives in West Hollywood and Palm Springs, California.

Dr. Gutiérrez y Muhs is a poet and professor in Modern Languages and Women and Gender Studies at Seattle University. She has served as former Director for various programs and been honored with two Chairs, including the Theiline Pigott-McCone Humanities Chair. She is a polylingual poet, critic, cultural worker. She is the author/editor of more than a dozen books of poetry, criticism and culture, and multiple articles, encyclopedia entries, opinion pieces. Gutierrez y Muhs received her MA and PhD from Stanford University. She is first editor of *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, single editor of various other books on Chicana criticism, (University of Arizona Press, Lexington Books).

Jonathan Kirsch is an author, a book reviewer, and a publishing attorney. Kirsch contributed book reviews for many years to the Los Angeles Times and continues to contribute book reviews to the Washington Post. He is currently the book editor of the Jewish Journal. His thirteen books include *A History of the End of the World*.

Brian Nelson is a writer/producer whose feature films include Sundance selection HARD CANDY (Best Screenplay, Sitges International Film Festival), 30 DAYS OF NIGHT and DEVIL. His television work spans broadcast series JAG and LOIS AND CLARK; the ABC miniseries 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA starring Michael Caine; syndicated series EARTH: FINAL CONFLICT and VANISHING SON; cable series SO WEIRD and MURDER IN THE FIRST; and most recently, streaming series ALTERED CARBON, 11.22.63, DA VINCI'S DEMONS, and NIGHTFLYERS. With actor Chris Conner, he co-created the scripted supernatural podcast AGENT STOKER, and he is the author of EARTH BOUND: DAILY MEDITATIONS FOR ALL SEASONS (Skinner House). He holds degrees from Yale University and UCLA, and is married to therapist Barbara Calvi.

Helaina Pisar McKibbin has taught ESL and French in the Los Angeles Community College system. She has translated from English to French, "Bullwhip Days: The Slaves Remember - An Oral History, edited by James Mellon, Avon Books, New York, 1988. The French version is "Parole d'Esclaves," translated in collaboration with Sarah and Denis Baldwin-Beneich, and published by Les Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1991. She has published a short story in English, "Mistress of Light" in "The Story Teller," Volume 18, Issue 2, Spring 2013 and a number of poems such as "Looking

out of a Window at Night from a Lit Room," also in English in the "San Gabriel Valley Poetry Quarterly," Issue 69, Winter 2016.

Kamala Platt, Ph.D., M.F.A. is an author, artist, independent scholar, and contingent professor spending time in South Texas and at the Meadowlark Center in Kansas. She currently teaches online creative writing cultural and literary studies courses for the School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies in Arizona State University. Her scholarship looks to women's cultural poetics to reveal a future of sustenance and environmental justice. Her manuscript *Environmental Justice Poetics: Cultural Representations of Environmental Racism from Chicanas and Women in India* will be published with De Gruyter in Berlin. Her poetry collections include *Gravity Prevails,* Flower Song Press, 2021, *Weeds lovers: Ten Years in the Shadow of September*, Finishing Line Press, 2014 and *On the Line,* Wings Press, 2010.

Charles Scruggs is an emeritus professor of American literature at the University of Arizona. He is the author of *The Sage in Harlem: H.L. Mencken and the Black Writers of the 1920s* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1984); *Sweet Home: Invisible Cities in the Afro-American Novel* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), and co-author of *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) and *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance* (Ohio State UP, 2012). He has also published articles on Charles Chesnutt, Jean Toomer, Jessie Faucet, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Ernest Hemingway, John Fowles, Raymond Chandler, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and on American film noir.

Julia Stein was a writer/oral historian of Los Angeles doing original research of Los Angeles from 1900 to 1940. She has published five books of her own poetry, edited two books of other people's poetry, co-wrote a book *Shooting Women: Behind the Camera, Around the World* and was editor for West End Press helping them become the first multi-cultural literary press in Los Angeles. She has published book reviews in the newspapers and magazines across the nation for decades as well as worked for KPFK and WBAI radio stations.

Andrew Tonkovich edits the West Coast literary arts magazine *Santa Monica Review*. His fiction and nonfiction, journalism and reviews have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Ecotone*, and *Best American Nonrequired Reading*. With Lisa Alvarez, he edited *Orange County: A Literary Field Guide*, and is author of two fiction

collections, the comic novella *The Dairy of Anne Frank and More Wish Fulfillment in the Noughties* and the short story collection *Keeping Tahoe Blue and Other Provocations*.

INTRODUCTION

Three women were the first novelists of Los Angeles. Helen Hunt Jackson wrote *Ramona* about the Native Americans of Southern California. (1884). In the early 1880s Jackson had published *A Century of Dishonor: A Sketch of the United States Government's Dealings with Some of the Indian Tribes* (1881) focusing on eastern and Great Plains Indians. Next she had become an Interior Department agent visiting the Mission Indians in Southern California

For over 2,000 years the Tongva, which means people of the land, had lived in the Los Angeles basin, and by 1760 they lived in 100 villages. In 1769 when the Spanish soldiers with Franciscan priests marched north from Mexico they founded the San Gabriel Mission in 1771, and twenty more missions along the coast. The Spanish soldiers rounded up the Tongva, renamed them Gabrielinos, and forced them to work as slaves at the mission. Tongva resistance started in 1771 when a Spanish soldier sexually assaulted a Tongva woman, and in 1785 a Tongva woman shaman Toypurina led a rebellion against the San Gabriel Mission that failed.

