

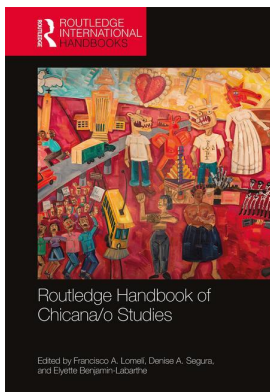
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The reception of Chicana/o literature and culture in Italy

A survey

Erminio Corti

Over the last few decades, Italian interest in the culture of ethnic groups who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino in the United States – the largest ethnic minority as a whole in the country – has been devoted mostly to the literary, artistic and intellectual production of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, even though recently scholars and publishing houses have begun to explore and translate works of some Latino writers who migrated from other countries of the Caribbean area (Cuba, El Salvador, Dominican Republic). This chapter aims at presenting a survey of the circulation and critical reception of Chicana/o culture in Italy. Among the heterogeneous Hispanic cultures of the United States, Chicana/o is by far the most studied. Also, thanks to the translations of seminal works of prominent writers such as Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros, Chicana/o culture is relatively familiar to Italian readers. Interest in contemporary Mexican American culture and its literary production – at least in an academic milieu – developed quite early and since the 1970s has increased steadily. In the following pages, I shall address the various literary forms and genres practiced by Chicana/o authors – poetry, theatre and prose fiction – as well as the wide-ranging field of Chicana/o Studies, which encompasses literary and cultural criticism, sociology, politics, music and linguistics.

At first, the reception of Chicana/o literature and culture in Italy focused primarily on the political and ideological antagonism that artists and intellectuals voiced in the issues of the *Movimiento Chicano* against the cultural and ethnic discriminations imposed by the dominant Anglo American society. Stan Steiner's *La Raza: i Messicoamericani* (*La Raza: The Mexican Americans*, 1972) was one of the first works of this kind to be translated into Italian. Published by Jaca Book in 1972, the book relies on field research conducted in the urban *barrios* and rural villages of the American Southwest with a view to retracing the social and historical context in which Chicana/o activism emerged and developed during the 1960s and 1970s. Similar reasons led a number of inquisitive academics in the early 1970s to delve into works, both in theatre and in poetry that acted as powerful amplifiers of political and social struggles in the first phase of the *Renacimiento Chicano* (Chicano Renaissance). The Italian 'discovery' of Chicana/o narrative prose occurs at a later time: it dates to the early 1990s and coincides with the first translations of novels penned by the most celebrated Chicana/o authors, which either small presses (like

Palomar, Passigli and La Nuova Frontiera) or large publishing houses (Mondadori, Guanda, Feltrinelli and Giunti) in time made accessible to Italian readers.

Theatre

Theatre, a medium that relates to its audience in a live performance within a definite frame of space and time, is a form of art that lends itself reluctantly to appreciation or study merely through its scripts or outside its original context of production. That is especially true of contemporary Chicana/o theatre, rooted in the farmworkers' struggle for civil rights and social justice in the mid-Sixties. That is a form of popular art addressed chiefly to the Mexican American community and based on a distinctive reworking of the cultural heritage of the community itself. Relying not only on scripts but also on improvisation and other dramatic strategies such as singing, dancing, pantomime or circus-like acts, the plays were meant to entertain, educate and inform the public, who often took active participation in the performances. Given its special features, it is remarkable that theatre should have been the first form of artistic expression by the *Renacimiento Chicano* to find its way into Italy, even though knowledge of this aesthetic and social phenomenon of Mexican American culture was by and large confined within the specialist province of American literature. This sudden surge of interest makes sense if we bear in mind that, during the late 1960s, artistic and intellectual circles in Italy and in other European countries were heavily politicized: they were concerned with the issues and the struggles of the working class and inclined to 'give voice' to the ethical or creative aspirations of oppressed ethnic minorities. In its overtly militant stance against the establishment and vocal support for *la raza* civil rights, Chicana/o theatre was promptly acknowledged in Italy as a conspicuous instance of the social art produced by counterculture movements in the United States.

The first Italian publication to introduce its readers to the thriving scene of Chicana/o theatre movement was *Sipario*, a journal of drama and performing arts. In December 1968, *Sipario* released a special issue devoted to experimental and politically engaged theatre or "*teatro della rivolta*" in the United States. A few pages of this issue referred to *El Teatro Campesino* (The Farm Workers Theater) directed by Luis Valdez and outlined the activities of this amateur acting company whose work was then inspiring the creation of other Chicana/o theatrical groups (Rostagno 1968, pp. 110–115). In 1970, *Sipario* published a brief article by José Montoya also dedicated to *El Teatro Campesino* (1970, pp. 44–45), and that same year in the literary journal *Carte Segrete* with a foreword by Renzo Paris (1970, pp. 155–159) there appeared the Italian translation of Valdez's play *Quinta temporada* (1970b, pp. 159–179), an *acto* written to encourage fruit pickers to go on strike, leave the fields and join the United Farmer Workers labour union. The staging strategies of *El Teatro Campesino* meant to draw attention to the social and political issues of *La Raza* through protest, satire and carnivalesque techniques were also mentioned in the fourth chapter of Mario Maffi's *La cultura underground* ("Ultime tendenze del 'Nuovo Teatro'", 1972, pp. 196–197), a relatively popular book among the young generation of readers in Italy during the 1970s. *Sipario* published a brief interview with Luis Valdez in 1973 (Paris 1973), and in 1976 a translation of his play *Vietnam Campesino* was included in the anthology *CHICANOS! Cultura e politica dei Messico-americani* (Gebbia 1976, pp. 179–197).

