

Neither Here nor There: Ruiz de Burton's Genres of Resistance

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On 14 August 1895, the *New York Times* announced the death of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton in Chicago, Illinois. “Senora María de Burton, claimant to an immense estate in Mexico, which had been granted to her grandfather by the King of Spain for valiant services, died yesterday,” the obituary begins. “For nearly a year she had lived in Chicago, carrying on negotiations for the sale of her heritage, which she valued at \$5,000,000” (*New York Times* 604). A late-nineteenth-century reader of the *New York Times* would come to find from this obituary that, in addition to her involvement in a legal battle over a Mexican estate, Ruiz de Burton is also the heroine of her very own romantic plot. “General Henry S. Burton,” the obituary continues:

during the Mexican war in Lower California, captured Tedos [*sic*] Santos, the town in which she was living, fell in love with the heiress, and carried her away with the regiment. Six months later they were married. She was a beautiful Spanish girl, and had little knowledge of the English language, but entered a convent and gained a complete education. For twelve years after she had completed her education, General and Mrs. Burton lived happily in New York City (604-5).

This obituary presents two conflicting images of Ruiz de Burton. She is on the one hand a fierce defender of her legal right to inherit and own property and, on the other, a vulnerable, Mexican beauty needing her valiant American general husband to “carry her away” to the civilized American

East Coast. Though it is her obituary, Ruiz de Burton is not the active subject here, her husband is. Her husband “fell in love with” her and “carried her away,” placing Ruiz de Burton in the background of her own life’s narrative. Here we not only see the complexities that make up Ruiz de Burton, complexities which have polarized scholars seeking to understand her role in late-nineteenth-century U.S. politics, but also the ways popular nineteenth-century representations of the American West further complicate a figure like Ruiz de Burton as both a nineteenth-century Mexican-American woman and a nineteenth-century literary contributor.

Because her own nineteenth-century society was ambivalent toward her, contemporary scholars also struggle with how to place Ruiz de Burton and her writings. Originally from Baja California, Ruiz de Burton was one of the Baja Californians who took advantage of the U.S. government’s offer to relocate them to the U.S. when it was determined Baja California would remain part of Mexico. It was shortly after this relocation to Monterey, California that Ruiz de Burton married Henry S. Burton, the military general who led the invasion of her Mexican village. The marriage proved scandalous and controversial. More offensive to her fellow Californios than her marriage to a U.S. military leader was her marriage to a Protestant. After the invasion of California by the U.S., an agreement was reached between the vicar general of the Californias and the U.S. military governor forbidding the marriage between Catholics and Protestants. This agreement, as Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita point out, “was broken on July 9, 1849, when the Catholic María Amparo Maytorena Ruiz married the Protestant Captain Henry S. Burton [...] before a Protestant minister, Samuel H. Willey, shocking both the church establishment and *Californios*, especially the women” (Sánchez & Pita, *Conflicts* 10). The marriage was considered “heretical” by many, and Ruiz de Burton was “banished” from Catholic society (11). In this bit of biography we glimpse a Ruiz de Burton who is quick to adapt to new situations and to grasp at new opportunities for power and influence. The couple then moved East while Burton served in the Civil War, giving Ruiz de Burton the opportunity to enmesh herself with prominent politicians and leaders of both the Union and the Confederacy,

including President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis. After the death of her husband in 1869, Ruiz de Burton returned to San Diego, California where she wrote her novels and began litigation over her estates, a project that would remain unfinished at the time of her death. Ultimately, Ruiz de Burton is a woman with little regard for borders—national, regional, or cultural—and recognizing this is important to the way we read and study Ruiz de Burton's literary works.

Since her rediscovery in the 1990's, Ruiz de Burton, author of *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), has occupied a difficult position for literary scholars. Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, the scholars responsible for the recovery of Ruiz de Burton's works, consider her a subaltern figure, fighting against American imperialism, capitalism, and racism. José Aranda and others have recently argued that Sánchez and Pita oversimplify Ruiz de Burton and her work in an attempt to make sense of her many complexities. As Aranda puts it, "to accept Ruiz de Burton as a subaltern, it will have to be conceded that she is so sophisticated a one as to require a major redefinition of subaltern status" (Aranda 563). When scholars engage in discussions of Ruiz de Burton's subalternity they are negotiating what seem to be conflicting aspects of her character. As a member of the Californio élite, a social class that establishes its superiority through claims to Spanish heritage and land ownership, Ruiz de Burton represents both the colonized and the colonizer. Though dispossessed by American Manifest Destiny, she is also problematically racist toward indigenous and mestizo populations and uses those populations to reassert her own social and racial élitism. Additionally, scholars are divided on how to understand her relationship to American capitalism. While some, such as José Aranda, argue that Ruiz de Burton supports "a political future where the civic ethos of an evolving, educated Californio citizenry takes as its founding mythos a nostalgic embrace of Californio ranch culture" (Aranda 15), and that she "is defending an economic order that originated among nineteenth-century Californios of Spanish/Mexican descent [...] that required little or no change to the social and gender hierarchy of pre-1848 Alta California" (22), others have rejected

this claim. Rather than critiquing capitalism in favor of traditional Californio feudalism, Pablo Ramirez reads Ruiz de Burton as relating the dispossession of Californios to the “rebarbarization” and corruption of an otherwise productive American economic order (Ramirez 430). That is, Ramirez uses the “lens of contract and consent” in order to argue that Ruiz de Burton “tries to awaken the public’s sympathy for the plight of the dispossessed *Californios* by demonstrating how the politics of conquest have undermined nineteenth-century Americans’ cherished ideals of individualism and contract in the West” (430). Ramirez situates Ruiz de Burton as a kind of American patriot fighting for the founding principles and ideals of a nation that has become complacent with corrupt politics and business practices as a consequence of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion. Again, we see scholars debating whether or not Ruiz de Burton is a figure of resistance, compelled to fight against dominant American institutions, or if she is an assimilationist figure who advocates for her own indoctrination into those national institutions. Either way, these arguments reduce Ruiz de Burton to a caricature in much the same way we saw with her *New York Times* obituary.