In 1781 right next to the Tongva village Yaangna near the Los Angeles River the Spanish had started the farming village that grew into Los Angeles. Mexico, which became independent from Spain in 1821, ended Franciscan control of the missions. Mexican governors gave grants for 455 large ranchos to prominent Californios. The number of Tongva as well as of nearby tribes' had shrunk drastically from widespread epidemics. In the early 1880s when Helen Hunt Jackson visited the Mission Indians in Southern California she learned that 15,000 Mission Indians had lived in Southern California in 1852, but in 1882 she found only 4,000 remained. Jackson's report recommended that the U.S. government purchase lands for reservations and start Indian schools, but the U.S. House of Representatives let the bill die.

Then Helen Hunt Jackson, inspired by Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* wrote her novel *Ramona* (1884) where Scottish-Native American heroine Ramona and her Native American husband are driven off their land repeatedly by new white settlers until Ramona's husband dies. In

Jackson's novel the heroine lives on a Mexican rancho soon after the U.S. take over California and is well treated. Actually Native Americans including Tongva were forced to work as unpaid ranch hands on the Mexican ranchos or were landless refugees in both the Mexican and U.S. periods.

L.A.'s Anglo Boosters reinterpreted the novel *Ramona* as a romantic novel about the wonderful Mexican rancho where Ramona first lived to attract settlers in Los Angeles. The Boosters held Ramona pageants which mainly showed a love story in their efforts to sell the city in the 1880s, and the Boosters wanted to attract tourists who arrived on the trains that now reached L.A. The Boosters' reinterpretation of *Ramona* was extremely popular: the book had more than 300 printings and was made into a film five times. Trainloads of tourists came on the newly completed railroad to the village of L.A. to see Ramona country.

In 1885 Californio Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton, the second woman writer, published in English her novel *The Squatter and the Don*, which criticized how a family of Californios who owned a big rancho had to spend years to prove their ownership of their land while Anglo squatters illegally farmed parts of their land. The family in Ruiz de Burton's novel lost their huge rancho—Californios lost all their ranchos. In Ruiz de Burton's novel a main Californio character becomes a construction worker at the novel's end. Los Angeles Anglo Boosters and real estate developers busily carved up the ranchos into town sites and home sites to sell to the people they hoped would settle here while most Mexican-Americans had become proletarians by the late 19th century.

Writer Charles Lummis and other promoters also created myths about the missions as they worked with the Boosters and railroad publicists to lure tourists to settle in the Los Angeles area. Also 2nd rate booster novels were published. The third woman writer Mary Austin was quite different from L.A. Boosters when she published her *Land of Little Rain* (1903), a dazzling book in praise of the Mojave Desert of Southern California and arguing for harmony between humans and nature. Austin saw the leaders of Los Angeles after 1900 grab the water from Owens Valley just east of the High Sierras where she was living in order to make L.A. grow into a city. Austin published her novel *The Ford* in 1917 which fictionalized and criticized Los Angeles's taking of Owens Valley water.

Richard Griswold del Castillo listed 16 Spanish language or bilingual newspapers in Los Angeles between 1850 and 1930 including *Los Angeles*

Star/La Estella, *El Clamor Publico,* and *El Californio Meridional.*[1] These newspapers criticized mistreatment of Californios in losing their lands and also published short narratives. In 1928 Daniel Venegas published his novel *Las aventuras de don Chipote o Cuando los pericos maman* (The Adventures of Don Chipote, or When Parrots Suckle) in the Los Angeles newspaper *El Heraldo de Mexico.* In the novel working-class hero Don Chipote works on the railroad from El Paso to Los Angeles where he explores Chicano life in Los Angeles. Rosario Sanchez and Beatrice Pita in their essay "The literature of the Californios" say that Venegas is "within a tradition of critical literature of resistance … in Ruiz de Burton's novel and much later in Chicano/a literature of the 1970s."[2]

Class conflicts occurred in Los Angeles from the 1890s through the 1930s both in the city and its novels. Writer Carey McWilliams in his *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (1946) described Los Angeles's history from 1900 to 1914 when the city had a strong union movement with socialists, trade unionists, and Mexican radicals fighting against the conservative *Los Angeles Times* and the downtown Anglo establishment who wanted cheap wages to draw businesses from unionized San Francisco to L.A.

Three discoveries of oil took place in the L.A. region from 1920 to1922. Oil as well as Hollywood created L.A. as a big city in the 1920s. Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil*, published in 1927, focuses on the conflicts between corrupt oil magnate father Dad Ross and leftist son Bunny Ross who supported oil workers going on strike twice. Right after World War I right-wing hysteria culminated in 1919 when the L.A. police chief with cops and serviceman raided the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) meeting hall. Sinclair in his novel *Oil* has the scene when the cops and soldiers attack the I.W.W. hall, and Bunny Ross arrives afterwards to see his good friend had been beaten and then died. The L.A. trade unions were killed off for a decade.

During the 1930s Cary McWilliams was the center of a writers' group downtown that included Louis Adamic, John Fante, and Carlos Bulosan. Louis Adamic took his novel's title *Laughing in the Jungle* from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1932), and writes about a Slavic immigrant's struggle

[1] Richard Griswold del Castillo, *The Los Angeles Barrio,* p. 126

[2] Rosaura Sanchez and Beatriz Pita, "The Literature of Californios" in Kevin McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010) p. 20

to survive in the 1920s non-union jungle of Los Angeles; the "dung" consisted of immigrant and native masses working hard for very low wages. Adamic's book got good reviews, but was ignored starting in the 1940s. John Fante wrote his novel *Ask the Dust* (1939) about a destitute Italian-American living in a run-down boarding house in Bunker Hill in downtown L.A. and struggling to be a writer. After Fante's novel fell out of print for the next 40 years, he made his living writing screenplays. Carey McWilliams called Bulosan's *America Is In the Heart* (1946) "the primary text of Filipino-American experience" in the 1930s. His novel has been compared to Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* when Bulosan shows Filipino workers struggle for better job conditions. Until 1940 L.A. writers had lacked the backing of national critics, so these downtown novelists soon were ignored.

