

**F**rankly, over the years I have grown tired of the word ‘identity,’” Arturo Islas proclaimed in 1990. “[T]he whole question of who or what a writer ‘represents’ seems always to come back to my own heart and not anyone else’s. Nevertheless much of what I have to say . . . touches upon these issues.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Islas’s career may be said to revolve around questions of identity insofar as he wrote semiautobiographical fiction and was one of the first U.S. scholars to expand literary studies to include Chicano/a literature. He “sought to construct theoretical bridges,” says Frederick Luis Aldama, “that were anchored in the autobiographical.”<sup>2</sup> Islas understood that ethnic writers in the United States must negotiate calls for ethnic or identity-based representation, calls that “no longer wish to erase your difference” but, according to Trinh Minh-ha, “demand . . . that you remember and assert it. At least, to a certain extent.”<sup>3</sup>

Islas was thoroughly familiar with this demand. It took nearly ten years to find a publisher for his first novel, *The Rain God* (1984), and even then it was poorly marketed and not well understood. As José David Saldívar points out, the mainstream presses wanted the book for its “‘insider’ Chicano cultural message” while also complaining that the “cultural message” was too heavy and would be of interest only to a Chicano audience. The “ethnic ‘cultural message’ label imposed on [Chicanos and Chicanas] by mainstream editors,” Saldívar maintains, “draws simplistic attention to their ‘otherness,’ while their place in U.S. society and the relation of their work to global literature tends to be undervalued.”<sup>4</sup> Not only the mainstream (white) presses expect Chicano authors to “represent.” Cherríe Moraga accuses gay Chicano writers of not being open about sexuality in their fiction, and she con-

siders Islas an author whose “writing begged to boldly announce his gayness” but did not.<sup>5</sup> Antonio Viego counters Moraga’s interpretation, however, saying that these critiques that insist “on the readability of the gay male Chicano subject in an effort to locate him . . . mimic the dominant culture’s homophobic [and I would add racist] insistence on taxonomizing deviant sexual [and nonwhite racial] identities.”<sup>6</sup>

In Islas’s posthumously published novel *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (1996), these contradictions—between a desire to express identity-based experience and a resistance to the “demand” that writers in a multi-ethnic United States represent cultural, ethnic, racial, and sexual difference—rise to the surface. The novel is narrated in the waiting room of a hospital by Louie Mendoza, a jazz musician from the El Paso barrio now living with his white girlfriend, la Mollie, in San Francisco. His audience is an unnamed professor conducting an emergency-room research project. Louie spills his loves and hopes and fears into a tape recorder held by a man who, according to Louie, comes to hospitals “to pick up an accent here and . . . there to study ’em.”<sup>7</sup> A series of mishaps have brought Louie to the hospital’s waiting room. After being treated the night before for a broken leg, he had dragged himself home in his cast. But the staff of the incompetently run and probably overwhelmed hospital had earlier given la Mollie the incorrect information that he had died. Encountering what she thought was a ghost, la Mollie fainted, hitting her head on the kitchen sink and sending them both back to the same hospital again for treatment of her head injury.

Unlike Islas’s more widely read novels, *The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls* (1990), *La Mollie* does not overtly critique the purist, homophobic, and racist attitudes and ideologies in Mexican American communities. Whereas these first two (published) novels are semiautobiographical, with clear parallels between Islas and the main character (Miguel Chico) and between Islas’s family and the family depicted in the novels, Louie talks more about Shakespeare and Hollywood movies than about Chicano, Mexican, or Native American culture.<sup>8</sup> He is in love with an upper-middle-class white woman, and in spite of his friendship with his gay younger brother, Tomás, he is blatantly homophobic.

In *La Mollie and the King of Tears*, Islas uses race, ethnicity, and sexuality in ways that resist taxonomized and reified identity positions while simultaneously stressing the importance of racial, ethnic,

and sexual identity in the creation of the U.S. citizen-subject. Islas often critiqued the multicultural ethic of incorporation in his novels. In *Migrant Souls*, Miguel Chico complains: “The dumb sociologists want only positive images, whatever they are, from fiction writers. As if the whole world, especially their own little one, were one big happy collection of ethnic groups. No one knows how to read anymore.”<sup>9</sup> *La Mollie* forces its readers to “read” by putting them into an uncomfortable relation to representations of identity and forcing them to perceive familiar identity categories as constructions. Islas prevents hybridity (in the form of Mexican-American, Native American-European, homosexual-heterosexual, or a combination of these) from functioning as an easy way to conceptualize difference.

### Hybridity in Critical Context

Much critical work on Islas has treated his fiction as a form of hybrid autobiographical representation that “meshes autobiography, biography, myth, history, and fiction.”<sup>10</sup> Marta Sánchez sees a mixture of “autobiography, novel, and classical ethnography” that expands the reach of American literature by “giving voice to those once voiceless” and “highlight[ing] the ‘minority’ writer’s role of mediator between cultures.”<sup>11</sup> One of the potential limitations for the historical hybrid narrative in the context of multicultural U.S. publishing and reading environments is the dual purpose the autobiographical element must serve. As an authentic voice for the “voiceless,” it must also function as the location for a character that can embody multiple cultures and represent them to a reading public.

Critics have had difficulty negotiating Islas’s work as a contribution to both Chicano/a and queer literatures. David Román blames reviewers in the gay media for helping to ensure Islas’s “invisibility” and Chicano studies scholars for failing to discuss adequately “implications of homosexuality.” Islas’s novels, he argues, “have yet to be critically engaged on their own terms, that is, as the writings of someone who was both Chicano and gay.”<sup>12</sup> Román points to the need for a hybrid approach to Islas, but his own framing limits us to thinking about hybrid identity as two implicitly whole and preexisting identities put together—“someone who was both Chicano and gay.”

The term *hybridity* has come to be used generally now as a celebratory description. It can “deconstruct binaries,” according to Teresa

Gómez Reus, because a writer's "hyphenated condition does not limit itself to one duality between two cultural heritages."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Ellen McCracken uses the term as a combination of several elements when describing Norma Elia Cantú's work as "a hybrid of the visual and verbal, fiction and autobiography, the novel and the short story, and ethnography and creative writing . . . unfettered by fixed binary categories."<sup>14</sup> Yet hybridity defined in this way can lead to a logic that promotes inclusion or plurality as a solution or that ignores clashes between cultural heritages, aesthetic approaches, and identity positions. "A celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se," warns Ella Shohat, "if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence."<sup>15</sup> This has been a pitfall in some of the criticism on *Islas*. David Rice, for example, reads the semiautobiographical character Miguel Chico as "a hybrid ethnic" who "embrace[s] separate identities simultaneously," allowing him to "reconcile and re-integrate the separate pieces of his family and, thus, his ethnicity."<sup>16</sup> I would like to move beyond models of hybridity as "giving voice to," "reconciling," or "reintegrating" cultures. In *La Mollie*, *Islas* both represents and queers hybrid Chicano and hegemonic American identities. He provides the allure of identity difference, then both confounds and satisfies (though not always in comfortable ways) the reader's desire to see that difference represented, thereby using hybridity to challenge the way we think about identities in terms of a one-to-one relation of identity to body.

