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Religious and Denominational References in Chicano Literature – a Transborder Way of Narrating Identity

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Abstract: This article understands the US-Mexican border not only as a border between nations, but as a border between denominations. Chicano literary texts show how (mostly) Mexican Catholicism and (mostly) US-Protestantism are both transcended into a third, unique religiousness that does not completely reject neither old nor new, but constructs an identity of one's own – a transborder and transdenominational identity. Various denominational and religious references on different narrative levels serve the authors as literary means to transform the line that separates into a fruitful, identity-founding space. This article aims to add a new perspective to border discourse by approaching it through the literary analysis of religious, and mostly denominational, references. It amplifies the discourse of border and religion by tracing denominational elements in two literary cycles – José Antonio Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy and Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy* – and by mapping their narrative functions. These denominational references are used to transcend religiousness and play a vital role in the literary development of a transborder identity.

Keywords: Chicano, literature, border, religion, identity

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Introduction: Religion and Border – a Dynamic Relationship

This article understands the US-Mexican border not only as a border between nations, but as a border between religious denominations. In Chicano literary texts, such as work by Rudolfo Anaya and José Antonio Villarreal, Mexican Catholicism and US-Protestantism combine to form a third, unique religiousness. This new religiousness neither completely rejects old nor new but parallels both, establishing its own identity – a transborder and transdenominational identity. Various denominational and other religious references on different narrative levels serve the authors as literary means to transform the line that separates into a fruitful, identity-founding space. [1]

Border discourse and Chicano research are closely connected.[2] Here, the border can be looked upon as literal as well as figurative, that is, the real, physical, political border on the one hand, and the border as metaphor on the other.[3] While the latter has been gaining more and more scholarly attention, it is also important to keep the literal border in mind, especially in these times when political borders are becoming disturbingly robust.[4] However, this twofold notion of 'border' within the Chicano context is particularly productive regarding literature, culture, theory, and identity. 'Border' stands as a close relative to another, structurally equally twofold paradigm in Chicano literature: that of religion.[5]

[1] While the term 'denomination' in this article refers to the Christian denominations Catholicism and Protestantism (without further differentiation of Protestant denominations), the term 'religion' is used to refer to Christianity without denominational distinction as well as religious concepts other than Christianity.

[2] As not to complicate my text further, I resign the gendered specification of 'Chicano' and 'Chicana' (Chicana/o, Chican@, ChicanX), apart from points where obviously only women are included. As I work with primary texts of male authors only, the term 'Chicano' is most times sufficiently correct anyway.

[3] See Goodman (2015: 155).

[4] Ever since the mid-1980s, the metaphorical border has been of academic interest. Tabuenca Córdoba sees this "tendency toward a metaphorical, rather than literally based appropriation of border experience") as highly problematic (Tabuenca Córdoba 2013: 456). She suspects an "intellectual colonialism" that affects mainly the population on the Mexican side of the border when the metaphorical border gains predominance over the geopolitical border (see Tabuenca Córdoba 2013: 454-459).

[5] In this article, I use the widest definition of religion possible, one that includes organized and officially established religions as well as the most individualistic personal religiousness and spirituality.

Religion in literature can, and of course does, mirror religiosity and therefore can be understood in its literal sense. Similar to the border, religion also becomes a metaphor and can, in its figurative sense, be read as a poetical expression for something else like cultural identity. This double meaning is valid for the combination of border and religion: in a literal sense, border and religion interact and determine one another. Apart from language, religion is one of the most significant cultural elements that constitute Latin America and North America as different cultural spaces. Such a distinction between a (mostly) Spanish speaking, Catholic world and a (mostly) English speaking, Protestant world has historically grown and does not precede the arrival of European conquerors and settlers.[6] Similarly, the US-Mexican border in its literal sense is not a 'natural' one; it is the result of the European conquest and its subsequent settlement, with different motivations on each side. Different denominations are not only a consequence of colonization in the sense of specific cultural features imprinted on the forthcoming population (in the sense of 'we are Catholic/Protestant because we are here'), they are also crucial factors in building these differences in the first place (in the sense of 'we are here because we are Catholic/Protestant').

In a metaphoric sense, religion 'becomes' a notion of border. In literature, both border and religion can be used to narrate – and by narrating to some extent create – a new identity. Taking these circumstances into consideration, this article aims to add a new perspective to border discourse by approaching it through literary analysis of religious, and mostly denominational, references.

It is noteworthy at this point that religion in the Chicano context cannot be reduced to Christianity. As Theresa Delgadillo points out, "non-Western worldviews are many, and how fiction represents these perspectives and practices range from subtle allusion to structural principle to central themes and characters" (Delgadillo 2013: 248). In this quote, Delgadillo hints at the literal and figurative meanings of diverse religious references. Religious images, thought, and language do not stop at borders but cross them and intermingle freely; they explain faith and belief, culture and identity. When understanding the border as a denominational border, it becomes obvious that references to denominations in Chicano literature are a transborder phenomenon. They address many denominations and originate from both sides of the border. With this in mind, tracing references of solely Christian denominations becomes a much narrower field.

[6] For negotiations on the influence of religion and especially Christian denominations on the different cultural self-concepts of the Americas, see Elizondo (1985: 9-14), Junker (2009: 22f.), Waechter (1996: 28f.), Noll (2000: 213), Krakau (2009: 51-57).

Christian denominations play a crucial role in the development of today's border between Mexico and the US: Protestant exceptionalism and manifest destiny caused the US to expand into Mexican territory. On either side of the border, denominational affiliation was a significant factor in the construction of nation and identity. Thus, it is not surprising that neither one of the denominations holds a home field advantage within the borderlands themselves. Both are present, both on shifting ground. In this context, denomination does not necessarily carry a theological or religious meaning anymore, but can also be understood as a cultural element which may over time have developed a secular significance. The literal becomes figurative.

