# *MANUEL MUÑOZ'S EXPERIMENTAL NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN "EVERYTHING THE WHITE BOY TOLD YOU"*

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***Abstract:*** *At the intersection of many identities, postcolonial writers, as is the case of Chicano/as, have had to push the boundaries of traditional narrative techniques in order to portray new, unique situations and experiences. Manuel Muñoz experiments with narrator, perspective and voice in his 2003 short story collection Zigzagger. In the story "Everything the White Boy Told You", he builds a chimera collective narrator, which weaves multiple narrative levels by switching between 1st, 2nd and 3rd voices, between being heterodiegetic and homodiegetic, and ends up incorporating the main character in its collective ego. This allows Muñoz to build individual characters which are at the same time collective and archetypal, while distributing the responsibility of representation from the subject to its communities. The narrative techniques ensure immersion and cognitive involvement which leads to empathy and understanding, or at the very least to the questioning of the reader's intersubjectivity.*

***Keywords:*** Manuel Muñoz; Chicano Literature; Postcolonial literature; Queer Literature; Intersectionality.

## INTRODUCTION: POSTCOLONIAL NARATIVES

Postcolonial studies are concerned with the implications of colonization in both the colonized populations and the colonizer. In postcolonial literature especially, the interest falls on themes and forms that might shed light on the implications of colonization. While the U.S. proudly claims multi-culturality, the truth is that there has been a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) hegemony for most of its history. Race and religion have played a big role in the formation of the American consciousness, and often non-white or non-protestant populations have been *Othered*. The expectations of every *immigrant*, regardless of their skin color, was to assimilate to American culture. Even non-protestant Christian denominations (such as Quakers or Catholics) have been persecuted and othered much like non-Christians and POC (people of color). An important side to the colonialism practiced by the U.S. has been the cultural one, where minorities might feel the need to *assimilate* to WASP expectations, or at the very least made to feel inferior because of their *otherness.*

Especially heavy is the cultural impact over the black community (over 200 years of history of slavery, and an additional one of continued *racism*), native communities (removal from their land, confinement to reservations, heavy negative *stereotyping*, and *whitewashing* of history), and the Chicano/a and Latinx communities, who have perhaps most often been subjected to cultural colonialism in its most classical definition. Some of the concepts their literature approaches are the issue of *orientalism*, as white people create their own *myths* around the colonized populations, some of which aimed at *fetishizing* them, or further oppressing them. Another common concept in postcolonial studies is *tokenism*, which elevates an individual narrative of success, while ignoring the collective narrative of systemic oppression.

To address such subjects, colonized groups have had to push the boundaries of narrative experimentation. Using formal, classical narrative devices for experiences that are most definitely neither standard, nor usual, proved difficult. As such, postcolonial narratives could not and should not be expressed in traditional structures.

In his 2011 essay *U.S. Ethnic and Postcolonial Fiction*, Brian Richardson explores what he calls *collective narratives.* He notices the world-wide tendency of postcolonial

writers to experiment with the construct of the narrator and with narrative voice, often towards a collective: collective narrators, 1st person plural narrations, individual narrators doing it in the name of a community, or even collective focalization, etc. (5). Richardson also mentions that postcolonial writers have a very unique relationship with *time* and *sequentiality*. Narratives rarely follow a straight temporal axis but shift around and blur boundaries. This often depicts trauma (even shared), and the loss of control of their history (5). In matters of story, an interesting development is the stretching of the narrated subjects: instead of following the unique individual or a family, postcolonial writers often follow entire groups (villages), different subjects of the same group, sometimes over longer times (even centuries). Thematically, an especially unique interest is *the beginnings*, which are almost always treated in a postcolonial and ethnic narrative, even if it is not often positioned at the beginning of the story (6).