Having gained international renown with its 1969 participation in the *Festival Mondial du Théâtre* of Nancy, *El Teatro Campesino* in 1978 started a tour that circulated a new performance of *La gran carpa de la familia Rasquachi* (Harding & Rosenthal 2006, p. 227; The Great Tent of the Rasquachi Family) across six European countries. On 19 July the company performed in Italy, at the *VIII Festival Internazionale del Teatro in Piazza* of Santarcangelo di Romagna. After the show, Luis Valdez met the audience for an informal interview and the performance was repeated the

next evening. A few weeks later, *La gran carpa* was enacted also at the *Teatro Tenda* in Rome, in the course of the *II Rassegna Internazionale di Teatro Popolare*. *El Teatro Campesino* was engaged in another European tour in 1980, and on 7 July it inaugurated the *Inteatro Festival* of Polverigi (Italy) with the play *Fin del mundo #4* (End of the World #4). A booklet with the translation of Valdez's *acto* entitled *Los vendidos* and an essay investigating the cultural stereotypes and political struggle in the works of *El Teatro Campesino* were published the year before by Michele Bottalico. Also in 1979, Bottalico wrote two more pieces devoted to Valdez's theatrical activity: one essay published in *Metaphorein*, a journal of criticism and sociology of culture, under the title "Cultura di base e ricerca d'identità di una minoranza etnica americana: il Teatro Campesino come teatro di comunità" (Culture on the Based on Identity Research of an American Ethnic Minority: Teatro Campesino as a Theater of the Community); and a brief review that appeared in *Sipario* of *Zoot Suit*, the first professionally produced Chicano play staged on Broadway. The Spanish journal *Estudios de Filología Inglesa* published another essay by Bottalico (1981b) with the title "El renacimiento del teatro mexicano-americano en Estados Unidos: hacia una 'vieja' poética de nueva realización". In the same year Bottalico (1981c) wrote "I mille volti della Chimera" (in *Quaderni del CUT* – Centro Universitario Teatrale of Bari), a pithy analysis of the growing political theatre movement in the United States in which the Italian author voices concern about the evolution of Chicano theatre at the time:

Today . . . the Chicano theatre movement is starting to show obvious signs of weakness. These undermine its nature, so much so that it runs the risk of losing sight of its potential and of abdicating the role it successfully plays within the ethnic community.¹

(1981c, p. 9)

Bottalico claims that the degree of aestheticizing pursued by some companies as they strive to become professional and attract a broader audience – first and foremost in the case of *El Teatro Campesino* – may in fact blunt the sharp edge of their social protest and eventually alienate original audiences from the Chicano theatre movement. The musical *Zoot Suit* and its film version directed by Valdez himself represent arguably the most glaring example of this process.

Starting with the early 1980s, interest for Chicana/o theatre in Italy began to wane: the only new academic contribution to the field from the early 1990s to the present day is in fact the second chapter of Bottalico's book *Milestones: I classici della creatività chicana*, in 2008. Yet, in 1988 Lisa Tassarolo Bondolfi published *Dal mito al mito*, a seminal work that features the most articulate survey of the Chicana/o theatre movement ever written in Italy. The second section of the book includes an anthology of creative works and essays written by Chicana/o artists and scholars. Tassarolo sets out by considering the history and society of the Mexican American communities in the Southwest of the United States, its ancestral legacy and its conflicts with the Anglo American society after the Southwest's violent transition from Mexican to U.S. rule. She then meticulously traces the origins and development of folk theatre in the Spanish language until the onset of the "Segundo Florecimiento cultural Chicano" (Second Chicano Cultural Rebirth; p. 30), stressing both the influence exerted by the more traditional theatrical repertoire – introduced by Catholic missionaries in colonial times – and by forms of *género chico* (short genre) of Spanish and Mexican derivation such as *zarzuelas* (short, amusing musical play), *sainetes* (one-act comedy), *cuadros de evocación* (sketches or remembrance), the *peladito* (a popular, low-class character in theatre) sketch and the *corrido* (ballad)-type *acto*. In the two chapters that follow Tassarolo reconstructs the genesis of contemporary Chicana/o theatre, discusses its close ties with the Mexican American civil rights movement, and addresses its engagement in political and social questions. She begins by examining the *acto*, the new form of dramatic performance made

popular by Luis Valdez, and analyzes its structure, themes and stage techniques based on improvisation, irony and the use of vernacular language (Spanish/English code-switching, *caló* or *pocho* [two forms of Chicana/o slang]). Valdez is also responsible for introducing the *mito* (myth), a kind of ritualistic and expository play that borrowed features of ancient Mesoamerican cultures and Christian tradition to present its audience with an “exemplary paradigm of the *sacred history* of Chicanos” (p. 44). Even though Tessarolo’s study is centred on *El Teatro Campesino* and the work of Valdez as a playwright and director, she also mentions the activities of other Chicana/o theatre companies such as *El Teatro de la Gente*, *El Teatro de la Esperanza*, *Teatro Urbano* and the role played by TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Aztlán), the coalition of Chicana/o theatre groups founded in 1971. The last chapter is a critical review of the play *Zoot Suit*, whose main character, *el pachuco*, Tessarolo sees as the ambiguous, romanticized symbol of that very social alienation the *movimiento* was striving to overcome, even though Valdez presents it as the epitome of Chicano cultural resistance to assimilation.

The essay by Michele Bottalico we mentioned previously as a section of his 2008 book *Milestones* (“Metamorfosi del teatro politico: El Teatro Campesino e le sue poetiche di transito” 2008, pp. 37–100) is a critical survey of the artistic production of *El Teatro Campesino* from its inception to its dissolution, which occurred in 1980. In this lengthy study, which incorporates parts of two previously published essays (Bottalico 1979 and 1985), the author charts the evolution of Valdezian theatrical aesthetics and techniques. His analysis of the most popular plays performed by the group provides an insightful assessment of its sociopolitical and cultural implications. Bottalico’s study – which draws upon a substantial corpus of critical texts – is comprehensive and well argued. With Tessarolo’s book, it provides an invaluable companion for Italian students and scholars who wish to approach contemporary Chicana/o theatre.