Since Protestantism emerged through the rejection of Catholicism, both denominations – even though both Christian – must be seen as separate entities. Each stands for itself and influences the believer in potentially every aspect of life. Although most Chicanos may identify as Catholic, traces and references in Chicano literature show a profound usage of Protestant themes, motives and structures. Movements and extensions between the (at least) two denominations can be found in Chicano literature and therefore in the Chicano worldview. It is constitutive for Chicano identity to be neither fully Mexican nor American but a unique 'third' with a strong "tolerance for contradiction",[7] a tolerance also to be found regarding religious aspects. The space between nations that Chicanos find themselves in is mirrored in the literary transcendence of religious and denominational notions. In literature, religion shifts from literal to figurative realms.

Although (or maybe precisely because) Chicano literature rarely favors one denomination as the personal religiousness of its protagonists, it suggests a spirituality native to the borderlands. Carmen Cáliz-Montoro notes:

> [T]he borderlands run beyond territorial restrictions. They involve the building of new myths through artistic creation, which is here to be taken to its ultimate goal, that is, transformation and self-creation. In literature, the creation of new forms of writing and myths represents the foundation of the movement of the New Mestiza, and of what living in the borderlands means (Cáliz-Montoro 2000: 14).

Even if Cáliz-Montoro explicitly refers to Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the 'New Mestiza',[8] myths like these are often told with narrative structures that are profoundly coined by Christianity and even denominationally distinguished. As the analytical sections of this article will point out, religious notions within cultural products such as literary works have complex

[7] This term is coined by Gloria Anzaldúa. She writes: "The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures." (Anzaldúa 2012: 101).
[8] See Anzaldúa (2012).

denominational influence on language, thought, worldview, story lines, and narrative structures, while at the same time new religious concepts are introduced. In the borderlands, otherwise separate denominations are in contact with one another.

The dynamic interaction between the diverse religious references and the notion of 'border' in Chicano literature has not yet been fully investigated, nor has it been extensively used for literary analysis. Of course, the one text that comes to mind concerning these two paradigms is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Even if the situation is less dramatic than Alma Rosa Alvarez' fear of *Borderlands* being "rarely discussed in terms of spirituality" (Alvarez 2007: 51), the question of cultural identity, especially with the characteristics of border and gender, has attracted foregrounding discourses around Anzaldúa's work.[9] Amongst others, Delgadillo's 2011 *Spiritual Mestizaje* "turn[s] attention to the ways that Anzaldúa's perspective of the borderlands centers spiritual transformation as a possibility arising from the meeting of disparate cultures and as a necessary and more conscious element of the critical project of the borderlands" (Delgadillo 2011: 179). Delgadillo focuses on 'Chicana' literature only; furthermore, since she is exploring Anzaldúa's concept of "spiritual mestizaje", denominations do not play any role in her investigation. This is not surprising since Anzaldúa's text clearly leads away from these established forms of religiosity: "[t]he mestiza consciousness she advocates is predicated on ambiguity and contradiction, which allows for the vacillation between Catholicism and other beliefs. This postmodern uncertainty opens up a space for altered or new forms of spirituality/ies" (Alvarez 2007: 57). Yet, as Alvarez states, some of these may well stay in the realms of Christianity and even Catholicism. It is therefore worthwhile to keep looking for denominational references in literature.

While the scholarly interest in border discourse seems as popular as ever, the admittedly wide field of 'religion' in a Chicano context has not been exhaustively studied. The academic engagement with religion in Chicano contexts can, at this point, generally be divided into two categories. The first one deals with the notion of religion in literary texts, and the second one tries to fathom the dimensions of religion in Chicano lives. While the latter sees religion in Chicano culture (that is: 'reality'; a place 'outside' literary texts) as extremely diverse and multifaceted, a multidirectional analysis of religious notions in Chicano literature has not yet taken place, even though the importance of religion in Chicano texts has long been recognized. In 1975, Guadalupe Valdes Fallis even affirmed that Chicano literature can be called 'literature' precisely 'because' it engages with the universal question of the existence of God.[10] In the

[9] Anzaldúa herself amplifies the discourse of spirituality in her 2015 volume *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*.
[10] At this historic moment, Valdes Fallis saw Chicano writing being attacked in its literary quality (and seen as

following years, some scholars engage with the notion from a point of view that accepted and constructed Chicano texts as sites of a homogeneous Christianity. In 1982, Davíd Carrasco put forth that "[t]he Christian-centric orientation of most Chicano studies is a serious problem" (Carrasco 1982: 197).[11] Whether or not Carrasco's statement is correct, he fails to point out how negotiations of Chicano literature in this field often miss one crucial aspect: the heterogeneity of Christian religion. As noted above, Chicanos find themselves not only between Christianity and a wide range of other, indigenous religious traditions, but also between denominations. Espinosa's and García's 2008 volume *Mexican American Religions. Spirituality, Activism, and Culture* pays tribute to this extensive diversity of religiosity, including denominational differences. Unfortunately, literature is but a marginal object of investigation in this volume, and even less in Facio's und Lara's *Fleshing the Spirit. Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* published in 2014. The notion that becomes visible in these volumes – that 'religion' in Chicano contexts is more than Christianity and is leaving the realm of mere 'religiosity', merging with culture and politics of ethnic identity – would also prove to be most relevant for literary studies.

In this article, I will enhance the discourse of border and religion, tracing denominational elements in two literary cycles, Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy and Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*. By mapping their narrative functions, I will show that these denominational references are used to transcend religiousness and play a vital role in the literary development of a transborder identity.[12] Prior to this, I will discuss why it is literature that attracts my focus of

irrelevant outside of Chicano communities); hence, she explores what literature is: "[i]deas in great literature, it is held, must be universal" (Valdes Fallis 1975: 26f.). Investigating the works of Rivera, Anaya and Villarreal, Valdes Fallis detects such universality in Chicano literature's question of God. I quote this article in the framework of a historical exploration of the relevance of religion in Chicano literature. See Valdes Fallis (1975: 26f.).