**AUDIENCE AND REPRESENTATIVITY**

Similarly interesting is the concept of the *double audience* of a postcolonial narrative. Since these oftentimes aim for representation, the audience is automatically sectioned off: the ingroup, the readers which belong to the same group/situation as the characters/events depicted in the narrative, and the outgroup, the readers which do not belong to the same group or situation. When it comes to the outgroup, "a white listener cannot plausibly be asked to embrace [these narratives], […] but he can become a strategically placed misreader… through whose gaps in perception the tales can seep, damaged but recoverable" (Charles W. Chesnutt, quoted in Richardson 13). Basically, the expectation of what Suzanne Keen calls *ambassadorial strategic empathy* (*A Theory* 224) is to give the outgroup a voyeuristic perspective, in the hopes that some seeds of prosocial behavior may be sowed. Prosocial behavior means an improved attitude towards the represented group or situation, as opposed to general empathy or sympathy, which might not necessarily result in any changes in the attitude or actions of the reader.

When it comes to the ways in which authors achieve representativity in a narrative, Suzanne Keen identifies a series of narrative devices; she looks to classical narratology to see what has been proposed as most effective in matters of driving empathy and describes a few different techniques that give an insight into a character's mind: free indirect discourse, interior monologue, psycho-narration, internal focalization (fixed or variable) or even an autodiegetic or homodiegetic narrator using the first person to narrate (*Empathy* 96-99).

Besides the narrative devices themselves, Keen also identifies three strategies authors can adopt in matters of driving empathy: bounded strategic empathy, ambassadorial strategic empathy, and broadcast strategic empathy (*A Theory* 224). Depending on the reader's relationship with the depicted group/situation, the reader is either part of the ingroup (bounded strategic empathy, reader = character group/situation), part of the outgroup (ambassadorial strategic empathy, reader is not part of the character' social group/situation; the character acts as an ambassador to the outgroup), or neither/either (broadcast strategic empathy), in which case the author appeals to common human experiences between the outgroup reader and the ingroup character/situation.

While broadcast strategic empathy is often disparaged against by critics as base and unfruitful, Keen says that many postcolonial novelists use this strategy in appealing to the reader's sympathy, which "suggests that broadcast strategic empathy deserves attention more nuanced than refusal of empathy as an impossible goal of representation" (*A Theory* 224). When it comes to postcolonial narratives, she calls for an "intersectional narratology, a method that can accommodate the different directions and locations of a rich set of texts, contexts and identities while framing global observations about the workings of narrative in the world" (*Intersectional Narratology* 123). In her view, an intersectional narratology would

be the most relevant manifestation of a postclassical narratology, one that would allow outside influences to a rather exclusivist field – a productive field, but not flexible enough. As a concept, *intersectionality* was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, who noticed that. in militating for rights, oftentimes categories of people were "falling through the cracks" (140). More specifically, she noticed that the civil rights movement benefited especially black *men*, while the feminist movement benefited *white* women. Meanwhile, black women compounded on the oppression, and neither movement took into consideration the particular needs that arose at the intersection of their identities as both *black* and *women*, among other (religious, economic, educational background etc.).

It is important to emphasize that intersectionality is not identity. An 'identity' is not *intersectional*. Identity is multifaced; multiple *identities* in regards to different social categories make up one's complex identity. These categories interact and create unique systems of inequality. Inequality is not meant to be seen as a necessarily negative term in this situation (although one might argue that inequality in any situation is unfortunate), but to describe the discrepancies in dynamic systems of privilege and oppression.

Even through the (post)structuralist practice is to proclaim the *death of the author,* the intersectional practice restrains the analyst from doing so. Just as the diverse readership is an important participant to meaning giving, so is the diverse authorship. The author's identity facets allow us to make a series of presumptions and to position ourselves in a specific way when interpreting patterns of privilege-oppression in the text itself. When major racist undertones are revealed by the examination of the text, whether the author is part of the ingroup or the outgroup gives a completely different interpretation – while racism is a cultural product, internalized racism is always a product of oppression, and racism towards an outgroup may be either the product of oppression or privilege, depending on which the dominant-hegemonic group is. It is important to note that the interpretation and understanding of the position from which said racism was produced is never excusable or justifiable, just open to discussion and inspection. Similarly, the issue of cultural-historical background needs to be taken into consideration: while depictions revealing a negative bias are never justifiable, cultural-historical background might help us contextualize and explain those views.

