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Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors"

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Macarena García-González's recent *Origin Narratives: The Stories we Tell Children about Immigration and Transnational Adoption* is a concise, but astoundingly poignant illustration of how Cultural Studies and literary analysis can be complements and, in that relationship, bring to light the ways that ideology and discourse are maintained. In seven succinct chapters, García-González charts a number of meaningful observations about how children's literature is a tool for perpetuating power structures, reifying the positions and perspectives of those most empowered in a given society. And while this work focuses specifically on literatures produced (or translated) for audiences in Spain—and even more precisely, works governed by a prestigious literary institution in that nation—it would be misguided to not see the very widespread implications and applications of this book. And yet, one of the most compelling moments in the text happens when the author explains the exceptionalism of Spanish international adoption and immigration, particularly in contrast to other European nations but also settler colonial adoptive and multicultural lands. García-González explains that, for a number of sociological reasons (including but not limited to the legalization of contraception following the end of dictatorship in Spain in 1975), and “[d]espite its delayed start, Spain was the European country where international adoption had its most spectacular growth in the boom period that ran from 1995 to 2005” (p. 39). In another key moment about the uniqueness of international adoption and immigration in Spain, García-González outlines how it is “often remarked how multiculturalism has been so differently constructed in the settler countries and in Europe...if only because in the United States, Canada, and Australia it forms part of a national project whereas in Europe it is connected to emigration” (p. 20). Moments like these are core reminders that international adoption is not impacted solely by the countries of origin from which young people arrive, but also by the countries and cultures in which they are raised and live.

Firmly located in the field of Children's literary studies, narrative studies, and with a Cultural Studies ethos, *Origin Narratives* ponders the ways origin and belonging, particularly as they are linked to representations of race, are similar and different in children's books purportedly aimed at international adoptees and immigrant young people. Given the ways that kinship, desire, and national belonging are experienced differently by young people in circumstances of international adoption as opposed to other child migrants, this framework is poignant. García-González argues:

The comparison of immigration and adoption narratives in children's books reveals how certain ideologies regarding 'race,' ethnicity, and national belonging are reproduced and resisted. Adoptees and children from migrant backgrounds face similar—yet also often antagonistic—processes of racialization in a society that still self-represents as homogenous and 'White.' (p. 5)

And various genres of children's literature as deliberate focus for García-González's study is not accidental. The author rightly acknowledges that these works are produced with pedagogical goals; they are "a niche of books that aims to assist in the socializing of this new form of family reproduction" (p. 4), and they argue the significance of studying children's literature within Cultural studies, since "[c]hildren's literature and media appear to be privileged sites for...the analysis of discursive constructions, since these are highly monitored fields informed by consensus in a society" (p. 26). In order to accomplish what appears at first to be a massive study, García-González relies on noted scholars from children's literary Studies, Postcolonial and critical race studies, critical adoption studies, narratology, and intersectional feminist approaches. There are also echoes of trauma scholarship that appear throughout.

García-González's voice as scholar is woven throughout the work as the author outlines their methodology (interviews with reviewers and other employees at the headquarters for the Fundación Germán Sánchez Ruipérez who mediate how and what is read in Spain as official literary recommenders; as well as close readings of various children's books promoted by that institution), the process of searching for, and later interacting with texts related to the project, navigating euphemistic and whitewashing language, and their own positionality as an "ethnically-marked researcher" of Chilean origin. García-González also explains their connection to other scholars of children's literature; the exceptionalism of their perspective but also the conversations they've shared with many notable academics in the field. These moments are far from intrusive, as sometimes they are in other works. In fact, these autocritical and meta-scholarly insertions contextualize the breadth of the work that García-González undertakes with seeming ease.

Early on, García-González identifies, from within her sample, several conventions contributing to the making of an international adoption 'master plot.' They begin with the unflinching point that "these stories, rather than targeting children, cater to a need of their adoptive parents to turn those into one of kin" (p. 35). Here, García-González gestures to Signe

Howell's foundational work on the 'kinning of foreigners' (qtd. in García-González, p. 35), and observes that the vast majority of these children's books are authored by adoptive parents themselves or people who seem to centre adoptive parents' struggles and perspective, which results in many of them "hav[ing] clear testimonial inspiration" (p. 40). García-González summarizes what they identify as the master plot: a heterosexual couple that faces a "difficult process" in becoming parents, travel to a foreign country to pick up 'their' child p. (p. 40); cultural differences provide narrative obstacles and opportunities for characterization; the meeting of adoptive parents and child seem to rectify any cultural conflict; together, the family returns to the adoptive land to live happily ever after.