[11] With his 'Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimensions in Chicano Experience', Carrasco presents a first alternative point of view by focusing on other than Christian religious manifestations in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, such as sacred landscape, hierophany, shamanism, and sacred knowledge. While his new and important study indeed turns away from a Christian-centric orientation, it could easily leave the impression of Christian religion having no influence at all on *Bless Me, Ultima*. A denial of Christian influence, Christian themes and structures seems as limited as the proposed problematic Christian focus. As with many aspects in the Chicano context, religion gives no clear 'either or'. *Bless Me, Ultima* features both: Christian and non-Christian religious references. While I agree with Carrasco criticizing Christianity as powerful norm against which other religious notions are measured, my contribution to this field is to even take the denominational heterogeneity of Christian religion into account – without renouncing other religious references. I thus ground my research on Carrasco's important study, but at the same time aim to amplify and surpass it.

[12] Given that the cycles to be analyzed in this study are strongly concerned with the conception of Chicano identity, and due to the ever-present mode of nearly all Chicano concerns to be somewhat in between, which hints at this proposed identity to be a 'trans'-identity, this article is not so much concerned with 'what' this identity looks like, but with 'how' it is told. This way, by deciphering religious and denominational references, a mode of telling and narrating identity will be foregrounded and not so much transborder identity itself (even though naturally the mixture, overlaying and recreation of religious references are part of - and reflect - also the mode of identity and not only the mode of telling this identity). Religion is part of identity. Therefore, when religion is used figuratively it is not always obvious that transborder aspects of identity are told.

research rather than other cultural manifestations of denominations and religion that have been the predominant choice of objects of investigation so far, as the current state of research indicates.

Chicano Literature as Cultural Product of Denominational Borderlands

Literature carries the characteristic of being both mimetic and performative. Therefore it not only mirrors the culture it springs from, but also helps to 'create' it in the first place.[13] Being a border literature, Chicano prose mirrors the border and all issues that come with it, while it takes part in the making, and, in consequence, even in the unmaking – destabilizing, relocating, transcending – of borders.[14] Analyzing literature unfolds transborder processes.

"Borderland literature evokes a new dimension of reality which first involves - and then transcends - the geography and culture of the borderlands. It suggests a point of departure, a new state of mind similar to a crossroads where different paths converge" (Cáliz-Montoro 2000: 10f.). The Anzaldúan metaphor heard in this quote is also concerned with the performative function of literature. Anzaldúa states: "When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart – a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act" (Anzaldúa 2012: 95). In yet another quote, Anzaldúa again picks up the image of carving one's own body, above connected to writing, and links it with the creation of culture and religion:

> So, don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures – white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture – *una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture (Anzaldúa 2012: 44).

The strong feminist discourse that is opened up at this point must be skipped as it is not primarily relevant for my study. However, a programmatic emphasis on the performative quality of writing emerges in this quote, forming body, culture and religion, and creating identity. Delgadillo notes that diverse religious traditions play an outstanding role in this performative act because they are "not merely anthropological markers of Latino/a cultures, but discourses available to Latino/a writers as they work [...] to create contemporary Latino/a identities" (Delgadillo 2013: 246).

[13] This is also valid for all aspects of culture, be it language, identity founding myths, gender concepts, or religion.
[14] Not all Chicano literature must necessarily be border literature, neither is all border literature Chicano literature. For discussion of differentiation, see Tabuenca Córdoba (2013: 454-461). Since my analysis is strongly based on a proposed denominational 'border', I view Chicano literature as border literature.

Religious images thus become a 'language' in Chicano literature that speaks in a way that is very similar to how language in its literal sense functions in Chicano context. Chicano language is neither (Mexican) Spanish nor (American) English, but a mixture of great variety of both. The mixture goes deeper than simply including words from both languages or switching sentence by sentence – no, it forms, to some extent, a new language with modified words and grammar, with new meanings, images, structures, and with a new dimension of rhyme, style and aesthetics. It is a new creation influenced by both (or more) languages and not fully comprehensible for those who know only one. It may be the case that a word of Spanish origin is used in an otherwise English structured sentence to express something that could not be expressed equally in an only Spanish or only English sentence. A 'more' emerges.

Religious references work in a similar way. An author may create a distinct Catholic setting and at the same time underlay it with Protestant themes and structures to tell something completely different and new, like the longing for a spiritual homeland found in Aztec Aztlán, as will be shown in my analysis of Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*.

The multifaceted ways religion circulates in Chicano literature lead to a destabilization of essentialist categories within the field of religion, and concerning the narrower focus on denomination, the multidirectional negotiations transform the denominational border into a transdenominational and therefore transborder space. Religious references as narrative elements define transborder identity; this goes along with the collapse of denomination and border as stable concepts. Transborder identity may thus be understood and appreciated through denominational references in Chicano literature in their multidirectional functions.

My objects of investigation are José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959) and *The Fifth Horseman* (1974), which together form an unfinished tetralogy, and Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy* consisting of *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), *Heart of Aztlán* (1976), and *Tortuga* (1979). While this choice might irritate some readers for the authors might appear "too old", "too male", "too canonized", and the texts "too 1970's", and "too sexist" – a critique is certainly not completely unjustified – this article pleads not to dismiss them too early. These important precursors proved to be seminal for Chicano literature yet to come, with *Pocho* being written, published, and read before the *movimiento*, and the others emerging right at its summit. Concerning the representation of religion, Delgadillo classifies Chicano literature of the 1960s and 1970s as the first of four distinct periods which is "dominated by texts that overtly wrestle with religion ideologically and culturally" (Delgadillo 2013: 241).[15] These early texts establish

[15] In the second period, "religion constitutes an aspect of traditional ethnic and racial identity under contestation" in earlier, newly discovered and republished literature (Delgadillo 2013: 241). The third period in the 1980s and

significant links between the negotiation of religion, the urge for social change, and the development of a distinct identity. Although they have not yet completely arrived there, they clear the way for a transborder identity in their use of religious and denominational references. Contemporary transborder developments could difficultly exist without building on them, and this historic dimension is one of the aspects why they deserve to be studied.