Moreover, a fundamental intersectional concern is the identity of the narrator. A narrative is always a tyranny of the narrator; regardless of what type of narrator is identified, the truth is that what is read is an account given by said narrator: any portrayal the reader may come up with is constructed by the narrator itself. It is simpler when the narrator is homodiegetic or even autodiegetic – plenty of characterization devices are at the literary critic's disposal. But the more impersonal and extradiegetic a narrator is, the less involved and intrusive, the less clues there are in regards to their identity. Even when the narrator seems non-existent in the narration, the reader *knows* it exists – there is no telling without the teller – and that the account is nonetheless organized and colored by their perspective and narrative choices, even in the most behavioristic of narrations; their seeming absence is an interpretative key in itself.

Gerald Prince, in his book *Narratology,* states that "intrusions referring to the narrator or the quality of his narration may lead us to conclude that the real subject of the narrative is the rendering of certain events rather than the events themselves and that the real hero is the narrator rather than any one of his characters" (13). While Prince says "sometimes," paying attention to the narrator will always reveal more than what is being related. Understanding the narrator gives us new interpretative keys to the narrated events and characters, even if often retrospectively or at a second reading.

## MANUEL MUÑOZ'S POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVE EXPERIMENTS

A Chicano author born in the 70s and raised in a little town in the Central Valley of California, Muñoz attended Harvard and then received an MFA from Cornell University under the tutelage of Chicana writer Helena Maria Viramontes. His first short story collection, *Zigzagger*, was published by Northwestern University Press in 2003 to high acclaim, including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 2006. His short stories are focused on Chicano queer experience, drawing a lot upon his experience growing up in the Central Valley. For the second collection, *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue*, published in 2007 by Algonquin Books, a more mainstream publishing house dealing with Chican@/Latinx authors, he widened the selection of characters and experiences he writes about, effectively constructing a short story cycle/saga about multiple generations of Mexican-Americans living in the same neighborhood. This collection brought him the prestigious Whittling Award. In 2011 he published his first novel, *What You See In the Dark*, and another short story collection was published in 2022, *Consequences*, at Graywolf Press. From this, Muñoz's short story *Anyone Can Do It* was collected in two different short story anthologies: *The Best American Short Stories 2019*, edited by Anthony Doerr and Heidi Pitlor and published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, as well as in the *Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story*, edited by John Freeman and published by Penguin Press in 2021[1]. It is safe then to say that Muñoz has entered the canon of American Short Stories.

While in his novel, *What You See In the Dark*, Muñoz makes use of less traditional narrative devices to tell the story, in his second short story collection the narration is fairly straightforward and conventional. However, in *Zigzagger*, as he himself asserts in a 2021 interview with John Freeman, he experimented with narrative form and voice, often drawing inspiration from titans of the short story such as Steinbeck and feminist Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros. Feminist Chicana writers are known for pushing the boundaries of form and style well beyond their limits (cf. Gloria Anzaldúa, Sandra Cisneros, Cherry Moraga, Maria Viramontes, etc.), and he himself tried to emulate that. In doing so, he perpetuates a tradition of postcolonial narratives that experiment with voice and form in order to express unique experiences[2].

Muñoz's stories are deeply entrenched in the mythical positionality of the California Central Valley. Drawing from his own experience growing up in there, his depictions of field workers and small-town communities are a unique and unexpected environment for the unfolding of queer stories. While not all of his stories are set up in the Central Valley, all of them recount, even if through analepsis, a life specific to the *Borderlands* (cf. Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera*), of which the Central Valley is an iteration. For example, the story *Everything the White Boy Told You* takes place in a northern state, possibly New York, but relates through flashbacks the life of the Chicano character in Texas.