Through Larry/Bryant, a side character in one of Louie's extended tangents about his past, *La Mollie* provides a critique of hybridity as a model of subjectivity. After serving in Vietnam, Louie meets Larry/Bryant in a VA hospital after going "bonkers" from seeing his friend Juan and other "Mexicans and blacks" blown up by American-made grenades (120). Larry/Bryant's face was permanently damaged on one side during a U.S. attack on Japan at the same time the first atomic bomb was dropped, leaving him physically and psychologically split. He tells Louie that before the split he was "a blonde lesbian from Little Rock." Now he is "Larry and Bryant," two black men who shine shoes in the Albuquerque airport. Both Larry/Bryant and Louie are victims of their own nation's military forces, and both are constructed as hybrid figures. Larry/Bryant describes himself, like the atomic bomb, as "an atom split in two," who can't decide "what kind of 'bi'" he is—

“bicultural,” “bisexual,” or “binomial” (126). Louie describes himself similarly as a child of the border “washed up by the Rio Grande,” and as *la Mollie*’s “Chicanglo cause I got El Chuco written all over me but I know lots about old gringo movies” (6, 9). For both men, historical circumstance has “split” or fractured their identity. Larry/Bryant is “good at words but paralyzed by language.” He wants to put “his bi-world down on paper” but never can (126). Louie, on the other hand, has only words to keep him going. Sitting in the emergency room, Louie tells his story and allows the unnamed Anglo ethnographer to put his hybrid world on tape. As a representation of hybridity, Larry/Bryant, then, is a subject position without a cohesive structure: “He had all them memories and he jumbled em all up in his brain trying to find patterns that made sense. Like he said something and took it away at the same time” (126).

On one hand, Larry/Bryant’s struggle is like the one Homi Bhabha has described: the colonized other both speaks the colonial discourse and takes it away at the same time by revealing its nonidentity, that is, by revealing the limits of a U.S. citizen-subject discourse that has no place for this bisected and disposable man. The liberatory aspects of Bhabha’s hybridity can only be taken so far, however, in a U.S. context. Bhabha says that “[h]ybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority.”<sup>17</sup> Unlike Bhabha’s British colonial contexts, a U.S. multicultural, liberal democracy has no strict colonial authority; instead, a dominating hegemony does not disavow subaltern knowledges but in fact consciously acknowledges them in order to incorporate them.

In the unresolved, complex relationship between the collective politics that grew out of the new social movements of the 1960s and the political philosophy of liberalism that underlies many of the political, legal, and social discourses of the United States, liberalism and multiculturalism now coexist in the form of celebrations of multicultural diversity that can be identified and represented at the level of the individual. Thus, because the situation in which *Islas*’s characters acquire and express hybrid identities is not binary but hegemonic and multicultural in structure, Bhabha’s formulation of hybridity as the disruption of power lends itself to a potential incorporation, in which every expression of hybrid difference disrupts an absolute power but

does not topple that power, thus reinforcing liberal, multicultural hegemony.

Larry/Bryant challenges this model of reincorporation by demonstrating the violence of hybrid subjectivity and the histories that construct it, yet this also means he can never really say anything. Without a narrative of identity that fits his ideological and discursive environment, his hybrid discourse can only be heard as gibberish. Here the multiplicity or plurality of hybridity is revealed as a potential nothingness, a nonidentity; Larry/Bryant's multiple bi-ness ends up making him a number (a "binomial") more than a human being. Larry/Bryant's situation suggests the way in which hybrid subjects, in the words of Rafael Pérez-Torres, "risk becoming a mark of absolute transformation . . . a free-floating signifier," thus "leav[ing] the mestizo body voiceless."<sup>18</sup> Louie, who relates to multiple forms of hybridity both inscribed on his body and projected onto others, and who quite literally never shuts up, challenges the model of hybridity as either a "voiceless" and "free-floating" signifier or an ideal multicultural body.

One element of Larry/Bryant's hybridity holds a certain type of power: his understanding, acknowledgement, and performance of what are characterized in the novel as the most abject subject positions available in the United States: a lesbian and a black man. "[I]n this country," Louie points out, "being two black guys is not much better'n being a dyke," and he wonders why Larry/Bryant didn't "split up into two rich Anglos" (125). Larry/Bryant's marginalized positions are represented as simultaneously related (one "splits" out of the other) and incommensurable (he is either a white lesbian *or* two black men), raising the question of how hybridity relates to and constructs gender, sexuality, and race. Historically hybridity has been an "antagonistic structure," Robert Young explains, that "acts out the tensions of a conflictual culture which defines itself through racial ideologies. At the same time the focus on hybridity also inscribes gender and sexual division of labour within the mode of colonial reproduction."<sup>19</sup> Whenever hybridity is evoked, therefore, so are essentializing racial categories, histories of racialized sexuality, and an implicit politics of heterosexuality. Yet in the Chicano/a context, racialized, heterosexual unions (mother as Indian, father as Spanish) are precisely what have been used to construct social and political identity and promote solidarity. Thus, getting beyond or around the intersections of race,

sexuality, and gender that are embodied in the term *hybridity* itself would again leave us with a voiceless Chicano subject. To a certain extent, explicit and sometimes troublesome racial, sexual, and gendered identities are necessary for one to speak as a Chicano/a at all.

Hybridity, then, is connected through Larry/Bryant to pain, schizophrenia, and an inability to express oneself but also to a better understanding of the multicultural United States through a recognition of the marginality, abjection, and violence in the nation's history. Larry/Bryant also allows the reader to recognize hybrid identity as an imaginary construction for the purposes of representation (race, gender, and sexuality are here revealed as fabrications for identification, plus we have no idea what race, gender, or sexuality Larry/Bryant really is) and as a historical and therefore unavoidable form of subjection over which the individual has no agency. Through Larry/Bryant, Islas raises questions about the relationship between hybrid race or ethnicity and hybrid sexuality; furthermore, he establishes sexuality and race as identity positions that can be inhabited, projected onto others, and used as metaphors to describe an internal space too complicated and multiple to house a single or whole identity.

Following Islas, I turn now to examine the doubleness of U.S. hybridity: its articulation as both a politically constructed subject position and as a consciously created aesthetic.<sup>20</sup> This doubleness allows for a kind of queering of hybridity in which historical conditions and social identity do not always line up with desire or experience. Ultimately, in *La Mollie*, sexuality and race come to exist as identities and as the limits to identity. In the spaces in which they do not properly overlap, Islas constructs alternate modes of representing identity that do not allow us to know exactly, in his own words, "who or what [he] 'represents.'"