In the 1930s James Cain and Nathanael West had come to Los Angeles to write scripts for Hollywood while Horace McCoy had come to act in Hollywood. Edmund Wilson in his 1940 essay "The Boys in the Back Room" was the first important national critic who argued for Los Angeles writers saying that James Cain, Nathanael West, and Horace McCoy all wrote novels brilliantly showing the corruption and hopelessness in Los Angeles during the 1930s. In James Cain's *Double Indemnity* (1936) a woman gets her insurance agent to kill her husband. Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust* (1939) showcases people whose frustrated desire in Hollywood results in the riot of a hopeless mob. And Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They* (1935) shows a couple who failed to get jobs as movie extras competing in a grueling dance contest for weeks by the beach.

From the 1930s to the 1970s more writers came to L.A. to hopefully write screenplays for films in Hollywood, and many also wrote novels about Hollywood and the hills, the beach, and the canyons of the wealthy westside. Bud Schulberg, son of a Hollywood magnate, published his novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941) where the hero, a poor New Yorker, gets a job in Hollywood where he uses deception to become rich. Aldous Huxley's *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939) is a satire about a Hollywood millionaire who is afraid of death. Huxley criticizes narcissism, superficiality, and obsession with youth. Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One* (1948) satirized a cemetery and a Hollywood studio. And F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1941) created a Hollywood tycoon based on Irving Thalberg, the brilliant head of MGM.

Raymond Chandler had lost his oil executive job in L.A. and turned to writing detective novels including his first *The Big Sleep* where his detective

hero is hired by a wealthy oil millionaire. Chandler 's novels helped create hard core detective novels in the U.S, and he also wrote screenplays. Daniel Fuchs, who during the 1930s wrote three brilliant early novels about poor Jews in New York, moved to Hollywood and wrote some brilliant screenplays including *Love Me or Leave Me* (1955). He published a novel about Hollywood *West of the Rockies* (1971) and *The Apathetic Bookie Joint* (1979), a group of short stories including "A Hollywood Diary" about a writer's first Hollywood job when he can't afford a car.

In the late 1960s poet Charles Bukowski in the Los Angeles public library discovered Fante's novel *Ask the Dust* with his impoverished hero and began rethinking the L.A. novel. Bukowski was then inspired to write his novel *Post Office* (1971) about his awful job as a postal worker which was published in 1971. Then his novel got recognition for his powerful new voice in the L.A. novel about working class L.A. not on the westside but in central Los Angeles. After Bukowski convinced Black Sparrow Press to reprint Fante's novel in the late 1970s, many readers fell in love with his novels. Fante has been called "the quintessential L.A. novelist" writing about people who come with little money to L.A. to make a new life. John Fante Square was named after him in downtown Los Angeles in 2009.[3] Bukowski changed both the Los Angeles novel and the city's poetry with his strong down-to-earth working class voice.

Women have continued in the tradition of Jackson, Ruiz de Burton, and Austin to write innovative Los Angeles fiction for over 140 years. In 1938 Dorothy Baker, who grew up in L.A. and loved jazz, published *Young Man with a Horn* about a jazz musician in L.A. inspired by jazz musician Bix Beiderbecke. The novel was adapted into a successful movie starring Kirk Douglas, Lauren Bacall, and Doris Day. Dorothy Hughes, who published many crime novels during the 1940s and 1950s, wrote *In a Lonely Place* (1947), a powerful work about two women facing post-World War 11 male violence and fighting back to save themselves. Hisaye Yamamoto published wonderful short stories in the 1950s about the conflicts of 1st generation immigrant Japanese-American women and their children in the 1930s, the racism in L.A., and the life story of an Issei man. Her stories were later collected in the book *Seventeen Syllables and Other Stories* (1988).

Women's novels show Hollywood as often a dangerous place for women decades ahead of the Weinstein scandal, and these novels have been more successful. Journalist Joan Didion's *Play It as It Lays* (1970) creates the

[3] https://www.salon.com/2006/03/10/fante_2/

archetype of a lost, lonely actress's traveling across L.A. Joyce Carol Oates's novel *Blonde* (2001) captured Marilyn Monroe's courage and her exploitation by the Hollywood studios during the 1950s. In 2014 Megan Abbott published her first novel *Die a Little* set in 1950s Los Angeles with an amateur female sleuth investigating why a female extra got killed. And Emily Beyda's *Body Double* published in 2020 explores in a gruesome way how a young woman is hired and then brow beaten to stand in for a famous L.A. celebrity.

Women have also written more upbeat Los Angeles novels starting in the 1960s. Allison Lurie published her funny *The Nowhere City* (1966) about a proper Bostonian woman loosening up with her first happy romance on the westside which helps her to stay in Los Angeles. Mexican-American Mary Helen Ponce in her *The Wedding* (1989) wrote a lovely, humorous novel about a poor Chicana's wedding during the 1950s in an area like Pacoima. Janet Fitch's *White Oleander* (1999) has a teenager heroine whose mother is found guilty of murder and who deals with all kinds of foster mothers as the heroine finds her own way to adulthood. Michelle Latiolais also lacks the lost lonely heroine of women in Dideon's novel, but creates new kinds of heroines in her 2017 novel *She* who are brave, who take risks, and who help other women.

After World War II Latinx writers continued their literature of resistance with Luis Valdez's play *Zoot Suit* in 1979 showed how young Chicanos were falsely were accused of murder during World War II and how they fought back against stereotypes and false accusations continuing the literature of resistance. Oscar Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1972) fictionalized the Chicano protests in the late 1960s.