These points of contention in Ruiz de Burton scholarship can, I argue, be reconciled when we take into consideration her non-literary texts. This essay turns to Ruiz de Burton’s personal correspondences, her Southern California newspaper articles, and a few other, non-literary publications written by or about her in order to evaluate the ways Ruiz de Burton’s own society viewed and understood her role in the late-nineteenth-century United States. While much scholarship has been written on the ways Ruiz de Burton’s biography informs the plots of her two novels, the scholarship has not considered in much depth the ways her non-literary writings—her personal correspondences, newspaper articles, business proposals, etc.—draw our attention to the materiality of her novels as they circulated in a nineteenth-century literary marketplace. By returning to these archival texts we pivot our attention to the dialogic nature of Ruiz de Burton’s writing—to how she was communicating and speaking back to her Anglo-American countrymen and dominant United States institutions, not just resisting them. Rather than see her as a subaltern, if we return to her non-literary texts along

with her two novels, we can see that Ruiz de Burton is a woman adept at carving out agency for herself in a society that wants to caricature and flatten her into a one-dimensional romantic character of American Manifest Destiny.

Sánchez and Pita have argued that Ruiz de Burton's "mixture of disgust, resentment, and ambivalence towards both what she saw in this country and what she knew in her own [...] provided [her] the outsider-insider perspective" (Sánchez & Pita, *Conflicts* 59). But rather than thinking about Ruiz de Burton's "insider-outsider perspective" as her "negative identification" with the United States, it is helpful to understand her in terms of Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness." Anzaldúa defines the *mestiza* consciousness as a "plural personality" that "learns to juggle cultures," and by this Anzaldúa suggests that "the future will belong to the *mestiza*. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures," and this straddling is not necessarily "negative," as Sánchez and Pita suggest, but empowering, while it also avoids defining Ruiz de Burton against the impervious borders her work seeks to dismantle (Anzaldúa 101-2).

Although Anzaldúa's *mestiza* embraces the indigenous parts of herself, something Ruiz de Burton would never do because of her racism toward indigenous and mestizo populations, Ruiz de Burton's resistance can still be defined by this "juggle" of cultures, and reading her thus helps us to avoid nationalizing her works. The "juggle" that is Ruiz de Burton's resistance is between her native Californio identity and her newly acquired American identity. In addition, it is a 'juggle' between her role as woman and mother in a nationalist society, and her affinity for those masculine realms of politics and economics. Because we as literary scholars are so circumscribed within and directed by the organization of literatures into national or cultural canons, we find Ruiz de Burton to be contradictory. Her "straddling" cultures, nationalities, and identities may be confusing when one engages in close readings of her novels and other writings, but it is necessary to understand that Ruiz de Burton's resistance to her Anglo-American society is not a traditional resistance defined by a rejection of the dominant culture,

but a more strategic participation and appropriation of the dominant culture. In other words, Ruiz de Burton's resistance emerges out of what Anzaldúa terms the "pluralistic mode" (Anzaldúa 101). Anzaldúa defines the "pluralistic mode" as a "tolerance for contradictions" where "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (101). Rather, it is where "the possibility for uniting all that is separate occurs," but it is not, Anzaldúa explains, "where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers" (101). Instead, it is a mode of resistance that gives birth to a "third element," the "*mestiza* consciousness," which is an identity neither here nor there, but occupying a new space all together (102). Ruiz de Burton's non-literary texts reveal her "*mestiza* consciousness" and helps us to identify the pluralistic mode of resistance her novels engage in as they confront multiple oppositions across multiple cultural, ethnic, and gendered borderlines with the aim of hybridizing identity rather than nationalizing it.

The purpose of the rest of this essay is to jointly read Ruiz de Burton's first novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and a few selections from her archive. This undertaking not only makes evident Ruiz de Burton's own *mestiza* consciousness and the plural positionality that defines her resistance, but also considers how her novels, like her correspondence and other writings, are primarily concerned with her socio-political and socio-economic standings in her society, not her national identity. Ruiz de Burton's first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?* is an East Coast domestic novel set to the backdrop of the impending Civil War. The novel begins with Dr. Norval, a Yankee doctor, returning to his New England home after many years exploring and collecting rocks, plants, and other curiosities from the American West. With him he brings the dark-skinned Lola, a Mexican child whom he helped rescue from the Native American tribe that captured her and her mother during a raid on their Mexican village. Norval's family, rather ironically for a Protestant, abolitionist family, meets the young Lola with racist disgust and refer to her as another of the Dr.'s "specimen[s]" (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 8). However, when Mrs. Norval discovers that her husband is also the guardian to Lola's large fortune, her