*Borderlands*/*La Frontera* is a concept proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa in her 1987 book with the same name, which localizes Chicano/a identity within the borderlands with Mexico. This is consistent with the postcolonial tradition which emphasizes beginnings and origins; even if the Chicano/a experience depicted takes place in New York or any other state, their identity is inherently tied to the Borderlands, a plane of existence at the crossroads of multiple influences. It uses topological terminology to describe the plurality of identity and hybridity of Chicano/as. In the case of Anzaldúa herself, it was the convergence of Mexican, Native, American, Catholic and Pagan cultural elements, on which her Lesbian sexual orientation was superimposed. The Borderlands are a constant dynamic negotiation of identity and culture.

The Central Valley is for Muñoz what the Rio Grande Valley was for Anzaldúa. "'It's very poor; there's a lot of violence and racial tension,' he says of his hometown, Dinuba, near Fresno. 'It's a forgotten place—or a place that's never thought of to begin with'" (Muñoz,

qtd. in Brown). It is the perfect place to depict the themes of community and isolation that pervade Muñoz's stories. Still, it is functionally a Borderland for the characters of *Zigzagger* in the same way that it was for Anzaldúa: it is the locus of experience, the paradoxical symbol of both the duality and the bringing together of identities, of both community-building and ostracization formational experiences. Muñoz intentionally weaves all these throughout his stories with plenty of subtle and more obvious details, playing with perspective and time to gradually induce the reader in the sociality of the Valley's queer characters. Using experimental narrative techniques, he turns these themes and our expectations on their heads, indicating realities not often thought of or considered.

The stories are set in different towns dispersed throughout the Valley, but the experience is never different – a tightly-knit community clearly defining what is acceptable and what is not. Everybody knows everybody in these communities, and most often everybody knows what everybody is doing. This doubles the pressure on Muñoz's characters in terms of secrecy – after all, being queer in the Valley is not safe, as some of the *Zigzagger* stories attest. Quite often, the subject character of Muñoz's stories is either already dead or ends up dead (physically or symbolically), leaving the rest the characters to psychologically deal with it and confront the reality of queerness.

These communities are mostly Chicana/o or Mexican; the occasional white character is not central, but usually contributes to the plot twist and the understanding of deeper levels of the subtext. As such, oftentimes the tension between characters is usually not one of a racial (or even cultural) nature, but of conformity and non-conformity, heteronormativity and queerness, community and alterity, difference of class. As expected of a Chicano writer, the communities are steeped in Chicano/a culture, old and new, and there are plenty of references to their daily lives, as well as quite a few culture-bound terms. Of course, the expected interspersed Spanish is not missing – although quite a bit less quantity-wise when compared to authors like Anzaldúa. The stories are about "small-town community life and the social consequences of that life for how sexuality and intimacy will be played out by those who constitute the community. *Zigzagger* addresses intimate relationships, communal history and vernacular knowledge" (Martínez 227).

## A FLUID NARRATOR IN *EVERYTHING THE WHITE BOY TOLD YOU*

Possibly the most fascinating narrative experiment Muñoz does is playing with voice and plurality. In the short story *Everything the White Boy Told You*, Muñoz employs a chimera narrator that can only be explained as a collective intrusive narrator, shifting between heterodiegetic, homodiegetic, and autodiegetic, while at the same time being the focalizer of the narration. The story is told through a sort of imposed diegesis: instead of allowing the reader to see the character in action, the narrator invokes the action and the characters through a combination of mostly second person narrated prolepsis and analepsis, resulting in a rather elegiac tone. The naratee is also the apparent unaware main character of the story. For the better part of the story, it feels as though the narrator is addressing a TV while watching actions unfold; although the characters are being addressed, there is no actual way through which they could be aware of this, especially as the narrator is for all intents and purposes heterodiegetic even to the narratee. The narrator weaves the actual action (which is not presented chronologically) with predictions and flashbacks, all the while addressing the main character, Celio, a Texan Chicano living in an unspecified place in the Northern States. The collective narrator keeps inviting Celio to tell them more, as though they were in the same room, but then goes on to either predict what might happen or tell what is happening (or what has happened).