Denominational References in José Antonio Villarreal's Unfinished Tetralogy

Although Villarreal's *Pocho* is very well known, mostly as a forerunner of Chicano literature and especially of the Chicano *Bildungsroman*, most research widely ignores its construction as one sequel in a planned cycle of four novels of which only *Pocho* and *The Fifth Horseman* have been realized.[16] The latter stands as the antecedent of *Pocho* and tells the story of Heraclio Inés who fights at Pancho Villa's side in the Mexican Revolution until he must leave his home country disenchanted. In *Pocho*, "Heraclio Inés becomes Juan Manuel Rubio", father of the protagonist Richard (Jiménez 1976: 67). In both works, references to Catholicism add to an authentic cultural background in which the protagonists are socialized. Protestantism does not exist in the setting of *The Fifth Horseman*; in *Pocho* it is used as a cultural attribute to mark off Anglos from those characters of Mexican origin. Protestant characters are not fashioned as antagonists, on the contrary: the Protestant girls Marla Jamison and Mary Madison become close friends of the protagonist. Nevertheless, the differences in denominations are not discussed within the plotline.[17] When he argues with Mary, Richard starts to reject both denominations: "The Father tells us the Protestants are all going to Hell, and it's wrong for us to even go into a Protestant church, and I bet your preacher tells you we're all wrong. They can't all be right" (Villarreal 1989: 71).

Despite the lack of further negotiations of denomination on the level of plotlines, denominationally distinguished references find their way into the logic of the narrative structures. Concerning the above mentioned female figures, for example, a strong contrast to Catholic females can be noticed. While *Pocho* has often been criticized for presenting a misogynist image of women, this is only true for Catholic women such as Richard's mother

1990s is predominated by literature by women who see the "spiritual form a[s] key part in eliminating gender and sexual inequalities" (Delgadillo 2013: 241). In the fourth period in the new millennium, "new literary explorations of both non-Western worldviews and the historical formation of Western religiosities that often prominently feature female healers" are predominant (Delgadillo 2013: 241).

[16] See Jiménez (1976: 67) and Cantú (1985: 420-431).

[17] One exception is the denominationally based difference in the handling of the Bible that is noticed by Richard on several occasions. He positions himself slightly on the Protestant side when secretly reading the Bible as the Madison Family does on a daily basis although knowing that the Catholic priest will punish him for this. See Villarreal (1989: 74).

Consuelo or his childhood-friend Zelda. Protestant women are as strong characters as the male figures. This can be seen with Marla rightfully taking her place at her father's side in the orchard business,[18] and Mary staying Richard's dear platonic friend while his Catholic female friend Zelda is used only for sexual pleasure.[19] Consuelo, the Catholic wife and mother, tries to emancipate herself throughout the novel but remains in dialectical opposition to Protestant women. She is scorned by Richard and left by her husband for trying to be on par with men. Thus, the novel connects a misogynic image of women with Catholicism while linking emancipation of women with Protestantism. This structure serves as critique of Catholicism and therefore orientates itself slightly towards Protestantism.

This critique can also be seen in the attitude towards the clergy which *Pocho* portrays in an increasingly negative way. One priest "would not believe him [Richard] during confession, and twisted his words around so that in the end he made him admit he had done that which he had not" (Villarreal 1989: 114); the priest goes on gloating over Richard's sin of masturbation.[20] Richard soon thinks of priests as liars[21] and is reassured in this thought when he hears of a priest breaking his seal of the confessional for money[22] and sees another give false affidavits.[23] Not only is the clergy presented as corrupt, but also obstructive in administering religious education. Richard concludes "[o]ne should not, on penalty of going to Hell, discuss religion with the priests" (Villarreal 1989: 85). This extensive critique of Catholic clergy again tends to result in a Protestant orientation of the novel.

Another theme is structurally linked with Protestantism: education.[24] Education, learning, and reading play an important role in *Pocho* as Richard is nearly obsessed with it. This irritates Consuelo; as the Catholic key figure, she inevitably links education with blasphemy.[25] The most obvious split between Catholicism and education is introduced by the novel's attributed genre. It is widely received as *Bildungsroman* for which education (in German 'education' translates to *Bildung*) is a structural principle and crucial for the protagonist's development. After going

[18] See Villarreal (1989: 52f.).
[19] See Villareal (1989: 141f.).
[20] See Villareal (1989: 114).
[21] See Villareal (1989: 69).
[22] See Villareal (1989: 100).
[23] See Villareal (1989: 174).
[24] The emergence of Protestantism and the education of the common people are closely connected. For Protestants, a personal relationship with God is most important and this is dependent on the understanding of the Bible. Protestant reformers thus for example put great effort in the alphabetization of the common people. The sermon as means of education about God gains a more important role in Protestant liturgy. The inner conviction of every individual becomes the most important aspect of belief. See Tietz (2009: 29). Yet another reason for putting much effort in education is the Protestant resignation of clerical hierarchies that results in the need of a higher educated common people. See Lauster (2015: 354f.).
[25] See Villarreal (1989: 64).

through different crises, at the end of a *Bildungsroman* the protagonists typically stand as powerful individual.[26] The novel's strong interest in education and the link to its critique of Catholicism are again signs for a structurally Protestant formation.

The prominent position of the individual supported by the novel's structural composition as *Bildungsroman* has a Protestant implication. According to Wolfgang Steck, individualism is one of three Protestant attributes, the other ones being liberalism and modernity.[27] All three, perfectly fitting *Pocho's* protagonist, present Richard in the realm of Protestantism. On the level of the plotline, the text introduces Richard as Catholic. Although he eventually rejects Catholicism, he never takes on Protestantism as his personal religious identity. Nevertheless, his character fits with the above mentioned Protestant thinking structures.

This general – and very literal – Protestant leaning of Richard also comes to light in his formation as a figure of overcoming. Luedtke and Raab acknowledge this trait of Richard, as does the genre of *Bildungsroman*.[28] Overcoming in terms of religious identity, however, positions Richard close to reformers on the one hand, and close to the most prominent Christian figure of overcoming on the other: Jesus Christ.