attitude toward the girl changes. Soon after his return, Dr. Norval exiles himself to Africa because his criticism of the United States fighting against itself in a civil war is considered traitorous to the Union. After his long absence it is suspected that he has died on his journey and the rest of the novel traces Mrs. Norval's schemes to take hold of Lola's wealth, interfere in the romantic relationship forming between Lola and her son, Julian, and gain the romantic affections of her partner-in-crime, the Reverend Hackwell. Meanwhile, Lola's skin begins to lighten, revealing her beauty as the reader learns that her dark skin is the result of a dye, which the Native American Indian chief uses to distract Anglo-settlers from noticing and rescuing her and her mother. Reading this novel in tandem with her non-literary texts gives us an opportunity to read Ruiz de Burton's resistance in a more nuanced way. Rather than concluding that this is a novel that exclusively satirizes and critiques Puritan society, her letters, articles, and other archival materials ask us to think about the different positions Ruiz de Burton takes in the novel through her characters and her choice of genre. The sentimental romance and the sentimental heroine, Lola, parody the limitations of both genre and national borders, and how her society's adherence to strict boundaries and divisions (whether geographical or literary) interfere with more authentic ways of understanding and identifying individuals and cultures.

Ruiz de Burton's *Mestiza* Consciousness and Dialogic Identity

Ruiz de Burton's experience with authorship and publication in the U.S. is a complicated one. Despite having published two novels and a play in her lifetime, Ruiz de Burton as author is completely overlooked in the *New York Times* obituary that began this essay. Indeed, in a number of obituaries printed in California newspapers, where her novels were better received, Ruiz de Burton's authorship is referenced off-handedly in a way to suggest that, though she is a "brilliant writer," "her name became prominent some years ago in the famous suit against the International Company of Mexico for possession of the Ensenada land grant" (*San Francisco Call* 606). She is remembered by her late-nineteenth-century

society as a complication of the Mexican-American War, not a contributor to the national literary canon. Even after her death these obituaries serve to construct a character out of Ruiz de Burton that largely plays upon gendered and ethnic stereotypes by painting her as a “beautiful Spanish girl” with “little knowledge of English” who was swept up in a romantic love affair with a prominent Anglo-American general, while also situating Ruiz de Burton in opposition to the nation by emphasizing her resistance against national policies of westward expansion (*New York Times* 604). These descriptions ignore the tenacity and literary prowess Ruiz de Burton exhibits not just through her novels but also through her correspondence with male lawyers and financial advisors who sought to take advantage of her or who simply ignored her. By either downplaying or ignoring her authorship completely, these newspapers, ambivalent about how to understand her, reduce Ruiz de Burton to a romantic caricature or a threat to U.S. expansion.

Ruiz de Burton’s choice to publish much of her work anonymously or under pseudonyms is, I argue, her response to this caricature of her identity. As we see in an early review of her first novel, publishing the book anonymously created interest and mystery around the novel. In an article titled “A Native, Californian, Authoress,—A Literary Incognito Lost in an Interview—A new Sensation for the Public,” a reviewer from the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* writes of meeting Ruiz de Burton upon the steamer *California* while in the company of the Texas Pacific Railway party. The correspondent discusses with Ruiz de Burton the mysterious authorship of the novel, which Ruiz de Burton is represented as coyly trying to dismiss. However, the reviewer seems to trap her into outing herself as the author. When asked if she has read the book she responds:

“‘Read It?’ No! Yes! Why, of course I have!”

The manner of the answer and a little attendant embarrassment caused the bachelor to look at the charming widow with some surprise and awakened a feeling of curiosity. “Excuse me for repeating your words, Mrs. Burton;” he cautiously ventured to remark; “‘but of course I have’ seems to imply that you have some particular

interest in the work." He was rather rude in his scrutinizing way of looking and speaking. The ruse, however, succeeded. "Why! That's my book! No! Well, there, now, I didn't mean to tell you; but you know it now. (*Daily Alta California* 570)

This scene plays out like a scene from a sentimental novel in which the heroine is seduced into confessing her love for the novel's hero. But instead of confessing her love, Ruiz de Burton is confessing her authorship. The fact that the correspondent is now referred to as "the bachelor" who gives "the charming widow" Ruiz de Burton a "rather rude" and "scrutinizing" look, emphasizes the gendered roles that, undeniably, Ruiz de Burton manipulates in order to create curiosity around a book she had a difficult time getting reviewed in East Coast newspapers. What's more, Ruiz de Burton appropriates the stereotypes about women and Mexican-Americans in this scene to reveal herself to be the complete opposite, an intelligent literary contributor. She feigns a feminine embarrassment and confusion at being asked if she has read the novel. She stumbles over, "'No! Yes!, Why, of course I have,'" and, "'Why! That's my book! No! Well, there, now, I didn't mean to tell you.'" Ruiz de Burton is a calculating individual who has proven her prowess at negotiating with men in powerful positions, such as her lawyers and President Lincoln. It is not likely that she would be intimidated by a San Francisco book reviewer. Rather, this encounter is one arena in which we see her perform a *mestiza* consciousness. Anzaldúa explains that the *mestiza* "learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture," and "to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view" (Anzaldúa 101). In this scene Ruiz de Burton performs for her Anglo audience in order to sell her book: she represents herself as the "beautiful Spanish girl" that her *New York Times* obituary makes her out to be, but only in order to foster public curiosity for her novel.