### **Hybrid Loves, Hybrid Locations**

Telling Louie's story is a way for Islas to acknowledge the pain and violence of marginalized identity as well as the extraordinarily complex and incommensurable relations between different identity positions in the United States, while also providing an example of how one fights against "going bonkers" because of this awareness. Both a love story and a tragedy, *La Mollie* negotiates hybridity in overlapping and contradicting ways. It is a story of Louie's love affair with the United

States, beginning with his boyhood obsession with Hollywood movies and ending with his love affair with la Mollie, whose “family goes way back, all the way to the Mayflower” (5); and it is a tragedy, because this love affair will not save Louie from the abjection he has experienced as a Chicano subject, though he is able to use it to negotiate a disidentificatory subject position in “Act Two” of his life (46)—after he arrives in San Francisco from El Paso and moves in with la Mollie.

El Paso, the town where Louie’s tale begins and that haunts its later episodes, is not hybrid in the same way as San Francisco. El Paso is a space of doubling, of bi-ness, of the Mexican and the American—the border. It is symbolic of Louie’s difficult past (including a troubled marriage, his alcoholism, and the suicide of his teenaged daughter, Evelina, who was born with brain damage) as well as of the difficult past of Chicano identity. El Paso is the birthplace not only of Louie but also, in a sense, of the Chicano movement’s La Raza Unida party, which held its first national convention in El Paso in September of 1972, the year before Louie relates the events in *La Mollie*. During the convention, however, no attention was paid to the 16,000 Mexican American residents of the tenements along the Rio Grande, where in the 1970s the population density was 145 persons per acre and the average family income was only one-third of the nationally established figure designating a poverty-level existence. Unemployment was three times the national level.<sup>21</sup> This community was largely overlooked by a Chicano movement interested in electoral politics and social representation.

The year 1973 was both the political high point and the cultural and economic decline of the Chicano movement. El Movimiento began in the 1960s with César Chávez’s labor union organization and Reies López Tijerina’s protests over Anglo appropriation of Mexican American land. These activities were consolidated into a nationally oriented political and social movement by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez, who at a Youth Liberation Conference in 1969 gave Chicanos their name and their movement a homeland—the mythical fatherland Aztlán. The Chicano movement was built on a concept of hybridity: Chicanos were Indian on the maternal side and Spanish on the paternal. The return to Aztlán represented both a return to this Indio-cultural past and a recognition of the Spanish presence in the American southwest before the arrival of Anglos. The literary aspect of the movement was particularly active in creating a hybrid collective Chicano identity. Pérez-Torres has pointed out that while this project was “an attempt

to convey a pride in the mestizo heritage of Chicano identity," it also involved a forwarding of "mythic and archetypal dimensions of literary creation" that amounted to "a desire to escape history (especially one of oppression and exploitation)." While this desire is "understandable and, to a certain degree, laudable" he notes, it also is "deeply conflicted," universalizes Chicano experience, and celebrates a history of severe oppression.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while the Chicano movement built solidarity through hybrid identity, it glossed over some of the historical and material elements of the Chicano's hybrid position that were non-celebratory (poverty, violence, enslavement) and potentially divisive (gender, sexuality, class).

By 1972 the Chicano movement had begun to split between those who favored strong cultural nationalism or separatism and those who wanted to recruit more support from non-Chicanos and gain political power within the current U.S. system. This split was occurring just as *La Raza Unida*, the movement's political party, was gaining national recognition. Although 1972 marked the successful campaign of Ramsey Muñiz in Texas for *La Raza Unida*, where he took a significant portion of the vote, his campaign only two years later was a failure and marked the beginning of the end for the party, which was already being assimilated by mainstream party politics. Mexican American votes began to be courted by Democrats and Republicans not so much through policy change, as Robert Kennedy had done in 1968, but with a liberal, multicultural style that gave token government positions to "Hispanics" and catered to the emerging "brown middle class" concerned as much with negative portrayals of Mexican Americans in the media as with altering the living conditions of the poor.

El Paso, in *La Mollie*, stands in for a past, a population, a set of historical circumstances that includes not only the U.S. conquest of Mexico and the subsequent failure of the United States to keep its promises to its newly acquired citizens of Indio-Hispanic descent but also the Chicano movement's promises to Mexican Americans and Mexican workers in the United States. By 1986 when Islas was writing the novel, the Chicano movement had experienced failures as well. El Paso evokes a past that constructed a nonvoluntary hybridity that was sometimes politically viable but was not without its limitations. It is also a place of restricted expression. El Paso is where Louie learns that "some accents are okay and some ain't," and it is also the birthplace of his mute daughter, Evelina (12).

A 1967 National Nutritional Survey ordered by Congress found that the malnutrition in Texas was so prevalent that 30 percent of children between infancy and six years had some form of retardation related to poor nourishment. According to Tony Castro, this survey was suppressed because its findings revealed that the number of malnourished Americans had increased from ten million to fifteen million.<sup>23</sup> Evelina symbolizes the neglect faced by the border Chicano community not only in her illness and sadness but also in her inability to speak. “The worst punishment of all,” says Louie, “must be to hurt like that and not be able to say nothing about it” (18). Louie himself is voiceless in El Paso as well. Although he loves his daughter, drinking, and going to the movies, he is not able to find happiness. His role in the movie theater is entirely passive, and his drinking generally leads him to “beat up on” and yell at an “old toady tree” in the back yard (16). He does not learn to communicate with his daughter. It is Evelina’s death that brings Louie to San Francisco and opens up “Act Two” of his story, which moves him from a love affair with American movies to a love affair with la Mollie and the United States itself.

Louie’s relationship with la Mollie is in some respects necessarily straight for reasons that include dominant sexual ideologies as well as hybridity’s reliance on heterosexuality for its very production, as I will discuss presently. In this novel, however, being in love with the United States and la Mollie becomes linked to being in love with the city of San Francisco, where homosexuality, though separated from Chicano identity, is constantly impinging upon it. San Francisco is a town of both heterosexual romance and queerness. It is a Chicano town, and a town in which Louie can act out the roles of all the Hollywood movie stars from his childhood. Its hybridity is more complicated than El Paso’s. Its Mission District, where much of the story takes place, has an Indio-Spanish history in the buildings built by Spanish missionaries. For Louie, this is not a history of pride, as his Mexican heritage was for him in El Paso. Here Spanish missionaries were converting and marrying Indians as early as 1776, but as Louie sees it,

When I look at those white adobe buildings, all I can think of are all the Indians who got whipped and killed putting em up. . . . And then they gotta go and name this whole part of the city after them Church buildings like the priests oughta get credit for the Chicanos who’re trying to make something of themselves when they don’t care a caca for no one. (79)