Literary critic Eliud Martinez said that the Chicano novel came of age in the 1970s when Latino novelists were influenced by the writing of Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez which used magical realism to write innovative fiction. Ron Arias in his stunning novel *The Road to Tamazunchale* uses magical realism to tell how an elderly Latino faces death but also helps a mojado, a poor Mexican who dies by the Los Angeles River near downtown L.A. Chicana literature of resistance includes Helena Maria Viramontes's novel *Their Dogs Came with Them* (2007) that broke new ground showing four young women struggling as their neighborhood in 1960s East L.A. faces demolition for the freeway. Alejandro Morales' fine novel in English *The Brick People* (1988) described how Mexican-American workers from the late 19th century to the 1940s created the bricks that built the buildings of Los Angeles. Morales uses South American magical realism at his

novel's ending showing how the brickyards' Anglo owner Simmons is devoured by insects.

Henry Hay, a gay leftist labor organizer, founded in 1950 the Mattachine Society in LA, one of the first gay rights groups in the U.S. A decade later part-Chicano John Rechy had in 1963 published his *City of Night* about how the gay males, lesbians, and transgender people who were harassed by the LAPD fought back in the Cooper Do-nut Riots. Christopher Isherwood wrote a brilliant novel *A Single Man* (1964) about a gay professor living on the westside in the early 1960s recovering from the death of his longtime lover. Joseph Hansen co-led the Venice Poetry Workshop at Beyond Baroque in the 1960s that helped teach a new generation of LA poets including me. At the same time Hansen wrote the first gay male detective novel series in the U.S. starting with *Fadeout* in 1970 and continuing for two decades. In his ninth novel *Early Graves* (1987) Hansen's hero Brandstetter is a caring man dealing with AIDS. The heroes in Rechy's novel are courageous while Isherwood's and Hansen's heroes are decent, compassionate men.

Chicano/as also wrote L.A. novels with gay heroes and heroines. In 2003 Felicia Luna Lemus published her *Trace Elements with Random Tea Parties* where her young Latina heroine honors her traditional grandmother who raised her and Mexican legends like La Llorona but goes to live in L.A. where she explores the queer Los Angeles scene. Michael Nava published a series of novels with the hero Henry Rios, a gay criminal defense lawyer and detective. Nava's novels have earned six Lambda Literary Awards. In his latest novel with Henry Rios titled *Lies with Man* (2021) Nava's lawyer hero defends a gay activist accused of killing a pastor of a right-wing church who wants to put people with HIV in quarantine camps.

The Afro-American novel set in L.A began with Arna Bontemps, who published *God Sends Sunday* (1931) about Little Augie, a successful black jockey who later settles in a rural area Mudtown next to Watts. Many Afro-American novels criticized Los Angeles's racism throughout the 20th century. Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) creates a young black heroine Emma Lou Morgan, who moves from Boise, Idaho, to go to college at USC but discovers prejudice from blacks as well as whites and moves East. Both Bontemps and Thurman left Los Angeles for New York where they took part in the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1940s Chester Himes published two brilliant L.A. novels: *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* (1944) shows how prejudice against Afro-Americans causes the hero to lose his job in Los Angeles's wartime shipyards and in *The Lonely Crusade* (1947) an Afro-

American union organizer faces white workers' racism toward black workers after the war. Himes also left Los Angeles going to Europe when World War II ended.

Walter Mosley, who grew up in L.A., began his detective series where Himes first novel ended: in *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) Mosley's hero Easy Rawlins was just laid off from his wartime aircraft job in 1948 and takes his first detective job to gain money to pay off the mortgage on his house. Mosley's fourteen Easy Rawlins novels describe African-American immigrants who came from Louisiana and Texas during World War II to Southcentral L.A and who create a rich world but still deal with intense racism after the war. Literary historian Charles Scruggs said, "The prophet Ezekiel, Easy's namesake, had a vision of the restored Jerusalem …. While Easy seeks that redeemed city in Los Angeles, he must struggle to make it through the hellish earthly city of racial domination …."[4]

Afro-Americans also wrote brilliant non-detective fiction. Wanda Coleman, a leading L.A. poet, wrote *A War of Eyes and Other Stories* (1988) includes stories that deal with seamstress's poverty, the hard work all night of a black waitress, a wonderful night at a jazz club, and white racism. In the title story "A War of Eyes" a black woman working under Blue-Eyed Soul-Mama making a theater piece supposedly on racial harmony discovers that Blue-Eyed Soul-Mama makes sure her white daughter always dominates. And Coleman's novel *Mambo Hips and Make Believe* (1999) shows the friendship between a poor black woman and a well-to-do white woman who both want to be writers

The Los Angeles novel has changed after the population of the city has changed. In 1970 Anglos were 70% of the city. According to the 2019 U.S. census of Los Angeles the largest ethnic group was Hispanics who were 48.5 % while Whites had gone down to 26.1 % [5] . Asians were 11.6%, African-Americans were 8.9%. and American Indian/Native Alaskans were .7%. The literature written about Los Angeles after 1970 for the first time includes Native American Tongva as well as Latino/as, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and Anglo writers and also novels showing a mixture of people.

---

[4] Charles Scruggs, "Los Angeles and the African-American literary imagination' in Kevin R. McNamara's *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010), p. 790

[5] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/losangelescountycalifornia/RHI725219

Many novels focus on the L.A's 1992 uprising. In 1991 a Korean-American shopkeeper in South Central L.A. killed an Afro-American teenage girl—an act many thought that led to the 1992 revolt in L.A. Hector Tobar's *Tattooed Soldiers* (1998) is a riveting tale of Guatemalan refugee recognizing during the 1992 explosion the soldier who helped murder his wife back home. Paula Woods has her African-American heroine search in *Dirty Laundry* (2003) for the killer of a Korean-American woman while Anglo Ryan Gattis's *All Involved* (2016) has seventeen 1st person accounts of the events. Aris Janigian's *This Angelic Land* (2012) has his Armenian-American hero journey through the 1992 Uprising. And Steph Cha's *Your House Will Pay* shows how a Korean-American young woman and an Afro-American young man deal many years later with aftereffects.

