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Boffone, Trevor and Cristina Herrea, eds. *Nerds, Goths, Geeks and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicanx and Latinx Young Adult Literature*. University Press of Mississippi, 2020. 214 pages. ISBN: 9781496827463.

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In his 2014 article “Working with What We’ve Got,” Phillip Serrato made note that scholarship on Latinx children’s literature displayed “a tendency toward matters of immigration and immigrant experiences in this literature” (6). In other words, study of Latinx children’s literature centers on the tenets of Latinidad recognizable to the hegemony. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to say study *centered* on these themes. With the publication of edited collections like *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks: Outsiders in Chicana and Latinx Young Adult Literature* (2020), scholarship blooms. The collection, edited by Trevor Boffone and Cristina Herrera, “addresses themes of outsiders in Chicana/Latinx children’s and young adult literature” (5). In doing so, this volume doesn’t just shed light on the margins of the marginalized, but it redresses problematic patterns in scholarship.

As Boffone and Herrera point out, the focus of this volume is “a topic that has not been explored in edited volumes thus far” (Boffone and Herrera “Introduction” 5). In their introduction, Boffone and Herrera carve out space for this research by noting the publication of other innovative, recent volumes on Latinx youth literature, but explain “these texts do not consider themes that we explore in our collection” (6). Boffone and Herrera explain that both youth literature scholarship and Latinx literature scholarship, at large, neglect Latinx children’s and young adult books, an observation that aligns with Marilisa Jiménez García’s findings in “Side-by-Side: At the Intersections of Latinx Studies and ChYALit” (115). Thus, in keeping with Herrera’s already-established framework on nerdiness in her article “Soy Brown y Nerdy: The ChicaNerd in Chicana Young Adult (YA) Literature,” published in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, as well as Gloria Anzaldúa and José Esteban Muñoz’s theories on outsiders and disidentification, this volume explores those considered the misfits of the Latinx community.

Boffone and Herrera's introduction is an excellent contribution to children's literary theory. In discussing the outsiders' framework employed throughout the volume, Boffone and Herrera provide a series of important questions such as, "What does it mean to be an outsider within an already marginalized community?" and "How does Chicanx/Latinx children's and YA literature represent, challenge, question, or expand discussions surrounding identities that have been deemed outsiders or outliers?" (8). What's more, the introduction dovetails nicely with the foreword, written by verse novelist Guadalupe García McCall. In this foreword, McCall reflects on her own place within the academy and what it's like to be a Latina who enjoys reading and writing. She urges "nerdy kids today" to not "let the mal aire of our current climate poison your thoughts. Dream! Soar! Let the world hear you roar!" (xi). This urging travels through to the scholars published in this collection, who defy the normative expectations from hegemonic scholarship for analyses of Latinx youth literature to fit a particular mold.

Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks is divided into four sections, each focalizing on a specific type of outsider. Interestingly, none of the sections are specifically themed after the title. While nerds, goths, geeks, and freaks permeate the volume, they are not explicitly invoked in any of the sections. Rather, the first section is "Artists and Punks." In this section, scholars Amanda Ellis, Lettycia Terrones, and Adriana M. Santos explore young Latinas using art to make meaning or assert themselves. There is also a common theme among texts discussed, with two of the three chapters exploring Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*. Connections can easily be drawn between these chapters beyond their shared primary text. For example, in "Chicana Teens, Zines, and Poetry Scenes: *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero," Amanda Ellis argues, "[t]he novel affirms that creative personal writing proves crucial to *Gabi*" (15), while Adriana M. Santos further concludes in "Broken Open: Writing, Healing, and Affirmation

in Isabel Quintero's *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* and Erika L. Sanchez's *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*," "[w]riting is a source of identity formation and is healing for both" protagonists (55). This notion is corroborated by Lettycia Terrones, though she is writing about a different novel, which demonstrates the universality of the assertion that creating art is "a strategy for interrogating and self-fashioning... identity" (32). Holding art as healing and transformative likewise speaks to research outside of this volume, such as Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez's "Conocimiento Narratives: Creative Acts and Healing in Latinx Children's and Young Adult Literature," published in a recent issue on Latinx children's and YA literature in *Children's Literature*. These connections affirm that *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks* signals shifts in our conversations about Latinx youth literature.