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ is "a fictional narrative in which the characters and the action, irrespective of meaning or theme, are prefigured to a noticeable extent by figures and events popularly associated with the life of Jesus as it is known from the Gospels" (Ziolkowski 1972: 6). This is also true for Richard, with parallels occurring even before his birth as his parents are on a journey when he is born. The birth-scene is followed by an epiphany of the father, Juan, which shows a godly connection to the child's birth.[29] Furthermore, Juan's physical paternity is questioned, since Richard is born only two months after Consuelo finds Juan on his migration route. Then, still following the gospel's structure, Richard's early childhood is left out of the story. Paralleling Jesus' first apparition after his birth (Luke 2,41-2,52 where young Jesus discusses scriptures with the scribes), the reader next meets Richard in a preadolescent age, just having been awarded a prize for his outstanding knowledge of religious texts. Also paralleling the gospels, *Pocho* narratively neglects the protagonist's siblings and instead, another figure appears at the side of the protagonist in both the Bible and *Pocho*: Mary. Furthermore, Richard

[26] The genre of the novel has been profoundly influenced and further developed by puritan Calvinists because of its stress on the development of the individual and its inner thoughts. See Lauster (2015: 435-443). The genre of the *Bildungsroman* also carries this Protestant implementation by accentuating precisely this individual development. Furthermore, it derives from the literary tradition of religious biography and is especially connected to humanistic education. See Heinz (2007: 89). Finally, also Protestant pietism influenced the development of the genre *Bildungsroman*. See Michel (2007: 586).
[27] See Steck (1991: 109).
[28] See Luedtke (1986: 75) and Raab (2005: 12).
[29] See Villarreal (1989: 31).

is looked upon as "martyr" (Villarreal 1989: 175) by his peers until he must literally protest: "I'm not Jesus Christ. Let 'my people' take care of themselves" (Villarreal 1989: 162). Paradoxically, this denial of his role functions at the same time as its confirmation, because otherwise it would not be necessary.

Whereas the transfiguration of Jesus Christ clearly shows 'Christian' influence on the text, standing for itself it does not yet imply a denominational direction. This fact changes with the second transfiguration that appears in *Pocho* and, which is further extended in *The Fifth Horseman*: Richard's father can be read as an Old Testament figure. Juan Rubio becomes Moses or Adam, while Heraclio Inés mirrors David or Joseph.[30] Theologically, all four Old Testament figures are read as types, with Jesus being the antitype whom they prophetically prefigure. This typology is very common in biblical exegesis, but in literature it also features a tradition which Ursula Brumm recognizes as distinctly Protestant. Her book, *American Thought and Religious Typology*, clarifies that one traditional use of typology is to relate one's "own destiny typologically to the Old Testament, which was then regarded as concrete, dramatic, universal history of providential significance" (Brumm 1979: 33). Thus, "the emigration to the American wilderness was an exodus of the children of Israel to a 'second Jerusalem'" (Brumm 1979: 33). This legitimizing concept was extensively used by Puritan Calvinists; it is also used by Villarreal to explain and justify the existence of a child of Mexican immigrants in the US. This way, Richard – the 'Pocho', the Chicano – is sanctified perfectly, and instead of being looked upon as in deficit, is advanced to a 'second Adam' that may, can, and even necessarily 'must' come. Here we have a perfect example of the connection between the promotion of Chicano identity and religious references. While *Pocho* is concerned with presenting a way of coping with being 'Pocho' and thus concerned with establishing a new identity, this identity is creatively told with the help of denominational references and evaluated positive by the positive meaning of these references - as well as by the positive traditions the use of these references stand in. At the same time, *Pocho* is not a story of religious conversion. This hints at the overtly *figurative* meaning of religious references in this text, even though religion in *Pocho* can surely also be read literally.

The Fifth Horseman expands the possibility to read *Pocho* typologically by providing

[30] Determining factors for this interpretation are the entitling of the migration as 'exodus', which evokes the biblical exodus from Egypt (Moses) and the search for a fresh start outside the home country (outside paradise; Adam). For indepth interpretation of Juan as Adamaic figure, see Sedore (2000: 246-249). The connection between Heraclio and David and Heraclio and the Old Testament Joseph will be made later on in this article on the basis of text analysis. Neither of the four Old Testament characters are transfigured completely, rather they are loosely hinted at. This way, they are not in conflict with one another (for indeed, Moses, Adam, David, and Joseph are very diverse characters), but merely fulfill their function as different types to the antitype Jesus Christ.

alternative types to the Christ-figure, and also forms a more general panorama of the Old Testament. Several allusions to Old Testament stories transform the setting of the Mexican Revolution into a biblical landscape with the characters reenacting well-known narratives such as the above mentioned stories of Joseph and King David, as well as the Fall of Mankind, and the story of Cain and Abel. The protagonist Heraclio, who is introduced as the prototypical Mexican, always takes part in these stories – and always changes them slightly.[31]

Paralleling Joseph, Heraclio grows up in violent sibling rivalry until his older brothers abandon him far from the hacienda, without a horse, water or weapons (the biblical Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers). Like Joseph, Heraclio survives and fights his way out of his brothers' footsteps, arriving at a higher social position; nevertheless, he refrains from punishing his brothers for what they had done wrong. Unlike Joseph, however, Heraclio does not stay with the established ruler, but always goes against official hierarchies and joins revolutionary troops.

Like young King David, Heraclio starts his career as a shepherd and is slowly promoted to higher positions until he works directly for the hacienda's dynasty and even starts a relationship with the Don's daughter (David marries the King's daughter once he arrives at the royal court). Like David, he is later expelled and joins rebel groups. But unlike David, Heraclio never becomes the ruler himself. In the end of the novel, he leaves his home country rather than perpetuating established political structures.

Evoking the Fall of Mankind, Heraclio wanders through the hacienda's apple orchard, which in the strict sense is forbidden. As he finally picks an apple, he is startled by a boy who sits in the apple tree and threatens him with a knife. Out of this encounter, a close friendship emerges instead of the biblical hostility between Eve and the snake. Finally, mirroring the relationship of Cain and Abel, the relationship between Heraclio and his friend David evolves from brotherly love to rivalry, jealousy and hatred until one eventually kills the other. In Villarreal's version, however, it is never exactly clear who of both friends takes on which role, both are switching constantly, being both Cain as well as Abel.