After 2000 three Afro-American detective novelists explore the L.A.'s black history. Gary Phillips has written a series of crime novels beginning with *Only the Wicked* (2000) in which his hero Ivan Monk investigates the deaths of two elderly black men who both played in the famous Negro Baseball Leagues. Gar Haywood has his detective Aaron Gunnar in his sixth novel *All the Lucky Ones Are Dead* (2014) investigate the death of a famous rapper. And Paula Woods in her novel *Stormy Weather* (2002) investigates the death of a black film director finding out about black Hollywood from its earliest days.

Jervey Trevalyn's *Understand This* (2000) is a fine novel about the struggles of black teenagers growing up in Southcentral LA, while Bebe Moore Campbell's novel *Brothers and Sisters* (1994) focuses on the black middle class with its heroine a black woman determined to make it as a bank executive. Paul Beatty published two coming-of-age novels *White Boy Shuffle* (1996) and *The Sellout* (2015). *The Sellout* is a brilliant satire with a black hero who grows marijuana and watermelons in Dickens in south Los Angeles. When Dickens was erased from the map, the hero resurrects it as a segregated community. In 2016 *The Sellout* won both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the British Man Booker Prize--the first time a writer from the United States was honored with the Man Booker.

Asian-Americans started publishing more novels after 2000. Starting in 2005, Naomi Hirahara published five novels in her detective series with Mas Arai, who was a witness to the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. He moved to Los Angeles where he became a gardener and a detective in a series of books often focusing on Japanese-American culture.

In 2010 Lisa See published *Shanghai Girls* about two sisters who suffered in Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese War but were able to get to the U.S. to be interned in Angel Island. They were finally freed and settled in Los Angeles's Chinatown. And Viet Thanh Nguyen's brilliant novel *The Sympathizer* shows his Vietnamese characters escaping Vietnam at the end of the U.S. war there and then coming to L.A. The narrator first works as a clerk at Occidental College and then as a cultural advisor ignored on a Hollywood movie about Vietnam.

Some novels show connections of different ethnic groups in the city. Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997), a wonderful novel with both Asian and Latinx characters, takes place in both Los Angeles and Mexico, and uses magical realism. Half-Japanese novelist Nina Revoyr's novel *Southland* (2003) shows how Afro-Americans and Asian-Americans lived together after World War II in the Crenshaw District in Southcentral L.A. Decades after the 1965 Watts Riot a young female Japanese-American law student and a young black man team up to discover who killed four black teenagers during the Watts riots. Japanese-American Joe Ide has his black detective Isiah Quintabe solve crimes in Long Beach.

Both Bud Schulberg and Daniel Fuchs were Jewish Americans who wrote mostly about the movie industry in Los Angeles, but in the 1990s Jewish authors produced novels exploring Jewish identity as well as Jewish neighborhoods. Faye Kellerman published the first of the Peter Decker/Rina Lazarus mystery novels in 1988 with police detective Decker met Rina Lazarus. Kellerman published 26 more novels in which Decker and Lazarus fall in love and marry; he returns to his Jewish roots after the first novel as he solves crimes.

Rochelle Majer Krich's detective series has the novel *Angel of Death* (1994) where her female LAPD detective Jessie Drake investigates an attack on a Jewish attorney defending the right of free speech of a Nazi. Drake, who has been raised a Christian, explores Jewish neighborhoods like Pico-Robertson-Fairfax and Beverlywood and learns she was born Jewish. Iranian Jewish-American Gina Nahai in 2000 published *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith* about an Iranian Jewish girl and her mother's long trek from Iran to L.A. And Roth Matthue's *Never Mind the Goldbergs* (2005) shows an Orthodox Jewish teenage girl who likes punk rock in a comic novel about her coming to LA to be on TV where she questions her relationship to Orthodoxy.

Science fiction novelist Ray Bradbury has long lived in L.A. and has inspired many science fiction novels. Starting in 1947, Aldous Huxley, Robert Heinlein, and many other men wrote novels showing a nuclear weapon attacking LA or a comet approaching or a great flood. Alejandro Morales's speculative novel *The Rag Doll Plagues* (1992) about three plagues seems particularly relevant during the time of covid: the first plague is in 1780s Mexico; the 2nd in 1980s Los Angeles; and the third in 21st century LAMEX, a US/Mexican technocratic confederation.

Three women have written novels showing their characters surviving future horrors. Carolyn See's *Golden Days* (1987) has its heroine, her two daughters, and her male companion living in Topanga Canyon on the westside survive a nuclear war. In the 1990s the brilliant Octavia Butler had her novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993) start when the U.S. is suffering from climate change, huge wealth inequality, and corporate greed. The teenage heroine's neighborhood is attacked and looted, so she is forced to flee. Cynthia Kadohata's wonderful novel *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* (1997) set in the year 2052 has the poor heroine growing up in a Los Angeles horribly divided into rich and poor, but she slowly finds her way to build a life here in L.A.