Poetry

Along with theatre, poetry was the most popular literary form practiced during the early phase of the *Renacimiento Chicano*. The first texts of Chicano poetry reached Italian readers in the 1976 volume *Chicanos!*, an anthology edited by Alessandro Gebbia. The book’s general introduction is followed by five sections devoted, respectively, to the presentation of historical records and political manifestoes, the music tradition, poetry, narrative and theatre. Gebbia’s work clearly reflects the militant attitude and politicized assumptions which guided the interpretation of the history and of the contemporary cultural production of Mexican Americans in the 1970s. The limits of such an interpretative approach are evident; for instance in the words Gebbia uses to introduce his selection of poems: “The Chicano poet . . . seeks no literary effect; he cannot be attracted by beauty and love. Rather, he draws his images and metaphors from the social conditions of his people” (1976, p. 135). This type of statement clearly downplays the aesthetic investment of Chicano poets, and presents the reader with a biased and narrow assessment of their artistic achievement. Seventeen poems are translated into Italian but no parallel texts in the original are given: they feature authors such as Alurista, Abelardo Delgado, Rodolfo ‘Corky’ Gonzales, Nephtalí De León, Luis Omar Salinas, Raúl R. Salinas, Ricardo Sánchez and Tino Villanueva. Along with poems that had already attained canonical status in Chicano literature (for instance “mis ojos hinchados”, “A Trip Through the Mind Jail” or “I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín”), Gebbia included poetry possibly forgotten today, yet still pervaded with a passionate urgency that forcefully conveys the intensity of the political and social engagement animating Mexican American communities throughout the Southwest of the United States in those years.

More than 10 years elapsed between Gebbia’s *Chicanos!* and the publication of another study on gender-sensitive Chicana/o poetry in Italy. In the anthology section of her book *Dal mito al*

mito, mentioned previously, Lisa Tessarolo included 10 select poems from Lucha Corpi's collection *Palabras de Mediodía/Noon Words* (1980), and a composition ("Cuadro de gotas") by Francisco A. Lomelí, both preceded by brief biographical sketches of the authors. The choice of the texts translated into Italian (only Lomelí's poem translation is given with a parallel text of the Castilian original) reveals the editor's interest in themes, contexts and expressive modes which transcend the political fervour of much of Chicano poetry, closely attuned as it was to the struggles of the Chicana/o civil rights movement. Both Lucha Corpi's compositions and Lomelí's poem are indeed marked by an intimate, introspective and distinctly lyrical vein which Gebbia's anthology had largely ignored.

The first – and to this day the only – Italian anthology entirely devoted to Chicana/o poetry appeared two years later, in 1990. *Sotto il quinto sole*, edited by Franca Bacchiega (1990b) in collaboration with Martha Canfield, contains more than 150 poems and features the most renowned poets of the *Renacimiento*, such as Alurista, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Sandra Cisneros, Lucha Corpi, Angela de Hoyos, Abelardo Delgado, José Montoya, Pat Mora, Ricardo Sánchez, Alma Villanueva and Bernice Zamora. Fray Angélico Chávez, a descendant of a Spanish family that settled in Northern Mexico soon after the Spanish Conquest, is not strictly considered a Chicano writer and his poems appear in a separate appendix. All the poems are translated into Italian with parallel texts – a choice which enables readers fully to appreciate the Spanish/English code-switching technique some authors employ – and each section is preceded by short biographical notes and a concise bibliography. The selection of poets and works is assorted yet well balanced in its approach: it affords a bird's eye view of the diverse production of contemporary Chicana/o poetry and its complex cultural background. *Sotto il quinto sole* was preceded by the publication of four articles issued in Florence in the literary journal *Città di vita* between the summer of 1989 and the spring of 1990. These were dedicated to Angélico Chávez, Ricardo Sánchez, Angela de Hoyos, and Bernice Zamora (Bacchiega 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990a) and included the same select poems later featured in the anthology. Short essays introduce each author and provide basic clues to an interpretation of his or her work.

Another anthology published in Italy in the 1990s that provides examples of contemporary Chicana/o poetry is *Voci di frontiera: scritture dei Latinos negli Stati Uniti*, edited by Mario Maffi in 1997. The volume comprises two poems by Alurista ("our neighborhood" and "good-bye, good-bye, good-bye"), one by Gloria Anzaldúa ("To Live in the Borderlands Means You. . .") and three by Gary Soto ("Braly Street," "TV in Black and White" and "Mexicans Begin Jogging"). The poems are translated into Italian with original texts in footnotes. Even though Maffi's book only features a limited number of poems written by Chicana/o authors, the anthology has the distinctive merit of gathering in a single volume works written by artists from diverse Latina/o communities across the United States (Mexican Americans, Puertoricans/Nuyoricans and other Spanish-speaking Caribbean immigrants). Readers are thus enabled to detect cultural affinities or explore differences between these multifaceted groups.

The last and latest anthology of Chicana/o poetry to appear in Italy is *Poete latinas e chicanas negli Stati Uniti*, a small publication edited by Xánath Caraza and distributed as a "digital plaque" in the electronic journal *7Lune: Rivista di poesia* (2016). It features Chicana poets Barbara Brinson Curiel, Lucha Corpi, Diana García, Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, María Miranda Maloney and Celina Villagarcía, each one represented by a brief poem translated into Spanish and Italian.