For Louie, the difference is not so much in the history of Spanish colonization but in the city's celebration of its European imperialist nature. The Mission District is a multiply hybrid and diverse location. In the early twentieth century, it was a neighborhood of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants; in the 1930s, it became a predominantly Chicano and Latino neighborhood, and now, it is covered in murals depicting Mexican American and Latin American historical figures largely inspired by the Chicano movement. It is remembered, however, for its colonization by white, Christian Europeans.<sup>24</sup>

San Francisco in the 1970s was also known for its mixture of gay and Chicano communities: the Castro, adjacent to the Mission District, was full of gay bars and businesses. Throughout *La Mollie* there are references to gay men. A perfect San Francisco night, for example, is one in which "being in love throws fairy dust all over everything" (53). Romance is often connected to homosexuality. "At least the fairies have some romance going for em," says Louie. "Can you imagine the world without em?" (82). This interrelation between queer sexuality and Chicano identity is never incorporated within one character, unlike much contemporary writing that addresses intersections between (non-white) racial identity and (queer) sexuality by including a queer character of color. Tomás, Louie's brother, is the only character identified as both gay and Chicano, but he is rather flat, functioning mostly as a lens through which Louie can conceptualize the homosexual culture of the city.

Minoritarian sexual and racial or ethnic identity come together not through individual characters but through Louie's experience of the city. Chicano and gay identity mix perhaps most fluidly in the scene in which Louie meets Sonia—a "pure Chicana," as Louie says—in a unisex bar (47). As he describes it, "There weren't no U.S.A. about it." She was "burning the place up, and everybody knew it, even the two fairies" (47). Although Louie gets upset at the "fairies" for mispronouncing Puerto Vallarta as Porto Valarta and for their "real fake cocktail laughs" (that is, for both their Angloness and their homosexuality), when one of them says, "God, I think she's turning me on," Louie sends them a round of drinks along with one to Sonia (48). Here in this "un-American" setting, Chicano and Anglo and gay and straight masculinity come together. This is partly through the objectification of a Chicana, though the night ends with Sonia convincing Louie to buy a bottle of champagne for her and the two men and then drive

them all home. The flexibility of gender, sexuality, and racial boundaries in the unisex bar marks the best that hybridity as a cultural component of San Francisco can provide. And 1973 marks a moment in which the Chicano movement (at least in its political form) still had some momentum, while the gay rights movement was just getting underway. The novel takes place in queer, Latino San Francisco, in a pre-AIDS, post-Stonewall moment leading up to the 1977 election of gay activist Harvey Milk to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, which brought new momentum to the gay rights movement.

But in 1978, Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated by an avowedly antigay former police officer and supervisor. In the same year, the first cases of what would later turn out to be AIDS were also reported. By 1986, when *Islas* began writing the novel, Ronald Reagan was calling for a “celebration” of Chicano business owners in California while saying very little about AIDS (he didn’t use the word in a public address until 1987, much less devote any money to it or to the many Mexican Americans still living in poverty).<sup>25</sup> Thus the novel has the hindsight to understand the limits of San Francisco’s hybrid and multicultural landscape; nevertheless, the city does become a site in which desire and identity can coexist without lining up along essentialist (fixed) or deconstructive (“free-floating”) models of hybridity. Moving to San Francisco, and thereby moving further inside the dominant Anglo United States, allows Louie to begin to use desire and the erotic to negotiate his hybrid narratives of racial, ethnic, and national identity.

### **A Double Layer of Hybridity**

Hollywood and Shakespeare figure prominently in this novel concerned with Chicano identity and border politics. Louie, for example, is fond of imagining himself and others as characters from Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s. The films, all love stories and almost all tragedies, were made before the Chicano movement appeared in the United States. Louie uses these films in a form of stylistic hybridity that José Muñoz calls “disidentification”: “a way [of reading] oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject,” a process that “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings

to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications.”<sup>26</sup> In Louie’s early life in El Paso, these movies starring white actors and telling Anglo-dominated narratives made him feel “like a Martian watching a world I can’t never live in no matter how much I try” (19–20). But once he gets to San Francisco, he begins to live the movies instead of watching them. “[L]a Mollie tells me,” he says, “that my problem is that all I want to do is relive old movies stead of make new ones, and she’s absolutely right” (19). But reliving old movies doesn’t necessarily mean making no change. Louie connects Hollywood to his own history. A connection to the past is part of what he sees as his Mexican inheritance, though it can sometimes be destructive: “What the past does to Mexicans is just as bad as what the future does to gringos. It’s just two sides of the same craziness to be anywhere except where you are” (13). Louie uses these old films not to live in the past but to find a present—a narrative—for his part Mexican, part American self. Writing himself into these narratives recircuits their workings to account for and include him. He describes the end of his long, broken-legged walk home to la Mollie:

Every love scene in every movie I ever saw went running through my head. . . . The scenes and characters got all mixed up, and I was playing in em all. It was a giant Mexican mural of Hollywood starring me, Louie Mendoza, of course! I was Rhett Butler saying goodbye to Scarlett and asking her to kiss me like she was sending me off to war. . . . I was even that flake Ashley Wilkes coming back to Tara with Melanie running towards him down the road. . . . Then I was Rick in Paris with the Kid. . . . I was Paul Henried handing Charlotte Vale a whole bunch of camellias. . . . I turned into Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones hunting each other down in the desert and killing their passion cause it was too hot for them to handle. The desert faded into a jungle and I was Tarzan swimming towards Jane with Cheeta on the shore doing back flips and going into a chimpanzee ecstasy. (149–50)

This scene not only shows how Louie uses Hollywood’s exclusionary tales for his own pleasure, making Hollywood into “a giant Mexican mural” starring himself, it also points out the ways in which the other, the marginalized, and the outsider-insider have always been central to Hollywood movie making. Louie begins his fantasy as the blockade runner and social outcast Rhett Butler; then he is Rick, the outcast

American expatriate; and then Paul Henried, the European who falls in love with the American Bette Davis. He turns into both Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones in the story of a “half-breed” woman who, in *A Duel in the Sun*, goes to live with her white relations only to fall madly in love with two brothers. Finally Louie becomes Tarzan, the ultimate other coming to woo Jane/la Mollie with his wild passion. “The giant Mexican mural” evokes the murals of Mexican Americans painted in the Mission District and makes San Francisco a new hybrid: a Mexican American Hollywood and a new center of reconstructed American culture.