Despite straying from his usual internal focalization, Muñoz brilliantly creates a sham of an omniscient collective heterodiegetic narrator: while acting as if they know everything

through the fusing of predictions and events, it is established from the beginning that they represent the ex-lovers of the White Boy, Celio's love interest. As such, the predictions are not veridic omniscience, but simple hypotheses or proposals of possible outcomes based on a pattern of collective common experiences. Sometimes the predictions are presented as mere questions and are never confirmed. For example, the narrator addresses Celio like this: "Did he tell you about the urge he had at twenty…" (Muñoz 114). This technique has the benefit of showing, as opposed to telling, the relationship between the individual experience and the shared experience of a community, while also making use of implications, breaks in narrative. and unfulfilled closure, Muñoz's staple techniques for forcefully engaging the reader's narrative cognition and empathy.

Another aspect of the collective narrator is the interchangeable use of narrative person: while mostly using second person, addressing Celio directly, Muñoz intertwines it with first person plural interventions, in which they relate their feelings, experiences and expectations, and with occasional third person narration as well, through which they relate the White Boy's experiences. The benefit of this mélange is the ease with which Muñoz can weave narrative levels and switch between them; the reader is never technically sure which level is the main one, or whether there is one. First, there is the level of the "date" which structures the story as Celio goes on a date with the White Boy; these are the only actual "events" that the reader might be sure of, or count as *action* in the story. Secondly, there is the level of the Collective Narrator's past experiences with the White Boy, who gains a quasi-prototypical dimension: he is all White Boys, while also being presented to the reader with very specific details of his past. Technically, this is already second-hand information, as the collective narrator puts together the biography of the White boy through stories he has told of himself. This unreliable biography forms a third narrative level. A fourth one is in the form of the collective Chicano social experience presented as both Celio and the Narrator's pasts. A possible fifth narrative level is the potential, formed by the totality of predictions of the Narrator. This level ultimately reveals the more abstract-symbolic-prototypical dimensions of both Celio and the White Boy; the actions predicted don't characterize either individual, but the archetype they represent – and which they end up being by the end of the story. Each of the narrative levels add to the story as the plot advances, revealing more and more the intricate relationships between the participants to the story, including the Collective Narrator, who comes out on top as the actual subject of this story, not Celio, effectively forcing the reader, at the end, to cognitively return to the events story in order to reinterpret it anew with the knowledge that the narrator is actually autodiegetic.

Particularly extraordinary in the alternating of second person singular and plural narrating is the fact that the implied reader is co-opted in the experiences of the narratee. Gradually, the reader starts identifying with both the narrator and the protagonist (especially if the implied reader is also similarly at the intersection of postcolonial, ethnic and queer subjectivities). This enables the narrator to abuse implicature and presuppositions, leaving the reader to believe that their own conclusions are the correct ones, and that they participated in the story. This also ensures an immersive experience of the book.

As the story advances, the narrator evolves from a simple collective of ex-lovers into a sort of collective ego of the Gay Chicano community. While never ceasing to use first person plural in addressing themselves, the collective narrator slowly starts identifying with the main character, telling Celio as he is preparing for the date that "already you see us in the mirror" (Muñoz 114). But, far from sticking to an identity, the narrator *is* a collective ego, multitudes and one, as it tells Celio "we are with you as doubt and distrust … listening to our voices (I, me, Celio) …" (114). Unbeknownst to Celio, he is falling into the double trap of the white male version of the "enchantress," as well as into that of his own internalized

oppression, a sort of collective trauma common to the gay Chicano community represented in the person of the narrator.