As for collections of poetry devoted to a single author, only three have been published in Italy so far. The first was Gloria Anzaldúa's *Un Agitado Viento/Ehécatl, The Wind*, included in the second part of *Terre di confine/La Frontera (Borderlands/La Frontera, 1987)*. In 2000, the book was edited by Paola Zaccaria (2000) and supplemented with parallel text translations by Lidia Salvati

(from English) and Maria Teresa Triggiani (from Spanish). The year 2003 saw the publication of Tino Villanueva's collected poetry *Il canto del cronista*, painstakingly translated into Italian from English or Spanish by Paola Mildonian. A perceptive introduction also written by Mildonian traces Villanueva's literary influences (Dylan Thomas, Antonio Machado, Jorge Guillén, José M. Caballero Bonald and the Spanish "Generation of 1950"), discusses his artistic development, and explores themes and rhetorical devices that characterize his work. The anthology spans the entire career of the Texas-born poet and offers a wide selection of verse from his collections *Hay Otra Voz Poems* (1972), *Shaking Off the Dark* (1984), *Crónica de mis años peores* (1987), *Scene from the Movie GLANT* (1993) and *Primera causa* (1999). Villanueva came to Italy in May 2010, when he was invited for a series of lectures and poetry readings at the Universities of Verona and Florence.

Offerte di carta, published in 2015, is the title of the collection of 21 lyrics penned by the San Francisco Poet Laureate Alejandro "El Gato" Murguía (2015) and translated into Italian by Alessandra Bava. The small book is of interest because it features a poet still virtually unknown even among Italian scholars of Chicana/o literature. Regrettably, the edition has a number of evident shortcomings. For one, the book appeared in a very limited run of 79 copies which hindered its circulation severely and betrayed the lack of enthusiasm for contemporary poetry on the part of Italian readers. Besides, the book has no parallel texts in the original; nor does it provide information about the collections from which the poems are taken. And even the translation of a number of passages could have been more accurate. In 2015, Murguía himself was in Italy as a guest at the Festival Internazionale di Poesia Virgilio, in the course of which he gave a forceful reading of his poems (on May 23).

In terms of the critical reception of Chicana/o poetry in Italy, we need to stress that contributions to the field by Italian scholars are few and far between, and generally restricted to the work of prominent authors. A number of essays written by Franca Bacchiega appeared at the end of the 1980s. In addition to the articles published in the literary journal *Città di vita* (Bacchiega 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990a), Bacchiega wrote "Poesia dell'estremo ovest" (1987), a general survey of contemporary Chicana/o poetry. This was to be revised and expanded three years later into the comprehensive essay that prefaces her book *Sotto il quinto sole*. In her introduction, Bacchiega outlines the historical development of Chicana/o poetry: she traces its cultural influences and its relationship with the Chicano movement, and offers useful keys for interpreting the works of the authors included in her anthology. Bacchiega published three more articles in the 1990s. The first one, issued in 1992 in the *RSA* journal of the Italian Association of North American Studies, is a brief analysis of the picaresque character Celso, the main protagonist of Leo Romero's homonymous collection of poetry. The other two, published respectively in 1993 (Bacchiega 1993, "Fiori di bronzo: Scrittura femminile nell'etnia chicana degli Stati Uniti") and 1994 (Bacchiega 1994, "La poesia di Angela de Hoyos fra critica, ironia e mito"), are both devoted to a textual analysis of verses by Angela de Hoyos. The same collection of criticism (1993) that included "Fiori di bronzo: Scrittura femminile nell'etnia chicana degli Stati Uniti" also featured Martha Canfield's (1994) essay "Scrittura, corpo e femminile: riflessioni attorno a un testo chicano di poesia amorosa", a brief exploration of the theme of erotic passion and the question of identity in the *coplas chicanas* (Chicana/o couplets) of Gina Valdés.

In the June 1996 issue of *Il confronto letterario*, Erminio Corti (1996) published his first essay on Chicano poetry entitled "Elementi della tradizione culturale mesoamericana nella poesia del *Renacimiento Chicano*". The chapter investigates the ways and the modes in which contemporary Chicano poets such as Juan Felipe Herrera and Alurista successfully brought about a revitalization of their pre-Columbian cultural heritage. Also focused on the work of Alurista – poet, essayist, educator and activist – are both the essays Corti published two years later (Corti 1998)

and the volume *Da Aztlán all’Amerindia: multiculturalismo e difesa dell’identità chicana nella poesia di Alurista* (Corti 1999). The book is a close textual analysis of *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (1971) and *Timespace Huracán* (1976), two striking collections of Alurista’s verse. Of these two, the former takes on a remarkably exhortative, passionate tone that resonates with the social ferment stirring the Mexican American community in the late 1960s. The latter presents us with a series of meditative reflections in a heterogeneous style which marks Alurista’s aesthetic evolution and signals the winding down of the political activism championed by the *Movimiento Chicano*.

The emerging of a private dimension in Chicana/o poetry and its contentious relationship with the public/social sphere are at the core of two essays Corti published in the early 2000s. These address, respectively, the work of Alma Villanueva (Corti 2001b) and two collections of verse: Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Un agitado viento/Ehécatl, The Wind* and Ricardo Sánchez’s *Canto y grito mi liberación; The Liberation of the Chicano Mind Soul* (Corti 2003). In a close reading of both collections, this study charts an artistic progress that begins within a heavily politicized and stridently collective realm and – in various ways and to various ends – lands in the secluded sphere of the author’s inner self, the private space of autobiography and self-expression. In the case of Anzaldúa, it is her lesbianism and the struggle against discrimination and violence that women and Chicana/o queers had to face even within their own ethnic community. For Sánchez, it is a 10-year prison term. In 2010 Corti published another article that deals with Sánchez’s poetry, namely his collection *Eagle Visioned/Feathered Adobe* (1990). This depicts a New Mexico beset by ethnic and social conflicts, a “Land of Enchantment” that seems largely to have lost the cultural sparkle of the heyday of the Chicano movement.