Constructing *The Fifth Horseman* as the 'Old Testament' and *Pocho* as the 'New Testament' with Richard being the redeeming Christ figure, Villarreal repeats a well-known dynamic: he legitimizes a Chicano following the same pattern by which the Messiah is legitimized in the Bible. The slight modification of the Old Testament allusions serves as prevention of a too negative representation of the Mexican identity. Heraclio never becomes part of the oppressive political system; he is not clearly positioned as Cain – at least not without being Abel as well –,

[31] See Villarreal (1974: n.p.). Also noting the prototypical fashioning of Heraclio, see Dimicelli (1976: 74).

and his 'sin' in the apple orchard does not lead to diremption. In this way, the Mexican can remain a positive source of identity and yet the Chicano can be seen as the necessary fulfillment of a prophetic destiny. This argumentation follows the very structure of typology and by being used to explain one's own existence, it stands as an explicitly protestant tradition. This way, religious references are used to tell an identity construction that has little to nothing to do with the religious content the references provide.

As the title already suggests, yet another biblical allusion is made in *The Fifth Horseman*: "Thoughts of the Apocalypse and the Day of Atonement come immediately to mind" (Cantú 1985: 427). Indeed, Villarreal configures his novel following the Revelation by staging the first part, with Heraclio growing up on the hacienda, as the present world, and the second part, which details the transgressions during the Mexican Revolution, as the End Time. Destruction, famine, pestilence, and death – the apocalyptical scourges of humanity – are all to be found in *The Fifth Horseman*. Instead of opening the end of the novel towards the eschatological New Jerusalem, Heraclio as the 'fifth' horseman of Revelation stays in the world of mortals as "mankind's hope and promise" (Cantú 1985: 428) and rides towards "the City of the Angels all refugees seemed to know" (Villarreal 1974: 398). Thus, Los Angeles – and the US in general – gain an eschatological meaning and the people that enter it – the Chicanos – become the 'chosen people'. This narrative structure is also well known as exceptionalism and it functions in the same way as typology. Exceptionalism as narrative device to legitimize identity has a strong Calvinist and Puritan tradition and therefore can be seen as Protestant structure.[32] But again, this does not mean that a Chicano transborder identity must have a Protestant implementation – it merely is told through Protestant structures, regardless of religious content. The structure simply provides the mode of 'how' it is told, not of 'what' is told.

As shown, Villarreal makes extensive use of Protestant structures, in small, single elements of his novels as well as in the comprehensive whole of their logic as a cycle. These are found beneath an explicitly non-Protestant plotline. Regarding contents, mainly Catholicism is addressed and finally overcome by Richard; yet, Protestantism is not a choice either. This indicates that Protestant structures such as typology and exceptionalism are used to provide the

[32] Exceptionalism as the legitimizing thought to settle on the newly discovered continent traces back to the first Puritan and Calvinist settlers who were convinced of godly providence in their undertaking. See Waechter (1996: 28). In his famous sermon, John Winthrop established the metaphor of 'a city upon a hill' to ground his community on Puritan faith. This sermon follows the structure of typology by connecting the biblical Exodus to the own situation of building a new community and initiates a new narrative genre: the 'jeremiad'. See Bercovitch (1978: 1-8). Exceptionalism as promoted by the first Puritan settlers takes considerably part in nation building and in the self-conception of the US even until today. Here, Protestant exceptional thought over time replaces its religious implementation for a more political one. See Krakau (2009: 50-55) and Junker (2009: 22).

legitimizing background of a pursued – not yet accomplished – transborder identity. The personal 'religious' identity of the protagonists in the end is neither Catholic nor Protestant. This confirms the interreligious position Chicanos find themselves in and verifies the borderlands as a space between denominations. Richard has not found his personal religious identity (yet), but what he does 'not' believe in foreshadows a new transcended religious identity. A transborder religiousness is visible on the horizon.

Religious References in Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*

Anaya's trilogy handles references to denominations in a very similar way as Villarreal. The protagonists of both cycles overcome Catholicism, mother figures are fashioned as Catholic key figures, the main protagonist each has a Protestant friend, and the clergy is criticized. Anaya, though, is also concerned with remnants of indigenous religions and the creation of new and recreation of old myths. He thus expands the spectrum of religious references. As not to repeat results, in this chapter I will leave aside the negotiation of denominations – although they are certainly there – to focus on the interplay of Christianity with other religious concepts instead. In Anaya's trilogy, Christian religion functions as a culturally well-known pattern to transport other spiritual concepts. Christianity itself does not provide a satisfying spiritual concept – neither in its Protestant nor Catholic implementation. It merely provides the means to communicate the Chicano myth of Aztlán to the culturally Christian-coined reader. Successively, in Anaya's trilogy, the Christian religion crosses different levels. It appears as the protagonist's personal religion at the level of the plotline, and is also an instrument for the author to narrate transborder identity.

Research has extensively engaged with *Bless Me, Ultima*, Anaya's most famous novel. As with *Pocho*, it is less often understood in its context of a series. However, only by examining the whole cycle does the development of religious positions become visible. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, the child protagonist Antonio first discovers alternatives to Catholicism but does not stray too far from Christianity.[33] Clemente, father of the Chávez family in *Heart of Aztlán*, goes one step further by adopting the myth of Aztlán for spiritual support where the church fails to provide it. Finally, the teenage protagonist of *Tortuga* is physically and spiritually healed in a children's hospital in the desert, somewhere unmistakably fashioned after the legendary place

[33] Although Antonio is introduced to the Legend of the Golden Carp as an alternative to Christianity, this legend is invented by Anaya and fashioned strikingly parallel to biblical stories. See Hebebrand (2004: 47). The legend says that in primordial times a people was sent to the valley by gods to live there in peace, being forbidden only one thing: to eat fish. Anyway, after a long period of hunger, they violated this law and as punishment were turned into fish themselves by the gods. One of the gods felt sorry for the people and turned himself into a great golden carp to be with them at all times. See Anaya (1994: 79-81).

of Aztec origin, Aztlán. He leaves this place as a new man on the path of the sun. While the development of Chicano religiosity in the *New Mexico Trilogy* clearly leads away from Catholicism, the structures of narrating this development stay profoundly grounded in Christianity. Here it is clearly visible that a distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' of the narration is to be made: 'what' is told is not Christian, but 'how' it is told is even more so. Antonio's mentor Ultima, for example, is really configured as a Christian figure, even though she introduces the boy to *curanderismo*, to the world of spirits and witches, and the holistic concept of pantheism, thus opposing Christianity on the surface. In the plotline, she stands in opposition to the Christian institution represented by the always negatively portrayed clergy, yet in the structural logic of the novel, she remains a part of Christianity. This is accomplished by creating her as part of a trinity with Ultima representing Jesus, her owl being the Holy Ghost and La Virgen de Guadalupe taking the place of God the Father.[34] Along with Ultima as the Christ figure, curing the sick, fighting evil, and being murdered in the end,[35] Antonio becomes her disciple and together they form a deeply kerygmatic constellation that mirrors the emergence of Christianity and thus evokes the genesis of a new religion – which Antonio literally asks for: "can a new religion be made?" (Anaya 1994: 247).