Just like Celio, the White Boy is concomitantly an individual, given specific, if not stereotypical, experiences and mannerisms, and prototypical, even in his lack of name, having just a generic racial description. His prototypicality allows the author to amass in him multiple symbols, while allowing for his supposed individuality to make him redeemable. The White Boy is the ultimate symbol of privilege with which Celio is confronted, and which sheds a light on the Chicano's internalized oppression. When met with the White Boy's idyllic life story, Celio is impressed. When the White Boy showers him with affection and compliments, Celio is flattered. The implication is that both are because of his whiteness, while Celio further grew to despise his "humble" ethnic and social background. But the Narrator implies that the White Boy could not and had previously been unable to deal with the Chicano background of his lovers, making excuses to break up with the previous iterations of Celio. And so, the Narrator invites Celio to tell the White Boy more, that he may have a rounder image of the Chicano experience. While the privilege is the main symbolism, additionally implied are the white power, able to manipulate the colonized, the fetishization of people of color through exoticism (it is implied the White Boy has had many Chicano lovers. This might as well be the prototypicality of the character, but that is never truly separated from his individuality), economic and cultural privilege – it is implied his family would accept him as gay, whereas the Gay Chicano experience is exclusory. It is important to note that the White Boy becomes part of the Chicano Gay experience through his continued involvement with the members of its community. He rejects the intersubjectivity, which brings sorrow to the community. Yet, they still strive towards achieving acceptance from him through continuous exposure.

In this story, it is exactly this experience that leads to mutual identification of the narrator and Celio. The boy is presented as being twenty-two, young. As such, it is possible that this is one of the initiatory experiences that is slowly leading him towards joining in with this personified collective ego. The tool of the conjoining seems to be "telling": stories. The narrator keeps inviting Celio to tell more of his story, even as they predict his experience: "… we can help if you tell us some more," they tell him again and again. "All of us tell our stories the same way, sitting on the barstool…" (Muñoz 114). Stories become a catharsis, as well as a repository and the vehicle of the collective ego. They invite Celio to join in the collective consciousness, a protean web of stories, both particular and prototypical, specific to the individual and common to the community. The queer Chicano community in the person of the narrator is replacing the Chicano community at home. Perhaps replacing is not the correct intersectional term; instead, it is more likely that different facets of social identity usurp each other in rank and importance, rather than completely replace each other. In fact, this is exactly what Muñoz advocates in his other stories: his subjects' identities are rounding up, achieve individuation, *because* of the different influences, not in spite them. The boy in Muñoz's story *Zigzagger* becomes a man after going through a sort of unfortunate, but not uncommon, rite of passage, but he internalizes it using the Chicano/a and catholic cultural language he mirrors from his mother.

It is possible that in the case of *Everything the White Boy Told You*, despite not channeling focalization internally and instead placing it with the collective narrator themselves, Muñoz still shifts the site of queer enunciation: from the queer subject to his community. Perhaps the most seminal work done on the topic of *Zigzagger* is Ernesto Martínez's *Shifting the Site of Queer Enunciation*, in which he identifies and coins a new literary (specifically queer) analysis device based on Muñoz's use of voice and focalization – "shifting the site of queer enunciation" (227). This device allows readers to critically examine the intricate and complex inter-personal relationships of the characters, looking at the central

topic of the story from different perspectives. Perhaps specifically this is what is most ground-breaking about Muñoz's stories: readers get to examine queerness in mostly conservative Chicana/o communities from the perspective of characters who are (willingly or not) part of the queer experience and are directly impacted by it without being queer themselves. Martínez explains the idea of shifting the enunciation as "equitably distribut[ing] narrative responsibility for queer experience and identity" (227), thus providing a paradigm that fosters a deeper understanding of the social context of queer Chicano/as.