In fact, Ruiz de Burton expressed a trend of "juggling" dominant stereotypes to achieve her ends. Sánchez and Pita also recognize that Ruiz de Burton "knew that womanly wiles were strategies that she could manipulate, and so she did" (Sánchez & Pita, *Squatter*, Introduction xii). We

see this again in a letter she sent to her lawyer and prominent San Diego businessman, Ephraim W. Morse, in August 1869, just after the death of her husband while she was still living on the East Coast. After sending Morse multiple letters about her Jamul rancho in California but receiving no replies, Ruiz de Burton writes again, urging him to “Tell me too please how much I must pay in advanced [sic], you say, and what the costs of the court, etc. Explain it all well to me, remember that women can’t vote yet and we are very ignorant individuals” (Ruiz de Burton, “MARB to Morse” 296). As with the conversation with “the bachelor,” Ruiz de Burton takes on the role of the “ignorant” woman in order to entice her advisor to reply to her. But she performs this role caricature as a means of dismantling the stereotype by pointing to its source. She ironically reminds Morse that women don’t have the vote because men like him (it is insinuated) find women to be “very ignorant individuals.” Interestingly, Morse is also a frequent correspondent of Helen Hunt Jackson and helped her in her crusade for the Mission Indians in Southern California. Jackson’s interactions with Morse were far less contentious, suggesting Ruiz de Burton’s ethnicity, not just her gender, was also a factor in his treatment of her.

But even her ethnicity and the stereotypes associated with it seem to be an arena Ruiz de Burton exploited to garner attention and transmit her novels to a wider, Anglo-American audience. To start their introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?*, Sánchez and Pita begin with a look into this very same review of Ruiz de Burton’s first novel. They read the review as another example of Ruiz de Burton’s subaltern status rather than as a moment of her resistance. They focus on the part of the review which, after she is discovered as the author, cites Ruiz de Burton pleading with the correspondent to protect her secrecy as she is concerned “[the public] know that English is not my native language, [...] and they would say that my expressions partake of the Spanish idiom and that my English is not good [...]. I only wrote this to see how I saw it in print” (*Daily Alta California* 572). For Sánchez and Pita, this dialogue reveals a violence done to Ruiz de Burton by the correspondent who, they argue, “did not accede to her request and in fact published a review of her novel given the author’s name and

speaks of the 'descriptive and narrative power' of the work as well as of the author's 'critical though perhaps too cynical habit of observation'" (Sánchez & Pita, *Who Would Have* Introduction vii). And indeed, the reviewer does publish this. But to think of Ruiz de Burton as having no agency in this moment is to do the novel's political work a disservice.

We can surmise from reading Ruiz de Burton's letters that she had few problems writing in fluent English. Not to mention she was representing herself in court and writing up her own legal documents because of her inability to secure her lawyer's attention. This is not a woman insecure about her ability to write in English. Rather than requiring protection from xenophobia, it is clear here that Ruiz de Burton is relying on U.S. xenophobia, racism, and sexism to elevate her own literary standing in the United States. Ruiz de Burton plays into the stereotypes Anglo-Americans have of Californio women and, most explicitly in the above quote, she questions the dominant society's renderings of such stereotypes. She uses specific rhetoric such as, they "would think" they see errors in her English because that is what they expect, "which otherwise they would not notice," in order to reveal the dialogic relationship between her society's representations of her and her authorship. It is clear that Ruiz de Burton is conscious of her society's expectation that, as a Californio woman, she is to be the exploited subject, not the author, of these novels. It is the very reason her obituaries represent her as a romantic but agentless character. But as this review of her first novel suggests, Ruiz de Burton uses these expectations and the dominant culture's consumption of popular literary forms in order to translate them back to these audiences in new terms and from new perspectives to point out the false logic that props up such stereotypes and representations of her. In other words, the anonymity she published under was not anonymous at all, but a means through which she could become "plural," addressing multiple audiences—Anglo-Americans and Californios—and surpassing multiple obstacles—her gender and her ethnicity—at once.

Understanding Ruiz de Burton's anonymity as a critique of the ways her American society consumed dominant representations of Western-American women helps us to reevaluate the heroine in her first novel, *Who*

Would Have Thought It? Lola, the novel's protagonist, becomes a metacommentary on the popular sentimental heroine trope Ruiz de Burton's society was consuming in much the same way they were consuming caricatured renderings of the American West and its populations. For example, the novel begins with Dr. Norval bringing Lola home to meet the women of his family. As a means of introducing his wife and daughters to the young Mexican girl he has brought home from his travels West, Dr. Norval promises that Lola "is only ten years old; but her history is already more romantic than that of half of the heroines of your trashy novels" (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 9). *Who Would Have Thought It?*, while taking the form of the popular sentimental domestic novel in order to appeal to a large American audience, is also using this platform to reorient the genre to new perspectives. Not only does Ruiz de Burton critique the sentimental romance genre's representation of "romantic" heroines, but she is also reasserting what is "romantic" about Lola, a figure representing the American West. She is romantic not because she stands as something to be taken advantage of or because she is evidence of an uncivilized region, but because despite her time spent in Indian captivity, she is the *most* refined character and the truly pure and deserving heroine of the novel. Ruiz de Burton translates the typical sentimental heroine archetype from a new perspective in order to dialogically question discourses of Manifest Destiny and what they say about Californio women.

Scholars have been quick to identify Lola as *the* sentimental heroine of the novel, but this overlooks the fact that she is not necessarily central to the novel's plot. As Dr. Norval's early statement suggests, Lola may be "more romantic than that of half of the heroines of your trashy novels," but she is not the only heroine to be considered (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 9). And this is important to note because Lola's encounters with the novel's more conventional heroines is where Ruiz de Burton most acutely challenges dominant representations of the West and its populations. Scholars who center on Lola miss that she is relatively absent or silent for most of the novel. Lola is removed to a convent early on, leaving the narrative to shift between a series of "trashy" heroines and leaving its truly "romantic"

one in the background. Lola's silence and removal from the focus of the narrative, though it has been interpreted as Ruiz de Burton's "biting critique on the containment and silencing of Mexican American women" (Lowrance 393), can be better understood when we consider the book review and the way Ruiz de Burton situates her own authorship of the novel.