In 2013, Gaetano Prampolini and Annamaria Pinazzi edited *The Shade of the Saguaro/La sombra del saguaro*, a miscellaneous volume of essays on Chicana/o literature and Border Studies that includes five contributions on Chicana/o poetry. Two of them, written by Martha Canfield (2013a and 2013b), look at the symbolic representation of the female body in the work of Gina Valdés and explores the theme of the ethnic or familiar ancestry in Mexican and Chicana/o contemporary authors. A third essay consists of a brief comparative study on the function of the lyrical “I” in Rodolfo Gonzales’s epic poem *Yo soy Joaquín*, Neruda’s *Alturas de Machu Picchu* and Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself* (Fava 2013). In “El poeta chicano y la ciudad”, María Cecilia Graña (2013b) investigates the representation of urban space in the poetry of Chicano authors such as Juan Felipe Herrera, Raúl Salinas, Lorna Dee Cervantes and Tino Villanueva. The second essay Graña (2013a) wrote for the volume is an analysis of Villanueva’s *Scene from the Movie GLANT*, a large poem in five sections that gives a lyrical reworking of one haunting reminiscence: the time when he first viewed George Stevens’s film, the last scene of which depicts an episode of unashamed discrimination against a Mexican American family.

Also in 2013 there appeared “La bisensibilità di Tino Villanueva”, an essay by Andrea Spadola (2013) that addresses the work of the Chicano poet in the light of his “bisensibility”. Spadola coined the term to name the linguistic and cultural sphere inhabited by Chicanas/os and other Latina/o communities. Members of these communities often incline to shift between English and Spanish or to mix both, not only in everyday life but also for artistic purposes. In poetry, for instance, such code-switching is at times used to great effect as a literary device.

Narrative fiction and literary criticism

The first translation of a prose work written by a Chicano author appeared in Italy in the mid-1960s. It is John Rechy’s novel *Città della notte* (*City of Night*, 1963), published in 1964 by Rizzoli, one of Italy’s leading commercial presses. Although Rechy is in fact of Mexican origin and his main character (a young gay man who leaves his native El Paso to travel across the country

earning his living as a hustler) shares his ethnicity with the author, the novel was never associated with Chicano culture, not even in the United States.² That is in part because, in those years, the *movimiento* and the issue of a Latino or Chicano queer identity had not yet emerged. But also because the story dealt with the underground gay scene of big cities on the West coast, a theme which remained under strict censure in the patriarchal and heteronormative/homophobic setting of Mexican American culture at least until the rise of feminist and LGBT Chicana/o literature and criticism in the course of the 1990s. In 1996 there appeared a new Italian translation of *Città della notte*, followed the same year by the publication of two other novels by Rechy: *Numeri* (*Numbers*, 1967) and *Corpi e anime* (*Bodies and Souls*, 1983). Yet to this day, this production seems to have been largely ignored by scholars of Chicano literature in Italy.³

In 1976 Edmund Villaseñor's novel *Macho!* (*Macho!*, 1976) was published in Italy, translated and introduced by Carla Muschio. In the two decades that followed, however, the Chicana/o prose fiction made available to Italian readers was limited to a few tales or fragments of novels written by Rudolfo Anaya (1989, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2000, 2004a, 2004b, 2007) and Tomás Rivera 2006. Excerpts from these novelists as well as from the work of Rolando Hinojosa, Nick C. Vaca, Rudy Espinosa and Sergio Elizondo were included in the anthological sections of *Chicanos!* (Gebbia 1976) and *Dal mito al mito* (Tessarolo 1987). Interest in Chicana/o prose fiction emerged in Italy only during the 1990s and has been growing steadily ever since. It centred mainly on the work of the most renowned authors, both with translations of their short stories and novels, and the production of a sizeable corpus of critical essays.

Rudolfo Anaya's first novel was translated into Italian in 1996 and became a bestseller with the title *La magia di Ultima* (*Bless Me, Ultima*, 1972). Two years later, a small press house published the novel *Jalamanta: un messaggio dal deserto* (*Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert*, 1996), translated by Alessandra DeVizzi, and in 2000 Mondadori issued *Maya e il dio del tempo*, an illustrated book for children featuring a creative reworking of the popular Mexican legend of La Llorona (from *Maya's Children*, 1996), and a tale about New Mexican Christmas traditions (from *The Farolitos of Christmas: A New Mexico Christmas Story*, 1987). *Il canto della mia terra: racconti dalla valle del Río Grande* (*My Land Sings: Stories from the Río Grande*, 2004c) is the second collection of Anaya's short stories addressed to young Italian readers. Also in 2004, in his essay "Coesione (e qualche dissonanza) nella narrativa di Rudolfo Anaya", Michele Bottalico edited and introduced the Albu(r)querque writer's collection of short stories entitled *Il silenzio della pianura* (*Silence of the Llano*, 1982). And Ivana Janjatovic translated his tale "Alla ricerca di Epifanio", included in the anthology *Da costa a costa: 12 racconti americani di oggi* edited by Mario Materassi. Then, in 2007, the publishing house Palomar issued *Serafina e le sue storie* the Italian translation of the novel *Serafina's Stories* (2004), also edited and introduced by Materassi. While Anaya's literary corpus is adequately featured in Italian translations, it needs to be stressed that *Heart of Aztlán* and *Tortuga* – two of the most accomplished novels of the New Mexican writer which complete the "trilogy of the 1970s" inaugurated by *Bless Me, Ultima* – remain unpublished in Italy.