Ultima is not only Christian in structure but also in principle. Her ethics, morals, behavior, and actions are never in conflict with Christianity, rather her "*curanderismo* is a metaphor for something Christianity has lost" (Holton 1995: 26). This makes her a counterpart to Catholic clergy, not to Christianity in general. Her moving toward a more primordial religiousness, and Antonio's turning 'back' to her as the oldest spiritual agent available, parallel the Protestant paradigm *ad fontes* – back to the beginning. Catholicism is overcome following the pattern the Protestant Reformation provides, but not for the benefit of Protestantism as personal religiousness. The novel's direction of impact clearly is reformatory, but the goal of reformation remains ambiguous. Looking at Ultima as spiritual role model for Antonio, Anzaldúa's 'tolerance for contradiction'[36] becomes visible concerning different religious concepts that are united in the person of the old *curandera*. This way, she can be read as a 'trans'-figure, being transdenominational, transspiritual, and therefore representing a transborder identity. As shown, this transborder identity is narrated with the help of religious and denominational references, making it easier for the Christian-coined reader to understand the renewing and reformatory aspect of transborder identity by drawing on pictures of 'religious' renewal and reformation.

[34] See Cantú (1990: 28).
[35] These and more hints of Ultima as a Christ figure are noted in Cantú (1990: 28f.).
[36] See Anzaldúa (2012: 101).

Heart of Aztlán, as the title already suggests, is concerned with the central Chicano myth that has been conceptualized as spiritual homeland during the *movimiento*. The legendary Aztlán is a self-created myth. It does have indigenous roots, but it was almost forgotten and did not contribute to any specific identity construction until it was literarily and politically recovered and functionalized for the founding of a Chicano group identity. It "emerged to provide Chicanos with an *authoritative* sacred narrative of ancestry, delineating a map for ritual and world production that could *ground* a claim to authenticity" (León 2004: 54). It resembles Old Testament stories that stabilize Jewish identity and provide a legitimizing origin to a homeless, wandering people in exile. Unlike the biblical stories, which are deeply rooted in the cultural memory of Christian populations, Aztlán – even though it is an ancient Aztec myth – needs to be actively created and reframed. Anaya conveys it in *Heart of Aztlán*, and to some extent also in *Tortuga*, interestingly narrating the renewed myth by following well-known biblical narrative structures.

Like the Legend of the Golden Carp in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the myth of Aztlán, told by the wise old man Crispín, shows striking parallels to biblical stories. The fictitious Golden Carp could thus be revealed as a 'test case' for Aztlán. Anaya himself notes the resemblance of Crispín's myth with the Expulsion from the Paradise [37] and the Exodus from Egypt. [38] Furthermore, the Flood is alluded to, and in the feathered god (Quetzalcoatl), a charismatic leader like Moses or Jesus is evoked, one who even promises to return, which mirrors the Christian hope for Parousia. In this way, a Christian perspective contributes to understand the ancient pre-Columbian concept of Aztlán in its contemporary reconfigurations from a different angle.

In addition to fashioning the content of this myth according to the Bible, Anaya uses another biblical structure to *tell* the myth: the protagonist Clemente and the wise old man Crispín fulfill the constellation of prophet and messiah. Crispín resembles John the Baptist, thus functioning as precursor to Clemente who is even called 'messiah' by his people.[39] Like John the Baptist, Crispín comes from the desert. Both figures are the first ones to recognize the new leader, they baptize him, and make their followers turn over to the new messiah once he is established.[40] Meanwhile, Clemente resembles Jesus by becoming a leader, initiating a scene of The Last Supper where he passes a bottle of wine not "to get drunk, but to share in the communal spirit"

[37] See Anaya (1993: 241).
[38] See Anaya (1993: 235).
[39] See Anaya (1988: 52).
[40] In *Heart of Aztlán*, the connection to baptism is made by Crispín himself when he rescues Clemente from a dangerous storm. See Anaya (1988: 123).

(Anaya 1988: 147). Furthermore, he creates a uniting bond that "is the holy sacrament of the new movement" and is denounced by his own people (Anaya 1988: 147). In the end he leads a peaceful revolution.

As shown, the lost and newly created meaning of Aztlán as the positive foundation of a community is told through doubly Christian structures. First, Aztlán as told by Crispín resembles Christian myths of community foundation, and second, Aztlán is conveyed by a constellation of figures that resembles the one of prophet and messiah. However, as similar as biblical stories and the myth of Aztlán may seem, Anaya does 'not' ground the hope of his people on Christianity.

> [I]t is also clear that a spiritual vacuum has to be filled by something other than the traditional Catholic faith which promises the Kingdom of Heaven for the poor and the meek. Aztlán is the myth, the force, the psychic construct that can and, at least in the novel, indeed, fill [sic] the spiritual (i.e., psychological) void experienced by Clemente, his family, and the striking workers. This myth offers some relief on earth and it calls for social and political struggle as opposed to calling for penance, patience and blind faith for a better world in the afterlife (Alurista 1993: 223f.).

As can be seen in this quote, it is Aztlán that fulfills the spiritual need of the people and not Christianity. The compatibility of Aztlán with biblical structures, however, shows the logic in thought and narration that still derives from Christianity. In the narrations of Aztlán, Christianity is thus revealed as cultural element rather than occupying religious meaning. In this way, religion crosses borders, and Anaya functionalizes it as narrative device to create a new – or rather renewed – spiritual concept.