Ruiz de Burton's anonymous authorship or absence from the text proves to be a political choice that reflects back to her Anglo-American society their own inaccurate and ridiculous stereotypes and expectations of her. Ruiz de Burton's absence as author is reflected by Lola's absence throughout much of the novel. In the first few pages of the novel, Ruiz de Burton deploys her characters and settings in order to encourage the reader to read dialogically rather than from a rooted ideological position. The reader's first glimpse of the Norval family is from outside and through the window of their modest New England home. From the perspective of a nosy neighbor, we spot the two Norval daughters, Mattie and Ruth, waiting at the window for their father's arrival after four years of traveling in the western territories. Mattie, the youngest and less refined of the two, has her face "flattened against the window-pane so that it had lost all human shape," while the socialite Ruth is "rocking herself in a chair, reading a fashion magazine" in a most disinterested way (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 5). In a stylistic move that reverses the focus of the scene, Ruiz de Burton then ushers the reader into the house where we listen to the two girls poke fun at the nosy neighbor with their spinster aunt, Lavinia. As Mattie and Ruth trade puns on the neighbor's unfortunate name, Mrs. Cackle, we are introduced to Lola. Again, we first glimpse Lola through a window, but this time it is we, the reader, who are on the inside and Lola who is on the outside of the Norval house. Alongside Mrs. Norval and her daughters, we watch Dr. Norval and a "mysterious figure in the bright-red shawl" descend from a wagon and "proceed towards the gate, the doctor again tenderly throwing his arm around the female in the shawl—for it was a female: this fact Mrs. Norval had discovered plainly enough" (7).

This scene is at once an appropriation of a common trope in sentimental domestic novels and a translation of it. As Amy Kaplan

explains in “Manifest Domesticity,” “Many domestic novels open at physical thresholds—such as windows or doorways—to problematize the relation between interiors and exteriors” (Kaplan 43). Kaplan goes on to argue that these thresholds are important to the plots of sentimental domestic novels as they “are propelled in part by the effort to reconstitute the domestic sphere, both by enlarging its domain beyond the narrow definition of familial bloodlines and by purging it of the foreign bodies this expansion incorporates” (44). Through these permeable door and window spaces the outside and the inside meet. The typical sentimental novel, through the “private sphere of female subjectivity,” reasserts “narratives of nation and empire” and places the Anglo-American heroine in a position of power over the “foreign” other (Kaplan 44). Ruiz de Burton on the other hand, though she does recognize this threshold as an initial site of struggle, confuses “narratives of nation” and thereby, leaves the reader unsure of who holds more power over whom. There is, to put it simply, no closure in this scene, and power relations are left undefined as they never would be in the more typical sentimental domestic novels circulating in the literary market. Ruiz de Burton deploys the threshold trope in a way that forces us to ask exactly who is “domestic,” or “inside,” and who is “foreign,” or “outside.” She first places the reader on the outside, viewing the “insiders” critically for their unladylike behavior and their superficial obsession with fashion magazines; but then she complicates the meaning by having us view Lola from the perspective of the superficial “insiders.” Moreover, Lola now stands in the “outsider” space that the reader previously occupied. We are unsure who needs to be “purged” from this domestic expansion and who such an expansion benefits, or who we are supposed to align and sympathize with: is it the misbehaved Norval daughters, or is it the dark and “mysterious figure in the bright red shawl”? Ruiz de Burton begins the novel at the window “threshold” to destabilize what the reader knows about dominant literary tropes and genres from the very first pages of the novel. By placing the reader at once on the “inside” and the “outside,” she complicates what we think about identity during a time of imperial expansion.

Once Lola crosses the threshold and enters the Norval house, the Norval women engage in the pseudoscientific rhetoric of their day to determine if Lola is African, Native American, or a combination of the two. During the Norval women's examination, Lola notably "did not answer: she only turned her lustrous eyes on" them, letting them come to their own, inaccurate conclusions about her parentage (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 8-9). The interrogation of Lola's race continues at the supper table where Ruth asks Lola's name but again, Lola "looked at her, then at the doctor and went on eating her supper silently" (12). Discerning this must mean "'She doesn't understand,'" Ruth and the other Norval women assume a place of power over Lola and her representation. But Ruth is scolded by her father, who speaks for Lola at this moment. "'Yes, she does,'" Dr. Norval responds, "'but, not liking your manner, she disdains to answer your question'" (12). Lola's silence is not representative of her lack of power, her deferrals to men, or even her containment. Rather Ruiz de Burton writes Lola's silence as a sign of her superiority to and relative control over women who speak too much in the novel. The Norval women mistakenly assume Lola does not speak English and that their offensive discussion of her physical features is missed by her. But Lola *chooses* to be silent here, communicating with commanding looks to Dr. Norval who speaks for her, but only to indicate Lola's refusal to engage or make contact with the Norval women. We might compare the Norval women to the reading public who allow their assumptions about the American West and its populations to misguide their interpretations of the text. Lola's silence in the novel, like Ruiz de Burton's anonymous authorship, serves to challenge dominant representations and stereotypes by placing conventional sentimental heroines in conversation with unexpected ones.