Louie uses Shakespeare in a similar way. *Romeo and Juliet* serves throughout the narrative as a model not only for Louie’s own love story with la Mollie but also for the Hollywood stories he continually references. The Shakespearian tragedy, in fact, is a model for his entire life. When his high school teacher tells him, “[M]ost everybody dies or goes crazy in a tragedy and there ain’t nothing the characters can do about it,” Louie asks: “You mean like in the projects, Miss Harper?” (9). Later he suggests that Ophelia is “the first wetback in the history of the English language” (10). In telling his own tragedies, Louie is unable to change their outcome, but he does have control of the telling. As in Shakespeare’s plays, the importance lies in how a tragedy comes about, not in its ending. In this way, “Chakespeare Louie,” as he names himself, is able to reappropriate, through disidentification, a literary and cultural history that is his own. It belongs to him as much as to white America (166). Yet this disidentificatory form of hybridity has its limitations. It allows Louie to construct a disidentificatory narrative for himself but does not necessarily challenge dominant narratives of identity. Islas’s narrative thus takes a skeptical view of hybridity; it invokes issues of sexuality alongside issues of ethnicity to complicate and reveal the limits of Louie’s disidentificatory narratives.

Louie’s discussion of Hollywood is generally constructed as self-identification, allowing him to adopt a movie-star affect (“I give her my Clark Gable smile” [30]) or to make sense of his life, especially his love affair with la Mollie, in terms of Hollywood narratives (“I feel like Cary Grant right before he knocks Tracy Lord on her fancy Philadelphia cream cheese ass” [31]). But Louie’s Hollywood models for love are couched in sexualized racism that caricatures Chicano cultural heritage. *A Duel in the Sun*, for example, features Pearl Chavez,

the daughter of an Indian woman, whose sexual behavior is ultimately controlled when she is murdered by her white father. Pearl is represented as a hypersexual “half-breed,” a hybrid of genteel respectability and sensual lasciviousness. Pearl’s hybridity extends to her dual love affairs with one good and one bad son of some distant relatives of her father’s white family. Louie also mentions Rita Hayworth in *Down to Earth*, where Hayworth plays a Greek goddess who has come to fix Broadway’s representation of her and of Greek mythology by landing the role of herself in a play, making the play more true to her conception of the Greek gods but in the process creating a complete flop. The casting of Hayworth in *Down to Earth* calls attention to the absence of Chicanos and Hispanics in Hollywood films of this era: Hayworth, born Margarita Carmen Casino, was whitened for Hollywood with hair dye and eyebrow plucking. Islas’s use of *Down to Earth* places Louie in a comparable position to Hayworth as the Chicano who writes himself into narratives of Hollywood in order to represent himself as he wants to be, reminding readers of the importance of marketing representativeness on Broadway, in Hollywood, and in the U.S. publishing industry. Louie can use dominant narratives to represent himself, but how sellable does Louie have to be to get the novel into print? Ironically, Louie’s use of Hollywood narratives does not make his story a more valuable commodity under a late-twentieth-century liberal multiculturalism that would rather see him “represent” in ways that are authentically Chicano. As Islas once wrote in response to a rejection of the novel’s manuscript, publishers are “not ready for an American Hispanic voice that does not do that dance for readers who want to be entertained by ‘local color.’”<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Islas’s most important allusion to non-Chicano culture through Louie’s discourse is to a line from Walt Whitman: “The untold want by life and land ne’er granted, / Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find.”<sup>28</sup> Desire in *La Mollie* is intimately connected to identity and the future. It is Louie’s relationship to the erotic that provides him access to his hybrid narratives of self-representation and produces much of the forward movement in his life and the novel’s plotline. If alcoholism and poverty are the *cucuys* (“Mexican bogey men”) that haunt him and keep him tied to the past, the erotic is constantly moving him forward in ways beyond his control. “I love being in love,” Louie says. “It’s the biggest drug of all for me, man. All it takes is snorting one line or taking one toke of romance and it’s over.” And

even Louie admits that “it musta been all them Hollywood movies I seen when I was a kid. I believe in that stuff” (56). The movies, of course, not only teach Louie to believe in love but also to believe in a certain type of love. The films construct desire as both white and heterosexual. “I love these old movies, man,” he says, “cause they make me feel like a Martian watching a world I can’t never live in no matter how much I try. Imagine touching Betty Grable’s legs or Ava Gardner’s hair. I get turned on just thinking about it” (20). (Sexual) interpellation requires learning the female body as parts, learning desire for the female body as material and heterosexual, and equating these desires with the desire of an outsider, a Martian, to get “in.” The movies not only teach Louie white, heteronormative desire but also give him a sense of his own hybridity by constructing a narrative that makes him feel “like a Martian” acting out his life in San Francisco through Hollywood narratives both “alien” and earthly (as in Hayworth’s coming “down to earth” to represent herself in a foreign entertainment culture). These movies thus produce the hybridity that is also Louie’s strategy for making them applicable to his own life.

“Act Two” of Louie’s life begins when he meets and makes love to la Mollie during a love-in at a Grateful Dead concert. Although he is still in a relationship with Sonia, a “pure Chicana,” and “wasn’t looking to get involved or nothing,” he realizes afterward that he is “in love” with the all-American la Mollie (46, 47). He “didn’t wanna touch no one” else. “It was like getting to make love to the whole United States of America, man,” Louie says. “Not only that, it was letting me teach it stuff it hadn’t dreamed up yet and letting me hurt it a little for being so mean in the past” (46–47). This moment is clearly one of ideal hybridity, as Chicano and Anglo come together in a sexual act that produces something new, an America that lets its “aliens” teach it and make reparations for its “past” acts of violence. It is also a moment that makes clear the relationship between national identity, heterosexual desire, and gender construction. Like the movies that interpellated Louie through an economy of desire that made women into legs and hair, here Louie’s entrance into a real-life Hollywood love story involves an economy of desire that equates the female body with national territory: she is both representative of the United States and inseparable from it. Becoming American—which for Louie means not erasing his Chicano identity but being a U.S. Chicano subject—requires entrance into specific heteronormative, Eurocentric

relations: woman as land, man as conqueror. Here Islas provokes what Louis Althusser has called an “internal distantiation,” in which readers “perceive . . . the *ideology* from which [a work of art] is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*.”<sup>29</sup> Islas alerts readers to how constructions of gender, racial, and sexual identities in this love story are interrelated as part of the formation of national subjectivities and how romantic love has been constructed as natural, inevitable, and transcendent—an obfuscation of these interrelations.

Not only the Hollywood film, however, produces a heteronormative and gendered narrative. There are significant similarities between Louie’s interpellation as a U.S. subject through film and his interpellation as a Chicano subject. In reaction to his father’s claim that Louie was “washed up by the Rio Grande” and that his parents found him under the Santa Fe Bridge, Louie responds: “Well I knew I wasn’t no wetback Moses, so I used to look right back at my mom and say, ‘That sure is some bridge,’ cause I knew already where babies came from and just wanted to make her blush” (6). In Louie’s reconfiguration, his national identity is inseparable from the sexualities and the act of sex that produced him; his mother’s vagina is figured as the equivalent of a bridge between his U.S. and Mexican identities and his Anglo-American and Chicano identities. Thus, both his embodied hybridity as a Mexican American and his discursive hybridity as a Chicano utilizing tropes of dominant U.S. culture are made possible by a heterosexual structure of desire in which the woman’s sexuality and body are made equivalent to national territory and identity.