Two things stand out in García-González's analysis here. First, the author articulates "love" as the "driving force behind the master plot"; love stands as an explanation not just for why the adoptive parents have elected to raise children in this form, but also, more troublingly García-González speculates, "perhaps implicitly [sets up adoptive love] in opposition to the relinquishing progenitors" with the "adoptive parents ... presented as loving the child unconditionally" (p. 45). Not only does this suspicion imply that these works subtly erase first families (and especially first mothers), but it suggests a deeper layer of villainization within the text and cultural narrative. The second standout from García-González's summary of the master plot is the author's reflection on *how* countries and cultures of origin are represented in these children's stories. Both in literary and visual representations (as García-González also analyzes picture books):

The country of origin is often presented as an exotic land, especially in the visual depictions. Each of the books of La Galera collection, for instance, includes a double spread with data on the country of origin and also a short dictionary of words and phrases that speaks that desire of the adoptive parents to get through in the country of the child while resembling a list of ready-made sentences for adventurous tourists who believe they give them real access to a foreign culture. (p. 43)

These representations edge up to ethnographic anthropology, again with adoptive parents' perspectives centred. García-González expands: "These illustrations construct the origin as a place from where the adoptee can convey a story of proud differentiation. Poverty and abandonment are overwritten with exoticism. In other words, the countries of origin in these works offer any adoptee readers a profound paradoxical dilemma; the birth nation is at once a

site of adventure and exploration, Otherness from which they have been removed and even saved. This coincides with García-González's point that, while different narrative devices (like narrators using a second person address to an imagined adopted child who has supposedly requested the telling of their adoption story) indicate a child adoptee as the implied reader, much of these works are at the service of adoptive parents, their feelings and experiences.

In an early section on immigration stories, García-González notes a striking distinction from international adoption books: the implied reader is *learning* about other people's experiences, not, supposedly, their own. García-González argues, "These books...seemingly give us access to immigration, a reality that would be unknown to the group of us readers. In these phrasings, the idea put forward is that this alien point of view will enrich the worldview of the local child with new perspectives" (p. 66). This manner of building ethnic empathy through literature is not unique, but the point García-González is making is that again these works are produced in parallel to colonial frameworks, as they centre white experience, with other people of colour props for white awareness, discovery, and pleasure. The author notes that many of these works focus on assimilation (what García-González identifies as the interculturalist ideal in many European nations) while others offer a "so-called foreign perspective" and present to readers young people's experiences in other countries and cultures (p. 67). The core master plot in these works, García-González outlines, is "migrant children's journeys into Otherness" (p. 69)—particularly in relation to language integration—as characters all of the sudden are faced with being part of a marginalized community at odds with the mainstream race. One can imagine that this structure interpolates in a certain way white child readers who might be positioned to think, for the first time, how they themselves might feel if their race and culture all of the sudden became so tellingly visible. In each of these early sections, on international adoption and immigration, García-González analyzes several children's books, offering examples of works that reiterate the identified conventions, but also those that are exceptions to the norm.

Another part of García-González's book explores the scholar's frustration with how race and ethnicity are represented (or not) in children's books in Spain. They note early on that books tagged with the themes of race relations and, more specifically, racism, are typically those set in the United States or elsewhere abroad, and in works that are set in Spain, literary institutions were "reluctant to tag the books featuring discrimination against foreigners as being about racism" (p. 96). They argue that books are carefully curated to avoid accusations of racism, but

cautions that “[s]idelining the racism in these plots may end up justifying it even if the aim of the book is precisely to the contrary” (p. 97). In other words, by refusing to name race and racism outright as the motivators and cause for oppression and violence, these works are uncritical and normalize these behaviours as exceptions to an otherwise sanctuary state. Again, the argument that these kinds of narrative whitewashings ignore systemic and institutionalized racism are not new, yet García-González’s contribution is in exposing the ways these ideologies socialize young people and construct cultural narratives early in children’s lives. Diversity in these works predictably is celebrated in reductive and tokenistic ways (p. 100).

In the final chapter of *Origin Narratives*, García-González brings together the concepts with which they’ve been working throughout and analyzes the ways children’s literature reiterate the framing of nation-as-family. García-González astutely notes that “migrant” and “local” parents are divided in these works, and that characterization in these families is symbolic and meaningful. One example noted is that there is an “assumption that immigrant mothers bear more children” (p. 142), whereas “local children who are either the narrators or focalizers of the stories are single children” (p. 140). The implications here are unsubtle and fuel xenophobic anxieties about immigrant takeover. And of course, as García-González rightly points out, international adoptees offer a markedly unique expression of how nationality, race, and kinship come together in so-called ideal ways, when controlled and when white agency is at the core.

Although it is quite compact, García-González’s book offers a wide breadth of information and draws on extensive source material. There are moments when it is hard to determine to whom this book is directed. Lengthy summarizing of the history of scientific racism as it moved toward cultural racism leads me to believe that this book is imagined an introduction for many readers into thinking about these concepts for the first time, just as sections outlining narrative perspectives and focalization indicates to what degree the imagined audience understands literary theory. But I hasten to add that it is in this field and discipline that my own work exist, and therefore sections of what might possibly be general introductions to the field of children’s literature were instructive and helpful. In all, the examples that García-González offers convincingly support the many claims they make throughout the book, and offer an important and insightful way for thinking about how race is represented in children’s literature particularly in relation to two unique experiences.