After 2010 Tongva writers began publishing. In 2011 three elders of the Kizh Nation Gabrieleno Band plus a Tribal Archaeologist wrote a book *Toypurina The Joan of Arc of California* about Toypurina, a female shaman, who led a revolt in 1785 against the Spanish at the San Gabriel Mission. *Megan Dorame was a 2020 PEN Emerging Voices Fellow and several of her poems have been nominated for the Pushcart Prizes.* Dorame's writing is rooted in her homeland Tovaangar, and she explores the impact settler colonialism has had on the Tongva. In her brilliant poems she recreates Tongva people's attachment to the land and uses some Tongva words. Dorame has edited an anthology *Totoongvetamme Maaynok / Tongva People Create* with short stories, excerpts from longer stories, and poetry

Cindi Alviatre, a Tongva who teaches in the American Indian studies department at California State University Long Beach, published *Waa'aka': The Bird Who Fell in Love with the Sun*, a children's book based on a Tongva creation story. She says that "We are in a constant state of mourning. Our narratives are part of that healing and ceremony where we travel back to that time of purity and renew our commitment with our

ancestral connection to nature."[6] Casandra López**,** who is mixture of Cahuilla, Tongva, and Luiseño has published her poetry collection, *Brother Bullet,* from the University of Arizona; and is working on a memoir *Few Notes on Grief* about her brother's murder. Hopefully Tongva will publish novels. These Tonga writers are contributing to a revisioning of Los Angeles literature.

From 2017 to 2021 new Los Angeles novels tackle lack of housing. Robin Robertson's brilliant *The Long Take,* finalist of the 2018 Mann Booker Prize, is set right after World War II in Los Angeles. Robertson uses narrative prose poetry to describe the hero, a scarred veteran, seeing the destruction of older housing in Bunker Hill downtown showing how affordable housing was destroyed. Larr Fondation's *Time is the Longest Distance* (2017) uses stunning poetic prose in a novel about a mentally ill graduate student who becomes homeless winding up living in Los Angeles' huge skid row. Recently published Los Angeles novels use fiction to help the reader understand the decades long destruction of affordable housing and the resulting homelessness in a city with over 40,000 homeless in 2021.

Works Cited

Fine, David. *Imagining Los Angeles A City in Fiction.* Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2000.

Fine, David. *Los Angeles in Fiction.* Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

Henderson, George L. *California and the Fictions of Capital.* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1998.

McNamara, Scott. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of Los Angeles.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

McWilliams, Cary. *Southern California: An Island on the Land.* Salt Lake City, Utah: Peregrine Smith Books, 1973.

Murphet, Julian. *Literature and Race in Los Angeles.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Powell, Lawrence Clark. *California Classics. The Creative Literature of the Golden State. Essays on the Books and Their Writers.* Santa Barbara, California: Capra Press, 1982.

Richardson, Peter. *American Prophet The Life & Work of Carey McWilliams.* Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

[6] Christopher Soto. Tongva Writers Today: The Past, Present, and Future are Unfolding Simultaneously https://dev.lareviewofbooks.org/article/tongva-writers-today-the-past-present-and-future-are-unfolding-simultaneously/

Soto, Christopher. Tongva Writers Today: The Past, Present, and Future are Unfolding Simultaneously https://dev.lareviewofbooks.org/article/tongva-writers-today-the-past-present-and-future-are-unfolding-simultaneously/

Timberg, Scott and Gioia, Dana. *The Misread City New Literary Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Red Hen Press, 2003.

Welch, Rosanne. *A Brief History of the Tongva Tribe: The Native Inhabitants of the Lands of the Puente Hills Preserve*. 2006. Department of History, Claremont Graduate, University Claremont, California https://habitatauthority.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/native_american_history.pdf

Witschi, Nicholas S. *Traces of Gold: California's Natural Resources and the Claim to Realism in Western American Literature.* Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2002.

CHAPTER 1

MEXICO ON THE LOS ANGELES RIVER: RON ARIAS' *THE ROAD TO TAMAZUNCHALE*

HECTOR CALDERON

Ron Arias' 1975 *The Road to Tamazunchale* tells the story of an aged, dying man Fausto Tejada, "a puro indio, more indio than a Tarahumara" his wife Evangelina would remind him. Fausto will face racism, the law, imprisonment, resentment, atonement, and self-acceptance when he travels through the physical and emotional landscape of 1950s-1970s Los Angeles with family and friends gathered around him.

In Chapter 1, Fausto hears the faint groan of freeway Interstate 5 and views the river across the tracks. Beyond his home is a Mexican area of Los Angeles. The freeway is alongside the Los Angeles River, with the Southern Pacific Railroad service yard and the now gone Taylor Yard Round House. For six years, Fausto has been shuffling to the window in his gloomy home, reading and listening to the radio (undoubtedly the only two Spanish-language AM stations at the time, San Gabriel Valley's Radio KALI and Pasadena's KWKW). He had been a bookseller walking door to door from East Los Angeles to Bell Gardens, the Mexican areas just beyond downtown Los Angeles. Fausto's home is in Elysian Valley, an area of poverty, gangs, bums, winos, and dilapidated little houses tightly constructed against each other. Arias was raised in Frogtown, another name for Elysian Valley near the historic city center. In the late 1960s, I lived nearby in Cypress Park on Frederick Street across from the Taylor Round House, a source of employment for Mexicans. My father worked at the Taylor Round House as a lifelong "SP man" as were all his male relatives.

One can imagine the "Santa Monica History Museum to Showcase Indigenous Tongva" exhibit showing the Tongva living, hunting and fishing, along the riverbank marshes in the area below Elysian Park. Near the North Broadway entrance of Elysian Park just off downtown is the

Portolá Trail Historical Monument, a plaque commemorating where in 1769 Gaspar de Portolá with expedition chronicler Franciscan Friar Juan Crespi and soldiers came near the Tongva village, Yaangna, at the confluence of the Arroyo Seco and the Los Angeles River. Crespi describes a village of heathens who live in an enchanting place among the trees next to the river. There is no historical marker for Yaangna. The expedition crossed the Los Angeles River at this juncture. Crespi named the river El Río de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciúncula, eventually also the name of the future city.