The Chicano movement constructed hybrid identity in the same way, equating the Chicano Aztec heritage with indigenous foremothers and the European Christian heritage with Spanish forefathers. *Chicano* is imagined as the result of the reproduction of these gendered ethnic identities, and the woman is associated with the mythological homeland of Aztlán. Thus, Islas presents Louie’s internal distantiation not only in relation to dominant U.S. narratives of romantic love but also in relation to the counterhegemonic hybridity of the Chicano movement by showing how they both use gender and (hetero)sexuality to construct seemingly natural identity positions. This becomes clear in the different ways Islas and Louie use Shakespeare. For Louie, *Romeo and Juliet* is the classic love story and a model for his own desires and tragedies. Islas, however, has more at stake in modeling his novel on *Romeo*

and *Juliet*, because his focus on desire is entwined with both identity and action. “[T]he American myth,” Islas has noted elsewhere, “denies the tragic and erotic imagination.”<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare provides an Anglo but non-American literary model that does explore “the tragic” and the “erotic.” Lloyd Davis says that *Romeo and Juliet* “stages a paradigmatic conflict between ways of representing and interpreting desire” and that its “links between love and death unveil a dark skepticism about desire, despite bursts of romantic idealism.” Ultimately, the play both participates in the “‘canonization of heterosexuality’” and reveals “personal romance and desire” as “authoritative codes which conceal and impose official sexuality.”<sup>31</sup> Desire here, though linked to a conflict between the individual and the social, is not connected to identity. As Nicholas Radel notes, there are two “fundamental facts about early modern sexuality” that are important for understanding this play: “[E]rotic desire and sexual-object choice were not determinants of individual identity . . . and desire was not necessarily delimited by the sex or gender of the person desired.”<sup>32</sup> *Romeo and Juliet*, which is often read as the quintessential heterosexual love story, is also full of sexual innuendo between men and between women. *Romeo and Juliet* thus provides Islas with a model through which he can examine dominant interpellation through heteronormative romantic love and also explore the ways in which sexuality and desire consistently disrupt this model.

Hybridity “always carr[ies] with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality,” notes Young. “[S]ame-sex sex . . . posed no threat because it produced no children; its advantage was that it remained silent, covert, and unmarked.” Additionally, homosexuality and hybridity have coincided historically in their similarity as forms of degeneration: “[T]he identification of racial with sexual degeneracy was clearly always overdetermined in those whose subversive bronze bodies bore witness to a transgressive act of perverse desire.”<sup>33</sup> In Islas’s narrative, the transgression that the creation of the hybrid body requires in the dominant imagination is projected by Louie onto the gay male bodies in San Francisco. These men come to represent a subjecthood acquired not through heterosexual (natural and legal) reproduction but through discourses of power and modes of subjection and subjectification. In this way, the gay American male is the quintessential U.S. subject. Like Larry/Bryant, the male homosexual is a doppelgänger for Louie, who is also revealed to be constructed not simply through

the natural reproduction and hybridization of races and cultures but also by the social and national discourses that actually produce them. The reproduction of subjects, then, allows for a Chicano identity that can recognize its historical construction through colonial violence and political solidarity without relying on a strictly heterosexual and often essentialist hybrid model that functions along binary divides of sameness and difference, including male-female and European-Indian.

Ramón Gutiérrez suggests that in the U.S. national imaginary, perceived differences between Mexico and the United States are often projections of transgressive acts and perverse desires onto Mexico and Mexicans, which helps to construct and hold in place Anglo, European, and North American compulsory heterosexuality:

Middle-class white Americans organize their kin relationships around two orders: the order of nature . . . and the order of law. . . . Americans are either born into the nation (the order of nature) or they enter it through a legal process (the order of law) and become citizens through a process we call 'naturalization.' . . . The international boundary between Mexico and the United States has long been imagined as a border that separates a pure from an impure body, a virtuous body from a sinful one, a monogamous conjugal body regulated by the law of marriage from a criminal body given to fornication, adultery, prostitution, bestiality, and sodomy.<sup>34</sup>

In locating the sexually deviant body in San Francisco and by associating the gay male body with the United States (Louie says that his brother has “gone California” as a way of telling us he is gay [18]), Islas challenges constructions of both sexual identity and American identity by placing the bodies Gutiérrez names as those rejected in order to create the “virtuous body” of the United States, within and as an integral part of that body.

Making the gay male body an object of concern and desire for the heterosexual main character opens up ways of rethinking the regime of compulsory white heterosexuality that has interpellated Louie as a U.S. subject. In *La Mollie*, sexuality exists both as identity and as a limitation to identity. It is a structural framework for envisioning the world that is never reducible to one identity, one subject. Space itself is queered, not only through the equation of California with queer sexuality but also through Louie’s hybrid, Hollywood-inspired vision of the city. “Being in love,” says Louie, “throws fairy dust all over everything,

even sleaze, and the scummy Tenderloin glows after a rain that leaves all the lights shiny and blinking like chorus girls" (53). In this description of San Francisco's red-light district, straight love covers the city in a fabulous queerness that allows Louie to enjoy and find beautiful the homosexual culture that both frightens and attracts him. As Aldama explains, Louie "comes to exist as a straight thirty-something pachuco with a vision that queers . . . world-city spaces."<sup>35</sup> Although Louie sees himself through a straight discourse of romantic love, his language often represents him as desiring other men and as a subject participating in San Francisco's queer culture. Islas hints at these desires throughout the text. Louie is aroused at one point, for example, by a man wearing a slip over his suit, and he describes Tomás's friends as men with "faces . . . so clean they look like daisies all fresh and ready for plucking" (71). The name "la Mollie," of course, evokes the homosexual subculture in Molly houses of eighteenth-century London.

When Louie leaves the Mind Shaft, a gay bar that, as its name implies, is literally a "mind fuck," he stops at the corner, reflecting: "I don't know what it was that got into my skin about that place, but it had me stuck there in the alley so's I couldn't of moved if Sherman's army'd showed up" (146). The queerness of San Francisco has "gotten into his skin." It is psychologically and physically a part of him, though not constitutive of his sexual identity. Here this queer-straight hybrid sexuality functions as the limit not only of binary sexual identity but also of the (heterosexual) construction of U.S. identity. Reflecting on the Mind Shaft, Louie "recognize[s] the old demon lust winking in the background of all them pictures I couldn't erase from my head. . . . I had to keep telling myself that it was only a buncha guys doing all that stuff and not no extraterrestrials" (145). Louie recognizes in the pictures of male-male eroticism not only his own desire but also his alienation. Just as he felt like a "Martian" watching Hollywood films, the men in the Mind Shaft seem to be extraterrestrials as well. In the Mind Shaft, identity and desire do not line up. The gay man is an identity that trumps and disrupts Louie's other identity categories, which rely on a specific male-female gendering, a heterosexual system of reproduction, and desire through difference.