Section two is "Superheroes and Other Worldly Beings." I was surprised to see this section included in a volume that I thought would be grounded in realist fiction. To promote such scholarly focus draws attention to the notion that "fantasy is outside of the purview of non-white writers" (77). This is corroborated by Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*, in which Thomas explains that fantasy is often out of reach for people of color who are "barred," to borrow Thomas' term, from these magical realms (2). Yet, the authors and the texts they analyze demonstrate that Latinxs, even if they are on the margins, can break through those barred doors. But, as Christi Cook in "Bite Me: The Allure of Vampires and Dark Magic in Chicana Young Adult Literature" notes, this often renders those in the borderlands, in some kind of mestizaje or liminal experience (Boffone and Herrera 63). Beyond these theorizations of bordered identity, the authors in these chapters also make larger connections across the volume. For example, Ella Diaz mentions, in "The Art of Afro-Latina Consciousness-Raising in *Shadowshaper*," "art [is] a form of resistance" (98).

Incidentally, an important side note to make about this volume is its attention to Afro Latinx identities and its wide scope in addressing questions about race, ethnicity, and identity within its framework of outsiders.

The third section “LatiNerds and Bookworms” most closely connects to Herrera’s previous work on the ChicaNerd. In her previous article, Herrera explains, “Whereas popular culture and mainstream media have shaped the well-known figure of the nerd as synonymous with White maleness, Chicana YA literature subverts the nerd stereotype through its negation of this identity as always White and male” (307). Herrera expands her own research in her chapter “‘These Latin Girls Mean Business’: Expanding the Boundaries of Latina Youth Identity in Meg Medina’s YA Novel *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*.” Others in the section likewise recognize that “Latinx youth’s cultural knowledge and language are often viewed as deficiencies rather than additions to their intellectual capacities” (Boffone and Herrera 109). What’s more, like Tim Wadham’s exploration of “Tomás Rivera: The Original Latinx Outsider,” scholars in this section spotlight real and imagined Latinx youth who leverage their smarts as a means of self empowerment.

The fourth and final section of this book explores “Non-Cholos in the Hood.” Trevor Boffone’s chapter in this section, “Young, Gay, and Latino: ‘Feeling Brown’ in Emilio Rodriguez’s *Swimming While Drowning*” extends conversations about plays and other stage productions begun by Schroeder-Arce in the previous section. In this chapter, Boffone establishes “a new identity marker within Latinx cultural production: the homeless queer Latino teen” (146). Carolina Alonso also explores queer identity in her chapter “The Coming-of-Age Experience in Chicanx Queer Novels *What Night Brings* and *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.” Alonso interestingly proposes, “the protagonists” in these novels,

“cannot come of age until they have come out” (185). This assertion is a significant and succinct analysis of queer YA literature. In addition to addressing sexuality, this section also explores gender. For example, Elena Avilés analyzes Gary Soto’s *Chato* series, asserting that “Chato, a cool cat, engages with public notions of male-of-color identity by altering the pressures to ascribe to constructions of hypermasculinity such as being violent, hard, insensitive, and domineering” (160). Closing the volume with this section holds space for further discussions on queerness, gender, culture, and belonging. Correspondingly, Angel Daniel Matos and Jon Michael Wargo explain in their introduction to the special issue on queer futurity in this journal, “[w]e cannot wait to see the meanings that will be circulated in queer youth literature, media, culture, scholarship, and criticism in a place and time far beyond the here and now” (14). This edited collection in conversation with *RDYL* and other recent scholarship pursues a new kind of scholarship that has exciting horizons.

As a scholar who has also explored what it means to be an outsider, neither on the inside nor the outside of one’s cultures, particularly Latinx cultures, I found this volume to be especially impressive. The tone of all of the chapters is conversational and accessible, while maintaining the kind of scholarly rigor one would expect from an academic volume. Boffone and Herrera have landed on a particular balance of opening a new door in scholarship without having pretentiousness about their work. As one of the few edited collections on Latinx youth literature currently in publication, *Nerds, Goths, Geeks, and Freaks* will be the metric by which we measure all forthcoming works.

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