The Pluralistic Mode: Ruiz de Burton's Resistance

Ruiz de Burton is a complex woman who engaged in many different projects. Aside from author, she is also entrepreneur, businesswoman, and amateur historian, and it is beneficial to see how these various identities inform and push against one another. All of Ruiz de Burton's writings,

including her literary works, are produced first and foremost with the intention of creating political influence. According to Sánchez and Pita, Ruiz de Burton's personal correspondences "are primarily political, in a broad sense, for they not only deal with concrete historical events but with the trials and tribulations of accessing power in a variety of spheres, signally from a position of relative disadvantage" (Sánchez & Pita, *Conflicts* 59). But where many scholars such as Anne Goldman have identified this political work as "indict[ing] American nationalism" and "celebrat[ing] Mexican patriotism" (Goldman 74), I see Ruiz de Burton's political work as more complex, flexing between multiple perspectives and identities as well as combatting her society's representations and the gendered and racist stereotypes of her. Ruiz de Burton's politics are interested in disrupting United States nationalist histories and agendas, but this work also takes on a problematic project of situating herself within these very same systems. This suggests to me that rather than choosing sides, Ruiz de Burton was more interested in the fluidity and mobility of borders and identities. At times, we see her appropriating dominant ideologies in order to resist others, and we see her manipulating her dual situation as Californio and American, as woman and arbiter of her own estate (a rather rare occurrence for women of the era) in order to gain access to certain opportunities.

The political divisiveness of the Civil War setting in *Who Would Have Thought It?* provides Ruiz de Burton the opportunity to subvert these enforced borders and reject strict national or even regional allegiances. Although he is never mentioned by name, President Abraham Lincoln can be identified in the novel through the "characteristic stories" he tells and iconic descriptions such as, "His leg hung over the arm of his chair and dangled regularly, like a ballistic pendulum," which was an historically recorded trait of the Civil War President (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 214). However, the President Ruiz de Burton writes into her novel is far from the one recorded in prominent national histories. Rather, she challenges the "Honest Abe" moniker with portrayals of a more ignorant Abe, unaware of the goings on of his cabinet, the military he commands, and how "his people" suffer (213). For example, after being wounded three times, Julian Norval, the romantic hero of the

novel, is confused with his exiled father and is therefore dismissed from the military for traitorous behavior. As a result, Julian confronts President Lincoln and asks to be allowed to resign rather than be ruinously dismissed. But the President does not recall dismissing him: "I haven't dismissed you; or at least, I don't remember. What is your name?" (215). As Julian explains, President Lincoln is described as "looking towards the *high officials*, as if anxious to ascertain their opinion" (241). This is not a President in control of "his people" or his country. His cabinet or his "*high officials*" are making decisions without the President's consent or acknowledgment. The one decision the President does make positions him as an appeaser who is afraid of confrontation. Once it is cleared up that Julian Norval is not his father, the President issues Julian a promotion: "It is a darned sight more agreeable to give commissions than dismissals' [...] 'I can tell you what, colonel, you have made me feel very bad with your pale face and those mournful big eyes. I reckon you are very successful with the ladies, ain't you?'" (247). President Lincoln is depicted here as a push-over, and a man who responds to appearances rather than character.

Such a passage reflects Ruiz de Burton's own negotiations for her husband's promotion with President Lincoln who, in a letter to the Secretary of War writes, "Mrs. Capt. Burton is very desirous that her husband may be made a Colonel. I do not know him personally; but if it can be done without injustice to other officers of the Regular Army, I would like for her to be obliged" (Sánchez & Pita, *Conflicts* 189). This admission that President Lincoln has never met Burton, but is doing Ruiz de Burton a favor shows the extent to which Ruiz de Burton, even more so than her Anglo-American husband, has enmeshed herself within the dominant power structures of U.S. politics. And yet, her novel clearly satirizes this kind of presidential behavior. Though we may never know for sure what the meetings between Ruiz de Burton and President Lincoln were like, we can at least assume that she was dissatisfied with the way his Presidency and character were immortalized in history, despite her own benefit from it. Suffice it to say, Ruiz de Burton's political discontent is not enough to dissuade her from taking advantage of and participating in the systems of power she disagrees with.

But this kind of critique is not reserved for the U.S. alone. Most important for the purposes of my argument is that we recognize that Ruiz de Burton's biography reveals her to be an opportunist willing to sacrifice national and cultural allegiances for power and influence, as we saw with her marriage to General Henry S. Burton. Sánchez and Pita make the claim that native Californios' regional allegiance was stronger than their national allegiance to Mexico, that "*el país*" is California, not Mexico (126). I agree and extend such an argument to recognize that, more than a regional allegiance, the Californios harbored a cultural allegiance to landed aristocracy and Spanish superiority over the *mestizo* and indigenous populations of Mexico and California, as evidenced by Ruiz de Burton's own well-documented élitism. Even considering her cultural allegiances, we find Ruiz de Burton expresses dissatisfaction with her *paisanos*, her Californio countrymen. One of her most frequent correspondents, the wealthy, influential Californio, Don Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, was "disliked by some native Californians, as much for his apparent pro-Yankee sympathies as for his arrogant demeanor and his prosperity" (71). In letters exchanged between the two, Ruiz de Burton laments what she considers to be the lazy, complacent demeanor of her fellow Californios.