It is also notable that Louie would not be able to move "if Sherman's army showed up." This is one of only a few references in the novel to actual historical figures rather than the film stars who played them. At the moment of the "mind fuck"—the destabilization of identity—the

dominant U.S. history of war, violence, and national identity enters the narrative. Louie is imagining himself in relation to one of the most violent acts that the American nation has inflicted on itself. At the same time, there is no real place for Louie's Chicano identity in this narrative. While he may identify with the Native Americans against whom General Sherman practiced scorched-earth military tactics for the U.S. government, he could just as likely identify with Sherman himself, whose full name, William Tecumseh Sherman, locates him as an inheritor of a hybrid history of Native American and Euro-American ancestry. Thus the reference to Sherman both raises U.S. histories of violence and places Louie in an undefinable relation to them. His inability to move does not stem from a sexual desire for men or a desire for identification but from the way in which he has been forced to see (and not see) himself, a sameness in something different and an alienness in something same, neither of which can be fully comprehended along the lines of either sexual or ethnic identity.

Aldama notes that sadomasochism is, for *Islas*, both a replication of the dynamics of a chauvinistic heterosexuality and a way of working through those dynamics.<sup>36</sup> As a hybrid structure, sadomasochism, at its worst, replicates painful and problematic power structures within historical and embodied Chicano identity and, at its best, can be a game or a kind of aestheticized performance of consciously articulated hybridity that moves beyond the essentialist binaries of dominant and submissive, male and female, powerful and weak. Yet these elements remain linked too closely to *Islas*'s gay Chicano body and identity to fully account for the ways in which he employs sadomasochism in this scene. Leo Bersani has argued that although "masochistic jouissance is hardly a political corrective to the sadistic use of power . . . the self-shattering . . . inherent in that jouissance . . . also makes the subject undefinable as an object of discipline." This "self-shattering" interrupts "the ego's coherence and its boundaries" and "is intrinsic to the homo-ness in homosexuality."<sup>37</sup> In a similar way, sadomasochism allows Louie to have experiences that exist outside the identities that normally regulate his ego's boundaries and its coherence. His time in the Mind Shaft does not become another "free-floating," deconstructive hybrid experience because he remains at a distance from the action even while it takes place in relation to him. Louie's body is not partaking in the sexual acts but in the Mind Shaft's operational dynamics. The Mind Shaft replicates *Islas*'s novel because

it highlights the relation between the embodied reality of experienced identity and aesthetic representations of identity. In the bar, Louie, wearing his giant leg cast, is read by other men as playing the erotic roles of patient, Law, and older brother. Yet as someone who has just broken his leg, as a straight man passing judgment on this “south-of-Market Babylon for fairies” (141), and as Tomás’s brother, he is actually all of these things. The identities are both real and “played”; it is the scene of male homosexual desire that allows them to appear as both. This scene, then, is not so much a representation of lived gay or Chicano identity (though it is that) but a conscious aesthetic use of hybrid representation. In other words, we do not lose Islas’s “gay, Chicano voice,” but neither do we receive an explanation, representation, or bit of local color about who or what it represents.

### Identity Consumption and Representation

The mirror image is a central metaphor in *La Mollie*. It grounds one’s identity by establishing an image of the self, and it is the place where one confronts the other. On Louie’s way out of the Mind Shaft, for example, he tells the bouncer that he has a woman waiting for him, to which the bouncer replies: “That’s what they all say when they look in the mirror, baby. You come back soon” (143). The mirror provides Louie’s heterosexual image, yet it is also a place where his homosexual desires lurk in the background like “the old demon lust” that winks in the background of the pictures in his head. And significantly, it is the bouncer—that is, the Law—who is reflecting Louie back to himself and clarifying the way social identities function, and the lies they tell. On Larry/Bryant’s split subjectivity, Louie remarks: “well, man, what else can you tell yourself when you’re looking in the mirror for the first time and seeing what happened to your face?” (124). In both these instances, “looking in the mirror” implies seeing oneself anew and also seeing someone or something else, perhaps queer desire or the violence and racism inherent in one’s interpellation as a patriotic soldier. It is often in the mirror that Louie sees the *cucuys* that haunt his life in San Francisco.

“In the mirror,” then, is where one’s subjection and subject position are made most clear, where one experiences distantiation. It is where one sees oneself and the other people, identities, power structures, histories of science and war, actions one has taken—the racial,

ethnic, and national past that informs one's sense of self. Thus, the mirror is perhaps the place where hybridity as material, historical, embodied construct and hybridity as conscious aesthetic and political creation meet. In the conscious literary creation of hybridity, one is never simply representing a lived hybridity that exists outside the text; rather, in mirroring a set of lived identities, one is always necessarily leaving out many of the contradictions and conditions of lived identity and allowing to show, in however hauntingly specular a way, those elements that are necessary to, but get left out of, representative identities.

The distancing effect of this mirroring is visible in the position of the reader. Louie asks the unnamed ethnographer and implicitly the reader: "[Do] you ever feel that with guys like me, where you sit down to study em under your microscope you find yourself looking in the mirror or wondering if they use the same kinda toothpaste?" (86). Louie's readers are forced to become aware of their own positions as consumers of this ethnographic text. They are consuming Louie and his representations of ethnicity in a way not unlike the way he consumes Hollywood identities. Islas thus constructs whiteness as an unnamed but central element in the text's production and consumption. Readers are not only placed in the position of the white ethnographer but also are forced to recognize themselves in this position—and to confront their desire to see Louie represent difference. As *la Mollie* puts it, we want to see Louie as "a real example of ethnic and racial poverty" (30). In this way, the novel also reflects the readers themselves, making them complicit in a certain type of U.S. desire for ethnic representation.

Like the mirror, *La Mollie* reveals not only multiple and conflicting identities but also the multiple places of the other within and in relation to those identities. Islas asks readers to recognize the liberal, multicultural ideologies of identity and difference that have constructed their desires in relation to the text. This internally distancing narrative construction disrupts the possibility of a liberal, multicultural diversity in which one is recognized as a member of multiple identity-based groups, with each group and member distinguishable on an equal playing field. It places readers in a psychic space where they must simultaneously recognize the historical circumstances (over which they have no control) that have produced inequality through identity and desire, and their own complicity in this reproduction. We

must enter this space in order to accept the paradox that the example of Louie has shown us. On one hand, hybridity, identity, and desire are already constructed and the only way to become a subject in the world is to accept them; on the other hand, the only way to survive in such a world is to make those constructions, often in “hybrid” ways, identify, represent, and account for us.