Muñoz manages this literary feat by playing with voice and perspective. The narrator is almost always heterodiegetic, using 3rd person to narrate – but shifts between multiple individual internal focalizers and a collective focalizer (a collective character) through which the narrator scrutinizes the daily life of the "village". The internal focalization allows the reader to peek into the minds of the actants and to have a broader understanding of what is happening, despite dubious reliability of perspective as inferred by the narrator being heterodiegetic and creating a bit of intellectual distance between himself and the focalizers through a smooth shift in focalization.

In the case of *Everything the White Boy Told you*, the collective narrator, the intertwined narrative levels, the duality of uniqueness and prototypicality of the characters, all reveal the sociality of the individual as a member of the group, as well as, to a lesser degree, the plea of the queer of color towards their white fellows. In this case, there is a seemingly yet unknown (to the apparent main character) relationship between Celio and other gay Chicanos. This relationship is represented by the author through a collective narrator, or maybe a collective ego of a specific queer community, that shares in the responsibility of analyzing what appears to be core common experiences of the group. In this situation, the community presents its own collective experience (or, perhaps, trauma) through the particular experience of one of its (unknowing) exponents. Employing this unique set of ingenious narrative techniques, Muñoz signifies to the potential queer reader of his story the essence of the catchphrase "you are not alone," and to the outgroup "this is our experience, my own experience and my own's experiences."

Particularly revealing is the ending of the story. The narrator declares the community's expectation and yearning: "Tell him, like we told him. Maybe you're the one. … –tell him so that he has the whole story, so many pieces– …" (Muñoz 117). This is nothing more and nothing less than the yearning of every human being – to be understood and to be accepted. The narrator pleads with Celio to share his own Chicano experience with the White Boy, in hopes that it might be the bit that completes the puzzle and leads to acceptance. This is exactly what Muñoz does through this story and his entire book: trying to build understanding through representation, using his craft and the narrative tools at hand to their maximum potential.

**Conclusions**

Manuel Muñoz is a talented writer whose experiments with narrative techniques render multiple frameworks for representativity. He plays with narrator, focalization, and voice in order to maximize the possible illocutionary effect on the reader. He employs both bounded and ambassadorial empathetic strategies in order to drive the reader's goodwill towards the characters, and, hopefully, their represented communities as well.

Muñoz efficiently employs collective narrators and second person narration to weave between diegetic levels. The narrator in *Everything the White Boy Told You* turns from heterodiegetic into autodiegetic as the story advances, slipping between 1st person plural narration and 2nd person singular, while also intertwining multiple narrative levels: present, past, future-prophetic, individual and collective. The incorporation of the subject-character of the 2nd person narration, Celio, into the collective narrator, is a particularly delightful

technique, which allows for multiple interpretations: individual, collective, and archetypal. His experiments are the prime case in the point that the narrator is, in truth, usually the main character of the story, and that analyzing it might reveal new meanings.

Muñoz's stories are a wonderful example of representation done right. His characters, always caught in the middle of some life-changing event, are complex and multi-faceted, in search of identity and of their place in society. They live at the intersection of multiple identities and cultures, which are almost always clashing. Their place in society is unclear, although Muñoz turns the trope of queer isolation on its head. Despite all queer characters going through some variation of imposed (or even self-imposed) ostracization, Muñoz's narrative techniques constantly hint towards an intersubjectivity of both queer and non-queer characters, a social dimension to the queer experience that is not limited to the queer subject.

**Endnotes**

1. Biographical notes taken from the author's website, manuel-munoz.com, accessed 4 Dec. 2024, as well as from the blurb and the "About the Author" section of his book *Zigzagger*.
2. Interview held by John Freeman with Manuel Muñoz and other authors about their stories collected in *The Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story* (ed. John Freeman. Penguin Press, 2021). https://www.lapl.org/books-emedia/podcasts/aloud/penguin-book-modern-american-short-story. Accessed 4 Dec. 2024.

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