Furthermore, in a letter she sent to Vallejo's son Platón in April 1859, Ruiz de Burton cautions him against becoming complacent, and she urges him to question the true meaning of patriotism. She rebukes "our paisanos" who approach inclusion in the United States with "surliness, bitter and repelling," which, she says, has forced Californios "to beg for what we had a right to demand" (Ruiz de Burton, "MARB to Platón" 157). In this complaint against her own countrymen, Ruiz de Burton criticizes a resistance of "repelling" because it does nothing more than further isolate Californios from the benefits of U.S. citizenship, "what we had a right to demand" per the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Rather, she instructs Platón in her own vision for a "pluralistic mode" of resistance. She tells him to move past "the narrowness of view which will not see virtues in others or faults in ourselves; but with that judicious liberality, true magnanimity

which will grant their due to others fully and willingly we can keep sacred that holy feeling; the love of our own race" (157). Coded in this language that may at first appear assimilationist is Ruiz de Burton's strategy for a "pluralistic mode" of resistance and the hybridizing of identity. She tells this member of the next generation of Californios that the key to keeping "that holy feeling; the love of our own race" is in the race's ability to adapt to their new political and cultural situations. She encourages throwing off "faults in ourselves" and trading them in for the "virtues in others" as a means of showing cultural pride. We can read this letter as Ruiz de Burton's resistance to stagnation in Californio society, rather than a resistance to Anglo-American domination in California as scholars typically want to read her.

Where Sánchez and Pita would say this letter exemplifies Ruiz de Burton's "outsider-insider perspective," Gloria Anzaldúa helps us to identify the resistance captured in this letter less in terms of her sense of not belonging, and more in terms of her *dual* belonging. Anzaldúa tells us, "she [the *mestiza*] turns the ambivalence into something else [...] a *mestiza* consciousness—and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (101-2). The "pluralistic mode" from which Ruiz de Burton's resistance arises, as Anzaldúa tells us, is necessarily messy and even, at times, ugly. Ruiz de Burton does not stay within clear, identifiable borders but is constantly crossing over them and playing her multiple identities against one another. It is this messy ugliness which has led scholars to overlook Ruiz de Burton's own involvement in oppressive systems because her participation doesn't mesh with arguments that want to see her as a subaltern. However, within this messiness and ugliness we find Ruiz de Burton's "tolerance for contradictions" and "ambiguity," and her resistance can then be evaluated as rejecting oversimplistic conceptions of identity, whether they be nationalist, ethnic, or gendered. Her letter to Vallejo's son is evidence of Ruiz de Burton's *mestiza* consciousness and pluralistic resistance at work. She expresses the "intense pain" and frustration in the "impotent discontent" expressed by her fellow Californios

(Ruiz de Burton, "MARB to Platón" 157), but it is this which also refuses the "unitary aspects" of the nationalist identity (Anzaldúa 101). Her frustration with the "patriotism" expressed by both her Californio and American societies is founded in the tension between her own "plural personality" and the Californios and Anglo-American societies' tendency to conflate cultural identities with national ones. Her resistance then is expressed through a drive "to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (Anzaldúa 102). We see her move between her identities: at times she seizes opportunities and at other times she rejects the idea that an individual can and must be only one thing or the other.

At the local level, Ruiz de Burton is known to have published articles in San Diego newspapers concerning herself and her business and political ventures. In these articles, also published anonymously, she maintained a third-person perspective of herself. "Last Spring", she writes in an 1874 article titled "Cultivation of Castor Beans," "Mrs. M.A. Burton, who is a woman of rare energy and business capacity, decided to put in cultivation about one hundred acres of land on the Jamul Ranch" (Ruiz de Burton, "Cultivation" 573). In a small community like San Diego at this time, it would not be difficult to identify that Ruiz de Burton authored this article. As Sánchez and Pita tell us, San Diego knew well enough Ruiz de Burton's voice as she "undoubtedly [...] joined or even organized the incensed reaction" against racist articles published in San Diego newspapers (Sánchez & Pita, *Conflicts* 94-95). Is Ruiz de Burton being satirical here in referring to herself in the third-person and publishing anonymously? If so, she is certainly using the public newspaper platform to politicize her role in San Diego and the importance of her ownership of the Jamul Ranch to the larger community. The article associates this Mexican rancho and its Mexican-American, female owner with American capitalism. The article commends Ruiz de Burton, despite her gender, as a better capitalist than most of the Anglo-American settlers to the region. Continuing in the third person, she writes: "If more of our farmers had the courage and energy possessed by this lady we should make a still better showing in our exports"

(Ruiz de Burton, "Cultivation" 574). The third person allows Ruiz de Burton to at once critique the failure of Anglo-American settlement in the region, while she also situates herself, and by proxy Californio society as a whole, as necessary to the success of the region for the United States' initiation into global capitalism. She plays with the splitting of her identity in this article, separating her authorial self from her ethnic and gendered self to suggest that, when it comes to the economic success of the United States and the smooth incorporation of the newly acquired Western region into the nation, she is indispensable.

Likewise, in an article on the California missions attributed to her, Ruiz de Burton plays with, or in true *mestiza* consciousness fashion, "juggles" national identifications: "No, the Americans of California give no thanks; no, not even a thought, to the self-denying Spaniards who came here to show us that this magnificent land, a fine harbor, and heavenly climate were here" (Ruiz de Burton, "Bygone" 579). Here Ruiz de Burton, as narrator, separates herself from "the Americans of California" when she is criticizing them, but includes herself in "to show us" when she wants to lay claim and belonging in "this magnificent land." It must also be addressed that she is calling out the "Americans of *California*," indicating that she shifts her identity depending on where she is in the country. In California, she is a native, a Californio. In the East, she is American or sometimes, Mexican-American. She is juggling her identities, picking and choosing how to identify based on the circumstances of the moment, and the fact that most readers probably knew she was the author, suggests that her choice to feign anonymity is political and opportunistic, not a protective measure.