Critical reception of Anaya's work in Italian literary circles was mixed, with Mario Materassi and Michele Bottalico standing out from the rest. Between 1994 and 2005, Materassi published three articles in Italian and American journals, later reprinted in his book *Go Southwest, Old Man* (2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Earlier he had published "The Cutting Edge of the Struggle" (1993), a long interview with Anaya that took place in Florence in September 1991. In this interview, Materassi traces the history of Anaya's career and discusses some aspects of the role of Native American and Mexican cultures in the rural society of *la Nueva México*; the presence in his writing of autobiographical elements, folk tales, myths and legends. The other two articles are, respectively, a narratological analysis focused on the theme of doubles and the interplay of characters in the tale "The Man Who Found a Pistol", and a study of three short stories: "In

Search of Epifanio”, “Absalom”, and “Children of the Desert”.⁴ The latter concentrates “on Anaya’s manipulation of literary conventions and on his subtle transformation of some of their established semantic functions” (Materassi 2009b, p. 41).

Apart from his introductions to the Italian translations of Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima* (Anaya and Bottalico 2004, pp. 353–358) and the collection of short stories *Il silenzio della pianura*, respectively, Michele Bottalico wrote three more critical pieces on Anaya’s work: a preface to the short story “Message from the Inca”, published in English in the *RSA Journal* (Bottalico 1993); “The Time of Awakening” (1997b), an interview with the author; and the essay “Le ‘forze’ del mondo meticcio: sulla trilogia di Rudolfo Anaya”, published in the collective volume *America ieri e oggi. Saggi in onore di Piero Mirizzi* (1997a) and reprinted in an expanded version as the third chapter of the book *Milestones. I classici della creatività chicana* (Bottalico 2008).

Sandra Cisneros’s creative writing also captured the interest of Italian publishing houses. In 1992, the editorial house Guanda issued *La casa in Mango Street*, the first translation⁵ of *The House on Mango Street* (1984) and in 2010 in the journal *Ácoma* appeared “Una casa tutta per me” (*A House of my Own*, 2010), the introduction written by Cisneros in 2009 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of her debut novel. In 2004, the small press house La Nuova Frontiera published *Caramelo: o puro cuento* (*Caramelo, or, Puro cuento*, 2004), translated by Sante Rede, and, a year later, the collection of short stories *Fosso della Strillona* (*Woman Hollering Creek*, 2005 [1991]), translated by Duranti. Also translated by Duranti in 2012 is *Bravo Bruno!* a children’s novella still unpublished in English that narrates the adventures of a dog in Rome (hardly a Chicano theme). In addition to the translations of the works already mentioned, some of Cisneros’s short stories and fragments or chapter of novels were included in two Italian anthologies of Chicano/Latino literature: *Voci di frontiera* (Maffi 1997) included the brief “Film Messicani”; *Voci chicane* (Godayol 2005) featured “Piccoli miracoli, promesse mantenute”, “No Speak English”, “Il mio nome” and “La Fabulosa: un’operetta texana” from *The House on Mango Street*, “Le tre sorelle” and “Mericans” from *Woman Hollering Creek*, as well as the essay “Guadalupe, la dea del sesso” (Cisneros 2005).

There are five critical contributions published in Italy and devoted to Cisneros’s narrative corpus. The first two, issued in the 1990s, are Leonardo Buonomo’s essay “La costruzione dell’io e l’ambiente etnico in *The House on Mango Street* di Sandra Cisneros” (1994), which deals with the theme of identitarian construction, and a comparative reading of *The House on Mango Street* and *Madreselvas en Flor* of the Texan novelist Ricardo Aguilar Melantzón, written in 1999 by Bottalico for the journal *Letterature d’America*. In 2007, Mara Salvucci published “‘Like the Strands of a Rebozo’: Sandra Cisneros, *Caramelo* and Chicano Identity” a thorough analysis of the dynamic and evolving presence of the theme of ethnicity in Cisneros’s texts. In the same year, Erminio Corti’s essay “Modelos de identidad en la narrativa de Sandra Cisneros: entre cultura de masas y cultura popular” was included in the proceedings of the *Séptimo foro internacional de estudios sobre las culturas literarias del sudoeste norteamericano*, edited by Maria Cecilia Graña and Francesco Fava (2007). Among the essays on Chicana/o literature collected in *The Shade of the Saguaro/La sombra del saguaro* (2013), we have Van Hecke’s “Sabores y aromas de México: la comida en la obra de Sandra Cisneros”, a study of the role of food as a symbol of Mexican American cultural identity in Cisneros’s writing. “Quando la razza è di bronzo. Meticcio e ibridità nel magico mercato italiano” by Elisa Bordin (2012) analyzes the editorial policies adopted in promoting the translated versions of Rudolfo Anaya’s and Sandra Cisneros’s most popular works of fiction. According to Bordin, some Italian publishing houses (among them Giunti and La Nuova Frontiera) tweaked their translations to bring out the ‘exotic’ quality of these works, thereby leading Italian readers to overlook or “misunderstand the importance of the multiple racial and cultural inheritances in contact, essentials for the definition of Chicano”

(2012, p. 207). The most illustrative example of this strategy is the translation of the original title *Bless Me, Ultima* which, against the opinion of the editor Michele Bottalico, was rendered as *La magia di Ultima*. On the one hand, this choice deliberately suppresses in the title of the novel the voice of the young protagonist, drawing attention to the character of the old *curandera* (interestingly though, this old character becomes an attractive young woman on the cover image of the Italian translation). On the other hand, the use of the word “magia” evokes Latin American magical realism, a ‘market label’ much more familiar to Italian readers than Mexican American or Chicana/o literature.