Historical records show that the first settlers of Los Angeles, *los pobladores* of 1781, came from the northern New Spain, now the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Nayarit, Chihuahua, and Jalisco. The eleven founding families, composed of twenty-two adults and twenty-two children, were of Indigenous and African roots except for two white males, a Spaniard born in Spain and a *criollo* born in Chihuahua ("Original Settlers"). Downtown Los Angeles was the center of life for the first Mexican residents with water provided by the Los Angeles River through the *zanja madre* (mother ditch) for the small farming village.

The historic downtown retains the church, la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Angeles. Still today this church is a place of worship in Spanish. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, Mexicans spread west into the areas along the Los Angeles River, Elysian Park, and Chávez Ravine, and east across the river to Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. In the far north of the San Fernando Valley pockets of Mexicans were in Pacoima, Sylmar, and San Fernando originally because of Mission San Fernando. In Watts was a community of Mexican railroad workers ("History of Watts"), and in West Los Angeles on Sawtelle Boulevard Mexicans came to work on the ranchos. Westwood, UCLA, and Bel Air were built on an 1843 Mexican land grant, Rancho San José de Buenos Aires.

The Mexican population of Los Angeles increased with new arrivals from Mexico during and after the Mexican Revolution of 1910. The social and economic ravages of civil wars forced Mexicans to find work elsewhere, and the United States needed manual labor mostly for agriculture. It is estimated that over a million Mexicans entered the United States from 1910 to 1930 (Romo 71). By 1925, the Mexican communities of the Los Angeles metropolitan area had made Los Angeles the second largest Mexican city after Mexico City (Romo 80).

In Chapter One, Fausto has lived alone with his adult niece Carmela. He imagines returning to nature, "to worms, leaves, and petrified stone" and the "monstrous dread of dying seized his mind, his brain itched, and he trembled like a child in the snow. No he shouted. It can't happen, it won't happen! As long as I breathe, it won't happen…" (29). He removes his skin and hands it in the palm of his hand to Carmela. The imaginary molting is a reference to the Aztec God of regeneration, Xipe Tótec, represented in stone as a boy wearing and shedding human skin like a serpent. And such is the case: "In silence the old man listened for the song of life. Curled in the darkness somewhere beyond the home, it beckoned with the faint, soft sound of a flute. Then it was gone" (29).

In Chapter Two, Don Fausto Tejada begins his road to death when his mind imagines how he moves from Los Angeles to Peru and ascends the Andes peaks. A twentieth century Don Quijote de la Mancha like the seventeenth-century knight-errant, Fausto has undergone a *mudanza*, a transformation. With a lively imagination, upper-class ascot and smoking jacket covering his working-class khaki trousers, Fausto will travel to colonial Cuzco. His imagination comes to a stop when "suddenly his fingers had sunk into the carpet […]" and "from outside the house came the shrill, metallic sound of freight car wheels rolling into the yard" (31).

His mind provides him with a beautiful young woman Ana who will take him up to the giant white peak beyond the clouds. The old man has to rest several times. Nearing the peak, he is hobbling behind Ana-Carmela. He refuses to continue but Ana assures him the end is not far and, indeed, he is gasping with fire in his chest behind the procession of torch lights. Eventually, Ana-Carmela assists him to lie on the platform made for him with men dancing and women wailing around him. He was too tired to refuse their grief and asks, "They mean well…but why me?" (37). When he asks for Ana, Carmela answers as she wipes his forehead.

Symbolic Causality in Los Angeles

Fausto listens to an unknown shepherd raising his flute and releasing a long, melancholy note as he had imagined himself representing the Viceroy, as *a visitador*, an inspector general who arrived to write a report: "But Fausto was determined to enter the city grandly, mounted, leading an army of foot soldiers, arquebusiers, and lancers" (33). In Los Angeles, the fear of dying and the arduous climb are replaced by a smile and internal happiness. He concludes the chapter with "I can't think of anything more beautiful" (37).

Death is a dynamic real presence in mestizo Mexico and Indigenous communities in the Day of the Dead Altars and Day of the Dead Bread. I have traveled through southern Indigenous Mexico, and every corner store, bakery large or small, *mercados* and large food chains will begin selling their own regional versions of *Pan de Muerto* weeks in advance of November. The Day of the Dead on November 2 is the most important celebration for Indigenous communities with the god of death Mictlantecuhtli's presence. In San Cristóbal de la Casas, Chiapas, highland Maya families bring live music, food, balloons, and children's art to share with the living and the dead among them in the city's center. In Mixquic, within the southeast limits of Mexico City, throngs come to eat, drink, and celebrate Day of the Dead in the church's cemetery amidst a stone representation of Mictlantecuhtli. The living converse with the dead at gravesites. The evening will be thick with Indigenous incense, *copal*, and candlelight will fill the night sky; the evening is known as the *alumbrada*, when the cemetery lights will guide the spirits back to their other world.

In his "The Mexican Way of Death," Ron Arias wrote that he was raised halfway between Evergreen Cemetery in East Los Angeles and Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale. In *The Road to Tamazunchale*, he draws on both traditions. Starting in Chapter Three, Fausto lacks terror and fear in the presence of death, which is the opposite of Chapters One and Two. Fausto will be childlike, whimsical, and playful in his death voyage, and like Indigenous Mexicans without the suffering or thought of the Christian-Catholic perdition of the immortal soul.