Given this, we must rethink the too-common argument that marriage in Ruiz de Burton's two novels signifies an attempt at national unification. In both novels a Californio woman marries an Anglo-American man, and it has been generally settled amongst her critics that this is the vision Ruiz de Burton has for defining "a universalized category of the 'American'" (McCullough 169). Kate McCullough sees Ruiz de Burton's "historical romances as employing the figure of woman and her naturalized domestic sphere to suture seemingly irreparable national, regional, ethnic and even

religious divides in order to posit an American future that includes the Californios" (133). Though I agree with McCullough's argument that Ruiz de Burton imagines women as sources of power, it is important that we also recognize our own shortcomings as literary scholars circumscribed in nationalist and cultural organizations of literary canons. It is not, I argue, that Ruiz de Burton is envisioning or expanding what it means to be "American," it is not that she wants to "posit an American future that includes Californios." Considering that Ruiz de Burton married an American military general (to her Californio society's dismay) and still fluctuated between identifying as Mexican and American, we can definitively say that she had little interest in restricting herself to any singular national identity, whether it was an inclusive one or not. Instead, Ruiz de Burton wants to challenge the existence of "American" and "Mexican" identities altogether. The institution of marriage in each of her novels does function as a site for this kind of critique, but it does so by illuminating the absurdity in using geographic borders to assign identity, not by calling for unification across them.

The institution of marriage in the novel renders nationalism and national borders traumatic and divisive, rather than being "sutured" by it. At the end of the novel, when Julian has successfully rescued Lola from Reverend Hackwell's evil plot to kidnap her, Lola reunites with her father, who then takes her back to Mexico. Julian, promising to return for Lola, must first finish out his national duties in the Civil War. Ruiz de Burton describes this separation through a nationalist anxiety. She writes, "Lola sobbed and moaned all night. Her sad father sat by her and tried to soothe her, whilst he thought how much he would have loved to have found his child before she had so entirely given her heart away! 'She can't love me much now [...]. No child ever loves the parent after *such love* has entered the heart'" (Ruiz de Burton, *Who Would Have* 290-91). Lola is no longer representative of a Mexican nationalism. She will never love "the parent after *such love* has entered her heart," meaning Lola cannot return to the parent country after she has grown to love what the United States has to offer her. The marriage between Julian and Lola does not then represent a

metaphorical union between Mexican and Anglo-American élites, as others have argued. The marriage serves the novel by emphasizing the displacement and violent consequence of such strict national identifications. Born into Native American captivity just after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Lola is, by the very circumstances of her birth, a displaced figure, and her identity, based on geographical borders, is indeterminate. Given the nineteenth century's turn toward nationalism, the true violence done to Lola is not her mother's kidnapping and her subsequent birth into captivity, but the limbo she finds herself in between Julian and her father, between the U.S. and Mexico. Therefore, Lola is representative of a truly hybrid national self. To say that her marriage to Julian represents a "suturing" of Mexican and American national identities then, is to ignore that Lola's national identity is fundamentally indeterminate from the start.

It is the trend in Ruiz de Burton scholarship to preface any literary analysis of her novels with a biographical sketch of the author. Typically, this feeds nicely into making autobiographical connections to the literary works themselves. However, I am trying to reevaluate Ruiz de Burton from the perspective of her non-literary works to suggest not how Ruiz de Burton is retelling her lived struggles through her literary texts, but how these literary texts participate in the very systems of oppression that Ruiz de Burton struggles against. As noted, it is common for scholarship to quickly jump to the conclusion that Ruiz de Burton's novels resist American imperialism and capitalism. But, as I have shown in the analysis of her correspondences and newspaper articles, Ruiz de Burton herself attempted to participate in capitalist ventures and took advantage of the capitalist system. It is important then that we see Ruiz de Burton's novels as material, not just literary, objects, as well as textual objects fundamentally involved in business ventures and political entanglements. In an 1872 letter sent to her lawyer Mr. Barlow in New York, Ruiz de Burton urges him to use his connections to get a review of her first novel, *Who Would Have Thought It?*, into the major New York newspapers. She encourages him to "give me all the benefit of your influence with the New York Press, for I would like to make the venture a little bit profitable. I did not write for glory" (Ruiz de Burton, "MARB to Barlow" 438). Taking into

consideration that throughout her life Ruiz de Burton is in perpetual debt, statements such as the above indicate that her authorship is primarily a capitalist venture. She is, as she says, more interested in making a profit than she is in the legacy she will achieve, or the literary “glory” she will be afforded by writing her novels. Unlike some of her literary contemporaries, she is not interested in making a name for herself with the growing United States literary establishment. Her novels simply serve as income to fuel her ongoing battles to secure ownership over her land, making her literary endeavors the products of her labor and investments in her business ventures. Though she does critique the American capitalist system in addition to many other American systems in her literary works, Ruiz de Burton intentionally participates in those very same systems and, as when we saw her advise Platón Vallejo, suggests that these are “virtues” compared to the “faults” of Californio feudalism (Ruiz de Burton, “MARB to Platón” 157). Ironic and unsettling though this may at first appear, we must recognize that Ruiz de Burton’s manipulation of her identities is her opportunistic move to secure herself financially and socially, and analysis of her novels is simply incomplete without understanding their materiality in addition to their literary merits.

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