A few more novels by other Chicana/o authors have been published in Italy since the 1990s. In 1992, Michele Bottalico (Arias & Bottalico 1992) translated and introduced Ron Arias’s classic work of fiction *La strada per Tamazunchale*⁶ (*The Road to Tamazunchale*, 1975), and in 1996 Gary Soto’s novel *Chicano* was translated by Mario Bellinzona. Bottalico (2002) also wrote the essay “Illness in Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Doll Plagues*”, issued in the Spanish journal *Cuadernos de Literatura Inglesa y Norteamericana*. In 2012, another small printing house published *Barrio in fiamme*, the Italian translation of Morales’s first novel *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975). Garzanti published Nina Martínez’s novel *Caramba! Un romanzo scritto con le carte della Lotería* in 2005 (*¡Caramba!*, 2005), and in 2006 Maria Grazia Tonetto translated Alicia Gaspar De Alba’s *Il deserto delle morti silenziose* (*Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders*, 2005), a fictionalized account of the series of homicides involving murders of women that has spread panic among the inhabitants of the Mexican border region of Ciudad Juárez since the mid-1990s. In 2006, the unabridged Italian translation of Tomás Rivera’s collection of short stories *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him* was published with a foreword by Bottalico (2006), even though a few fragments of this formative work had been previously included in the anthological collections of Chicana/o and Latina/o narrative prose edited by Alessandro Gebbia (1977) and Mario Maffi (1997).

Only two anthologies devoted entirely to Mexican American authors are now available to Italian readers. Oddly enough, both were edited by foreign scholars. *Voci chicane: mericans e altri racconti*, published in 2005, is a collection of creative texts written by Chicanas which outline the history of *la raza* through a feminine/feminist point of view and explore gender issues within their own ethnic community. The authors included in the book, translated by Annarita Taronna from a previous Catalan edition, are Ana Castillo, Sylvia Lizárraga, Pat Mora, Mary Helen Ponce, Alma Villanueva and Helena María Viramontes. The second anthology, edited and introduced by Fernando Clemot and Klaus Zilles, appeared in 2008 and includes short stories of canonical Chicano authors such as Rolando Hinojosa, Ron Arias, Alejandro Morales and Tomás Rivera, as well as works of post-Renaissance writers like Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Santiago Vaquera-Vásquez and Juan Villoro.

Two more critical articles worthy of mention are devoted to Rolando Hinojosa’s work. One addresses the issue of Chicana/o identity in his novel *Becky and Her Friends* (Agresti 2012). Another explores the topic of self-translation as a form of creative re-writing (Benicchi 2010). Among the essays published in Italy by foreign scholars, there are also thought-provoking articles which investigate the theme of Mexican American cultural hybridism in the narrative fiction of Ana Castillo⁷ (Bottalico and el Moncef 2006; Köhler 2006), on writer Lucha Corpi (Flys-Junquera 2006) and Miguel Méndez (Emmanouilidou 2006).

As for broad reference books on Chicana/o prose fiction, with the exception of a few articles published in journals and books (Bottalico 1981a; Meli 1994; Clemot and Zilles 2008; Maffi 2009), the only monograph study available to Italian scholars and students is Silvia Bottinelli’s *Letteratura chicana: un itinerario storico critico* (1996). This volume is a clear, well-argued introductory survey that traces the evolution of Chicana/o prose fiction, poetry and drama, offering a broad panorama of the Mexican American literary history from 1848 until the mid-1990s. Although

Bottinelli's work sorely lacks adequate bibliographical data and is outdated in some respects, it is still a valuable beginners' guide to understanding the sociocultural framework of *Renacimiento* literature, its prominent writers, the themes they addressed and the way they addressed them.

Chicana/o Studies

Unquestionably, attention to Chicana/o culture in Italy has been directed mainly to the creative literature produced since the onset of the *Renacimiento*. Nonetheless, it is also clear that prose fiction, poetry and drama have played a key role in drawing Italian scholars closer to other aspects of the Mexican American culture and history, which fall under the umbrella term of Chicana/o Studies. The work of Gloria Anzaldúa and its critical reception are exemplary in this respect. Since the publication of the translated version of *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Anzaldúa 1994), a chapter of which had already appeared in the journal *Ácoma* with the title “*La conciencia de la mestiza/Verso una nuova coscienza*” in 1994, Italian scholars from various fields have written monographs and essays devoted to Anzaldúa's writing and thought. The most prolific among these scholars was arguably Paola Zaccaria. Her first critical work, included in a volume published in Spain in 2001 and devoted to the self-representation strategies of women writers and intellectuals, is “*Vivir en la frontera*”, a revised and expanded version of the essay that prefaced *Terre di confine/La Frontera*. In 2008 Zaccaria edited a monographic section entitled *Esplorare il “Nepantla” con Gloria E. Anzaldúa* for the journal *Scritture Migranti*. This section also contains the Italian translation of Anzaldúa's essay “Chicana Artists: Exploring *Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera*”, a long interview with the Texas-born author by Karin Ikas,⁸ and Zaccaria's article “*Abitare terre a confini instabili: dalle borderlands al Nepantla, il luogo delle trasformazioni*”. This study comes in the form of a political and cultural rereading of the ancient Mesoamerican concept of *Nepantla*, which Anzaldúa theorized as the liminal space/time, or the real and metaphorical borderland(s). Within that liminal sphere, discriminated individuals like herself (a lesbian and feminist activist) or ethnic minorities (namely Mexican Americans as a whole) experience a distressing but, at the same time, fruitful state of in-betweenness, which trains them for acts of active resistance against the oppressive power of dominant culture(s). Extended critical reflections on Anzaldúa's work and on Mexican American cultural *mestizaje* also appear in the second chapter of the second section of *Mappe senza frontiere: cartografie letterarie dal modernismo al transnazionalismo* (Zaccaria 1999) and in the fourth chapter of *La lingua che ospita: poetica, politica, traduzioni* (Zaccaria 2004). In 2009, Paola Zaccaria co-directed the documentary film *Altar: Cruzando Fronteras; Building Bridges* with Daniele Basilio. The work is a visual portrait of Anzaldúa's creative and intellectual life that features archival footage from her published and unpublished works held at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as interviews with scholars, activists and artists inspired by Anzaldúa's poetics and theory of *la frontera*.