Tortuga is yet another attempt to reframe Aztlán and due to the continuous movement of the trilogy away from Christianity, it comes closest to Native American spirituality – measured by the somewhat Christianized version in *Heart of Aztlán* and the completely fictitious legend of the Golden Carp in *Bless Me, Ultima*. In *Tortuga*, the setting is not explicitly called "Aztlán", but the description of the primordial desert with the prominent mountain and its seven healing caves makes Aztlán recognizable once more. The young paralyzed protagonist Tortuga is brought to a children's hospital on this sacred site. He recovers throughout the novel and is able to leave the hospital in the end, at which point he receives Crispín's blue guitar that signals him as the new leader of his people. Through this, Anaya re-writes the indigenous myth of Aztlán in the experiences of the protagonist, and connects it to the well-being of the Chicano community.

When compared to the protagonists of the other two novels, Tortuga is the most disconnected character from the Christian religion. The novel starts with Tortuga's loss in faith. Later the boy

claims: "I knew I had to find something to hold on to, we all did, but I wasn't quite sure what it was" (Anaya 2004: 107). This spiritual journey away from Christianity towards a new, personal religiosity is once more told with the help of biblical narrative structures.

As Bruce-Novoa notes, the plot of *Tortuga* shows close parallels to the New Testament narrative of Christ in the desert.[41] This very general story line calls for "the retreat of a chosen one into a secluded place […] where, through penance, mortification, meditation, and perhaps dialogues with peers and masters, or an apprenticeship to learn a specific skill, the person is transformed into a new, enlightened man" (Bruce-Novoa 1990: 184). This structure effectively helps to illuminate the symbolic meaning of Tortuga, a Chicano teenager who lives through perils and suffering and who leaves the "secluded place" only when he is physically and spiritually healed and ready to become a leader of his community.

Not only can Christ in the desert be read in *Tortuga*, one also finds the closely-related motif of 'Descensus Christi', the Harrowing of Hell. With striking frequency, a connection between the children's hospital and hell is made in the novel.[42] This turns Tortuga into Jesus Christ, descending to the dead after crucifixion, and rising again, leaving hell – leaving the hospital, leaving Aztlán – to "sing about it" (Anaya 2004: 134). Despite the Christian pattern he follows, Tortuga does not 'sing' about Christian religiosity. Instead he rises from hell on the "path of the sun" (Anaya 2004: 160), which is a distinct allusion to indigenous spirituality.

Tortuga is a crosser of borders. From city to desert, from paralyzed to moving, from victim to leader, from boy to man, from Catholic to the path of the sun, he overcomes and transcends dividing lines. His configuration as Christ additionally alludes to an abstract kind of border crossing: from the desert of temptation to unconditional devotion and from earth to hell to heaven. Thus, the motif of crossing borders is enhanced by Christian allusions, and religious references are used to narrate transborder phenomena.

Conclusion: Religion and Border – Transcended by Literary Means

"There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (Anzaldúa 2012: 80). One may add there is no one Chicano religion and no one Chicano way of dealing with religion, either. "Indeed, the defining characteristic of spirituality in the borderlands is its flexibility" (Martín 2014: 3). While Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy carefully foreshadows the specific Chicano identity and spirituality that is yet to come, Anaya's trilogy is already ripe with a wide variety of religious concepts – and much more stable in its promoted idea of identity.

[41] See Bruce-Novoa (1990: 184).
[42] See Anaya (2004: 28, 89, 118, 119, 134).

With Tortuga, it finally presents a protagonist sure of himself, his spirituality, and his place in his community, whereas Richard, Villarreal's protagonist, only expresses a need for change by fleeing to the army. In both cases, the negotiations of identity start in a crucial in-between-state and are closely linked to notions of religion, literally as well as figuratively. Biblical narrative structures help both authors to deepen the symbolic meaning of their texts.

In almost all examined texts, the US-Mexican border is negotiated only in its metaphoric sense, with other essentialist categories (like 'race', language, food and other cultural customs, and in *Bless Me, Ultima* even male/female or allegorical categories like moon/sea) taking the place of nation states.[43] As my investigation has shown, the substitutional negotiations of 'border' take also place within the field of religion, so that even when the border is not discussed literally, transborder processes can be traced on a metaphorical level. Denominations, standing literally as well as figuratively for nation states, are carefully used by both authors to be transcended into a new 'third'. The texts themselves show an admirable tolerance for contradiction concerning religious notions. They include all kinds of different references, such as Catholic setting, Protestant structures, indigenous remnants, and newly fashioned myths, which exist next to each other, overlap one another and add different levels of understanding to the texts. Thus, the border is relocated to the realms of religious negotiations.

The references to different denominations and religious notions in Chicano literature are like an ointment in the dangerous zone of the border which they cross, provoking a healing and the emergence of something new. Just like other concepts, Aztlán serves also a religious function. It is told in Chicano literature through structures of, and references to, both Christian denominations that originate from south and north of the border. In a spatial sense, Aztlán transforms a line (border) into a space (borderlands); and in an ideological sense, a new space of (religious and cultural) understanding is created by referring to different religious and denominational structures and contents.

Literatures of the 1970s are crucial for appreciating today's transborder trends; expanding transdenominational research to contemporary Chicano literature by following the above practiced pattern promises to be extremely worthwhile. "Latino/a literature's engagement with spirituality has [...] always mirrored the uniquely transnational characteristics of this population, and this is even more true in the recent prose and poetry of new generations of Latino/a writers" (Delgadillo 2013: 250). Deciphering the ways religious references function in Chicano

[43] The one exception is *The Fifth Horseman*, where the literal border is crossed in the end. But even this literal crossing is explained, foreshadowed and legitimized through biblical narrative structures and thus narrated religiously.

literature may illustrate the cultural identities emerging from transborder spaces. The results could easily be transferred to any other element affected by borders. The unique interplay of religion, border, culture, and literature, cannot be underestimated and gives invaluable insights into transborder dynamics.

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