Ron Arias cites two cultural epigraphs that set the stage for Fausto's explorations. The first is Francisco López de Gómara's *Istoria de la Conquista de México* describing soldiers' courage to enter a mysterious place climbing through ashes to finally reach the summit of the volcano Popocatepetl in a cloud of heavy smoke. López de Gómara, who was Cortés' secretary and chaplain, never traveled to Mexico. The other epigraph is from a Náhuatl poem *Cantos de Huezosingo*, when a poet asks, "'Must I go like the flowers that die? Won't anything be left of my name, nothing of my life here on earth? At least flowers…at least songs…" The flowered song, *el canto florido*, is poetry.

In Chapter Three, in Fausto's Mexican home's garden with chirimoya and avocado trees Fausto finds his wife Evangelina's hatbox selecting a pink cape which she used on cold nights. The hoe he stepped on in the garden will become his staff. He is now a dark Indigenous person with a rusty hoe-staff and a pink cape--a campesino of sorts. This Quijote Angelino takes to

the L.A. streets where he meets two young girls wearing shorts and halter tops (Quijote meets two prostitutes) at the bus stop on Riverside Drive along the river below Elysian Park. The two speak in 1970s colloquial English. One is "the blonde" and the other is the "darker one." Because of the history of colonialism in Mexican culture, there is a preference for light skin over dark skin because dark skin is always associated with Indigeneity. Fausto with a hoe is a perfect example of the world of dark skin. The darker girl of the two asks, "Who is prettier?" Fausto replies in a culturally expected way, the blonde is prettier. The darker one helps Fausto into the bus as Fausto confesses that she is the prettier one of the two. Color will be a determining factor of one's identity in a white world. More than a marker of difference, it is a marker of criminality or illegality.

A young goateed boy on the bus tells Fausto, "They don't dig capes no more. That went out two years ago'' (41) and "Man […] I thought you was a gardener" (42). Fausto's name is a reference to the German legend of a man who sold his soul to the devil for supernatural powers, the source for Christopher Marlowe's and Goethe's Faust. In Arias' tale, Fausto is similarly searching for ultimate understanding of death and beyond. The goateed teenager with slick black hair, shirt buttoned-up to the collar, all in black is a loner, a social outcast, a *vato loco,* who befriends Fausto. "He is just Mario," the boy tells Fausto. He is a realistic enabler with a protective spirit as well as the devilish negative figure who expresses skepticism and challenges the established order. Fausto needs Mario as a companion to push him forward and to deal with the realities of the law in Los Angeles. As Fausto looks down from a freeway bridge overpass, Mario worries that he might commit suicide, and on a hot summer day he distracts Fausto by retrieving cold milk from a liquor store for the old man.

Chapter Two's search through Peru has returned in the form of young shepherd Marcelino Huanca, the herder of alpacas on the freeway-off ramp who had wandered down from Elysian Park. Now Fausto will be accompanied by Mario and by Marcelino Huanca. Mario will provide Fausto with street smarts and Marcelino, the angel of death, will provide Fausto with Indigenous wisdom on death. Arias was inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's 1972 short story "Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes" ("A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"). In Latin America the religious believe that when an infant dies, the child is an *angelito*. In the García Márquez tale, an angel comes for a child who is at the point of death. However, the angel is old and falls to earth in a storm. The infant survives and the villagers have difficulty thinking of the old man as an angel despite his wings, questioning if he has a navel or if he knows Aramaic, the

language of Jesus. Eventually, the angel gains strength and freedom flying from the village. Like García Márquez, Arias is satirizing religious beliefs with an Indigenous shepherd who will escort Fausto to the other world.

Already on the Riverside bus riders and the fellow in the liquor store looked at Fausto, Mario, and Marcelino with suspicion. Then the white policeman wants to arrest Mario and Fausto for interrupting a funeral procession believing they are responsible for the sheep (alpacas) on the freeway. Faced with the prospect of imprisonment, Mario defends them from the policeman. Mario escapes but the cop shoves elderly Fausto into the back of the hearse. Fausto is now an outlaw of sorts and a "dead" man in the hearse on its way to Forest Lawn Cemetery in white Glendale. The cop cannot follow because Mario has poured milk into the motorcycle's gas tank and cut wires so that the policeman cannot call for help. At Forest Lawn, as the coffin is placed on the ground, Fausto opens the coffin, rises, and walks away to the surprise of everyone screaming "Jesus!" and "John, is that you?" Ill and dying, he has escaped from a neat hole in the ground in Glendale, free from the law and alive but an illegal. Fausto is no longer overwhelmed by fear.

When Mario finds Fausto walking from Forest Lawn, he offers to drive him up to the top of Elysian Park to find Marcelino with his alpacas near the Police Academy. Fausto recalls that his friend Tiburcio was once caught in a roundup of illegals on the Eastside because of mistaken identity—all Mexicans look alike. In 1953-1954, the U.S. government enacted a short-lived Operation Wetback allowing military-style roundups by the INS and the Border Patrol to seize illegals, and send them back to Mexico. Tiburcio, imprisoned within a chain-link fence, begged and screamed at Fausto to find a way to free him. The Police Academy tennis courts were covered with Mexican men. When Fausto offers to wait until finding witnesses for his release, Tiburcio screams "Remember, you could be here too" (50). Fausto's solution had been to stay by his friend Tiburcio pretending to be inside with him.

Fausto finds the young shepherd who tells him that he lost his way in the night and wandered down into a valley of blinding lights, noise and flat fields hard as stone. Fausto offers to take Marcelino to his home. Mario's car horn frightens the lost shepherd and the herd of alpacas. Mario had an altercation with "Mr. America," a policeman training his Doberman that growled and sniffed at Fausto and Mario. Mr. America offers that the dog usually bites strangers to which Mario answers, "Is your little test over?" (52). The policeman warns Mario, "[…] if I ever catch you in this park again, you won't leave in one piece. Now get the hell out!" (53) Driving