The articulate position championed by Anzaldúa, which aims to overthrow racist value sets and knock down barriers of gender, sex and class from a feminist/queer point of view, has recently been the object of many critical studies published by other Italian scholars. Worthy of mention among these are the fourth chapter (“*Queer Aztlán: il genere*”) of Fiamma Montezemolo's book *La mia storia non la tua: la costruzione dell'identità chicana tra etero e auto-rappresentazioni* (2001); Annamaria Cimino's *Scrittura clandestina* (2005), a clear and concise reading guide of *Borderlands/La Frontera* especially useful for students and teachers; Mirella Vallone's *Ciò che si muove ai margini: identità e riscrittura della storia nazionale* (in Toni Morrison, Gloria Anzaldúa e Bharati Mukherjee 2013); and Felice De Cusatis's *Voci ibride dagli Stati Uniti* (2010), a comparative study of works by Anzaldúa and Maxine Hong Kingston that explores textual strategies involved in issues of ethnicity, cultural hybridity, individual memory and community narratives.

Of comparable interest are also the essays published by Floriana Bernardi (2005), Brigidina Gentile (2006), Serena Provenzano (2012), and Giovanna Minardi (2014). In more specific terms, the theme of borderland(s) in Chicano literature and culture has been approached critically in a number of essays. In the anthology edited by Bottalico and el Moncef bin Khalifa (2006), we also have a study by the French scholar Michel Feith (2006) which “assesses the historical impact and ideological implications of Gloria Anzaldúa’s trailblazing *Borderlands*” (p. 13) and an article by Astrid Fellner (2006) which looks at society in the United States to trace the shift from citizenship built on nationhood to the new transnational identities that emerged as a result of increased immigration from Mexico. *The Shade of the Saguaro* (2013) has an article written by Abraham Acosta on Luis Alberto Urrea’s *The Devil’s Highway* – an investigative piece that reports the tragic attempts at border crossing by a group of Mexican illegal immigrants in 2001. The book also features two brief contributions by Carlos Gallego (2013a, 2013b): “Crossing the Ideological Divide: The US-Mexican Border in Chicana/o Literature” and “Between Borders and Margins: Reconceptualizing Alterity”, a comparative analysis of Anzaldúa’s work and Rodolfo Gonzales’s poem *I am Joaquín*.

The essays on the geopolitical frontier between Mexico and the United States included by Prampolini and Pinazzi in the last section of their volume take a somewhat different approach. They belong more readily to the field of border studies, which addresses the history of immigration legislation and border control policies (Fernández & Finch 2013), as well as the social and demographic impact of people’s movement across the frontier (Plana 2013a and 2013b). Some historical aspects of the New Mexico region, a territory colonized by Spanish-speaking settlers since the early XVII century, are the object of Bruno Cartosio’s book *Contadini e operai in rivolta: le Gorras blancas* (2003) and Francisco Lomelí’s essay “New Mexico Lost in the Far West: la creazione di una cultura autoctona” (2002). The former is an in-depth study, which traces the origins and activities of the clandestine movement that peasants and grazers of Mexican descent started at the end of XIX century with a view to protecting their lands from Anglo speculators. Lomelí’s article provides instead an overview of the historical and cultural processes that preserved the Hispanic-Mexican literary and cultural heritage in New Mexico after the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty. The breadth and quality of the scholarship on Chicana/o Studies in Italy is increasing as the interest in the field grows and intellectual borders dialogue with one another.

Notes

- 1 All English translations of the Italian texts quoted here are mine.
- 2 With respect to the reception of his work by Chicano readers and scholars, Rechy declared that “For years, people did not consider me a Mexican-American. . . . A couple of Chicano writers were irritated and angered because I claimed to be Mexican-American. It has been more difficult for me to come out as a Mexican-American than come out as gay.” Gregg Barrios. “A First Gay Novel, A Poor Latino Boyhood and the Confluence.” *New York Times*, 1 December 2013: A35B.
- 3 We have in fact one essay published in Italy containing a brief overview of Rechy’s novel *The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez* (1991), which “does address the fundamental problematic of what constitutes a political novel from a minority perspective in the 1990s” (Priewe 2006: 51). Written by German scholar Marc Priewe, it was included in the volume *Borderline Identities in Chicano Culture*, edited by Michele Bottalico and Salah el Moncef bin Khalifa.
- 4 An Italian translation of “Children of the Desert” appeared in the literary journal *L’umana avventura* (Anaya 1989: pp. 108–110).
- 5 In 2007, La Nuova Frontiera published a new edition of this novel (*La casa di Mango Street*), translated by Riccardo Duranti.
- 6 A new translation of the first two chapters of the novel is included in the anthology *En la frontera: i migliori racconti della narrativa chicana*, edited by Fernando Clemot and Klaus Zilles (2008).

- 7 Ana Castillo's work is also investigated in Marina De Chiara's brief study of the epistolary novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, included in the volume *Democracy and Difference* edited by Giovanna Covi and Lisa Marchi in 2012.
- 8 Paola Zaccaria published her own interview with Anzaldúa in 2000, in the Italian journal *Ácoma*, with the title "Mettere insieme Coyolxauhqui".

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