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### Notes

I would like to thank Ifeona Fulani, Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Adam Waterman, Robert Gunn, and Drew Lichtenstein for their generous help with this essay.

- 1 Arturo Islas, “On the Bridge, at the Border: Migrants and Immigrants,” Ernesto Galarza Commemorative Lecture, August 1990, Stanford Center for Chicano Research, Stanford University; see [http://ccsre.stanford.edu/pdfs/5th\\_Annual\\_Lecture\\_1990.pdf](http://ccsre.stanford.edu/pdfs/5th_Annual_Lecture_1990.pdf).
- 2 Frederick Luis Aldama, *Dancing with Ghosts: A Critical Biography of Arturo Islas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2005), 30.
- 3 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989), 89.
- 4 José David Saldivar, “The Hybridity of Culture in Arturo Islas’s *The Rain God*,” in *Cohesion and Dissent in America*, ed. Carol Colatrella and Joseph Alkana (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 161.
- 5 Cherrie Moraga, “Queer Aztlán: The Reformation of Chicano Tribe,” in *The Last Generation* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 163, quoted in Antonio Viego, “The Place of Gay Male Chicano Literature in Queer Chicana/o Cultural Work,” *Discourse* 21 (fall 1999): 117.
- 6 Viego, “The Place of Gay Male Chicano Literature,” 128.
- 7 Arturo Islas, *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996), 12. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 8 The character Louie was inspired by an exercise Islas did with his students. According to Aldama, they were asked to “imagine someone completely different from them and speak in that character’s voice alone” (*Dancing with Ghosts*, 52).
- 9 Arturo Islas, *Migrant Souls* (New York: Avon, 1990), 211.
- 10 Antonio C. Marquez, “The Historical Imagination in Arturo Islas’s *The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls*,” *MELUS* 19 (summer 1994): 5.
- 11 Marta E. Sánchez, “Arturo Islas’ *The Rain God*: An Alternative Tradition,” *American Literature* 62 (June 1990): 303, 285.
- 12 David Román, “Arturo Islas (1938–1991),” in *Contemporary Gay Ameri-*

- can Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood), 224.
- 13 Teresa Gómez Reus, "Weaving/Framing/Crossing Difference: Reflections on Gender and Ethnicity in American Literary and Art Practices," in *Caught between Cultures: Women, Writing, and Subjectivities*, ed. Elizabeth Russell (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 112.
  - 14 Ellen McCracken, "Hybridity and the Space of the Border in the Writing of Norma Elia Cantú," *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 25 (winter 2001): 265, 261.
  - 15 Ella Shohat, "Notes on the Post-Colonial," *Social Text* 31–32 (1992): 109.
  - 16 David Rice, "Sinners among Angels, or Family History and the Ethnic Narrator in Arturo Islas's *The Rain God* and *Migrant Souls*," *Literature, Interpretation, Theory* 11 (August 2000): 172.
  - 17 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 114.
  - 18 Rafael Pérez-Torres, "Chicano Ethnicity, Cultural Hybridity, and the Mestizo Voice," *American Literature* 70 (March 1998): 168, 173.
  - 19 Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 19.
  - 20 The double nature of hybridity has been variously defined. Mikhail Bakhtin distinguishes between "organic" and "intentional" hybridity; see *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 360, quoted in Young, *Colonial Desire*, 21. Lisa Lowe argues that "hybridities are always in the process of, on the one hand, being appropriated and commodified by the commercial culture and, on the other, of being rearticulated for the creation of oppositional 'resistance cultures'"; see "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2003), 151.
  - 21 See Tony Castro, *Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1974), 178.
  - 22 Rafael Pérez-Torres, *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, against Margins* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 41.
  - 23 See Castro, *Chicano Power*, 38.
  - 24 In 1984, just two years before Islas began writing *La Mollie*, Ronald Reagan proclaimed National Hispanic Heritage Week in celebration of "Hispanic" culture. He identified Hispanics as persons who "came [to the United States] in search of a better life for themselves and their children" and as persons with "strong cultural and familial ties" to "our neighbors." Reagan's speech constructed "Hispanics" as "good" immigrants who help keep up "our" relations with other American nations. Reagan mentioned "a mission system built by a remarkable Franciscan priest named Father Junipero Serra, who's now under consideration for sainthood. . . .

All Californians are very proud of these missions.” Reagan thus conflated all Spanish-speaking persons and erased the history of European colonization that led Chicanos to self-identify as racially and ethnically other than Euro-Spanish; see “Remarks on Signing the National Hispanic Heritage Week Proclamation,” 10 September 1984, The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan, [www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/1984/91084b/speeches.htm](http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/1984/91084b/speeches.htm) (November 2007). This passage in *La Mollie* rewrites Reagan’s speech to include such a history.

- 25 See Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the National Hispanic Heritage Week Proclamation,” [www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/91084b.htm](http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/91084b.htm) (November 2007). On Reagan’s response to AIDS, see Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 57.
- 26 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12, 31.
- 27 Arturo Islas to Maria Guarnaschelli, 2 December 1987, Arturo Islas Papers, Stanford University Special Collections Library, box 7, folder 9, quoted in Aldama, *Dancing with Ghosts*, 55.
- 28 Walt Whitman, “The Untold Want,” *Leaves of Grass*, ed. Sculley Bradley and Harold W. Blodgett (1891–92); reprint, New York: Norton, 1973), 502. Among the many allusions to Whitman in *La Mollie* is one of the novel’s epigraphs: “Who goes there? Hankering, gross, mystical, nude. . . .” (“Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass* [New York: Norton, 1973], 47).
- 29 Louis Althusser, “*Lenin and Philosophy*” and *Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 222.
- 30 “A Conversation with Arturo Islas,” by José Antonio Burciaga, *Stanford Humanities Review* 2 (spring 1992): 175.
- 31 Lloyd Davis, “Death and Desire in *Romeo and Juliet*,” in *Shakespeare and Sexuality*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 37, 36, 40.
- 32 Nicholas F. Radel, “Queer *Romeo and Juliet*: Teaching Early Modern ‘Sexuality’ in Shakespeare’s ‘Heterosexual’ Tragedy,” in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Maurice Hunt (New York: Modern Language Association, 2000), 91.
- 33 Young, *Colonial Desire*, 25–26, 26.
- 34 Ramón Gutiérrez, “Sexual Transgression on the U.S.-Mexican Border,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1996), 255–56.
- 35 Frederick Luis Aldama, “Ethnoqueer Rearchitexturing of Metropolitan Space,” *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 591.
- 36 See Aldama, *Dancing with Ghosts*, 75–99.
- 37 Leo Bersani, *HOMOS* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 99, 101.