Art and Literacy Projects:
*Cartoneros* and *Cordel*
2. Voices from the Margin: An Exploration of Themes in the Libros Cartoneros Collection at the Indiana University Libraries and Their Subject Treatment

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Introduction

Libros cartoneros are chapbooks manufactured by alternative publishing houses known as cartoneras, and their covers are generally made from recycled, corrugated cardboard featuring unique hand-painted designs. These books emerged in Buenos Aires in 2003 as a response to the economic decline which Argentina had experienced since 2001. They now enjoy great popularity throughout the Latin American region, where their publication has become a burgeoning industry.

Indiana University Libraries began to collect these chapbooks in 2005 and currently have a collection of approximately five hundred titles. In a previous article on the subject of the libros cartoneros, I presented an overview of this unique collection of books and described how they were being processed at the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. In this paper, my intention is twofold:

1) to highlight the subject scope of this collection by exploring some of the themes contained within these works, and

2) to illustrate how effectively themes in works of fiction can be represented, through application of the Library of Congress’s Special Provisions for Increased Subject Access To Fiction.

The omission of subject headings in the cataloging of individual works of fiction is common practice in academic libraries, indicating a preference for author and title as access points. Unfortunately, this practice also has the effect of curtailing the grouping of works on similar themes, and presumes that the user who wishes to gain access to specific works is familiar with either the authors or titles of those works. While readers may be familiar with works
belonging to a literary canon, this is less likely the case with the libros cartone-
ros, many of whose authors can be considered first-time or “emerging” authors
who have rejected the notion of a canon altogether. Since fiction is well-repre-
sented among the libros cartoneros, the need for subject access to these works
becomes even more immediate. The practice of nonassignment of subject
headings to works of fiction has traditionally served as a timesaving device for
libraries whose backlogs and frontlogs present an almost Sisyphean dilemma.
Predictably, this results in the burden being transferred to the researcher.

Options for Cataloging Fiction

Standard practice followed by the Library of Congress (H1790, Sec. 4)
allows topical access to individual works of fiction, but only for certain types
of these works: biographical and historical fiction and animal stories, and
“only as they come readily to mind after a superficial review of the work being
cataloged.” In addition, the assignment of form headings to individual works
of adult, juvenile, and young adult fiction is forbidden.

In researching the usefulness of classification, Kelley concludes that
“the greatest value to the user of a systematic arrangement of books lies in his
being able to locate groups of books on specific and concrete subjects read-
ibly.” Kelley also notes that “some of the insufficiencies of classification can
be overcome through subject-cataloging.” In an article on the research library
in the twenty-first century, Abby Smith warns against taking the scholar’s time
for granted, stating that “ready access to information that fits within the time
frames set by the scholar is often the most important criterion in information
seeking.” This sentiment has been expressed in a variety of ways by users of
library collections. Therefore, in the interest of promoting a special collection
such as the libros cartoneros, would it not be the next logical step for libraries
that have already acquired these works to create access by highlighting the
works’ subjects?

Since January 2001, the Library of Congress has facilitated this move
by means of its Special Provisions for Increased Subject Access to Fiction.
Since that time, the practice has been in effect for the cataloging of English
language novels by Library of Congress catalogers. Contained within the
General Principles of this provision, however, is the following proviso: “The
assignment of subject headings to individual works of fiction is intended to
provide the average public library user with an additional method of selecting
recreational reading.”

While the mission of the academic library may vary substantially from
that of the public library, it would be reasonable to assume that individual
users of both institutions expect to be able to retrieve desired information with
minimal effort. It is also likely that one person’s recreational reading may be
another’s research topic. If increased subject access to fiction seems to have
worked well for the cataloging of English language texts, there is no reason
to believe that it could not be as successfully applied to the cataloging of non-English texts.

Johana Kunin identifies members of the academic community among collectors of the libros cartoneros. Indeed, a recent search in the OCLC database confirms that, with the exception of the New York Public Library’s Research Libraries, public libraries are not featured owners of this literary collection. It should, therefore, not be considered unreasonable to expect academic libraries to meet this need.

Enhanced access assumes an even greater importance in the context of the disconnect between subject matter and classification number of literary works, since the latter is based, not on the content of the work, but on biographical information of the author, specifically nationality and period of greatest renown.

Although Indiana University Libraries have not yet adopted this model, as part of the subject treatment for libros cartoneros, a subject heading indicating the nationality of the publisher is routinely assigned. For example, “Chapbooks, Argentine,” with the Form Subdivision Specimens. This provides yet another access point to these works. The following is a list of headings proposed by Indiana University Libraries and approved by the Library of Congress:

- Chapbooks, Argentine
- Chapbooks, Mexican
- Chapbooks, Paraguayan
- Chapbooks, Peruvian
- Chapbooks, Puerto Rican
- Chapbooks, Salvadoran
- Chapbooks, Uruguayan

In combination with the Form Subdivisions, these headings indicate what the works are, not what they are about.

**Libros Cartoneros: Themes**

Among the libros cartoneros can be found works representing all the literary genres and themes which span the spectrum of human experience. Some examples include:

Rocato’s *Marilyn Monroe, comunista: entre el FBI y el 68*, an autobiographical novel in which the author’s infatuation with Monroe is interwoven with his experience of the 1968 student movement in Mexico

Daniel Hidalgo’s *Barrio Miseria 221*, which deals with social conditions in Valparaíso, Chile
Néstor Perlongher’s *Evita vive*, a two-volume pornographic/political novel featuring Eva Perón

Alejandro López’s *La asesina de Lady Di*, a novella inspired by the death of the late Princess

Leónidas Lamborghini’s *Trento*, a satirical novel about the Council of Trent (abridged)

Wilson Bueno’s *El gato peludo y el ratón platudo*, a cat and mouse children’s story

Ana López Montaner’s *La persecución*, a play about a young artist and her terminally ill mother

Juan Manuel Robles’s *Zaraí Toledo, la hija patria*, an interview with the fifteen-year-old daughter of a former Peruvian president

Carmen Berenguer’s *Bobby Sands desfallece en el muro*, an elegiac poem dedicated to the Irish poet and activist

Andrea Ocampo Cea’s *Patio 29: La democracia imaginaria*, an essay about human rights in Chile

John Spencer’s *Saving Lowry’s Eden*, a bilingual tribute to British artist, John Spencer

Vera do Val’s *Os filhos do marimbondo: histórias baseadas em relatos de lendas indígenas da Amazônia*, a retelling of Amazonian folktales

Washington Cucurto’s *Hasta que quitarle Panamá a los yankis*, an experimental novel with a deceptively provocative title, referencing US-Panama relations

These are but a small sample of the diverse thematic offerings of the libros cartoneros. However, the focus of this paper will be those that are works of fiction. For the purpose of analysis, I have selected one representative of each of the following categories: biography, urban fiction, and historical fiction/satire. Respectively, the selected works include: Alejandro López’s *La asesina de Lady Di*, Daniel Hidalgo’s *Barrio Miseria 221*, and Leónidas Lamborghini’s *Trento*. A synopsis of each of these works is offered, followed by a subject analysis.

**Providing Subject Access to the Works of Fiction**

**Biographical Fiction**

SYNOPSIS:

This version of Alejandro López’s celebrated first novel finds the protagonist, Esperanza Háberal, working as an extra for a soap opera company in Buenos Aires. Esperanza, a teenager from Gualeguaychú, Argentina, is obsessed with Ricky Martin and has come to Buenos Aires for the sole purpose of having Ricky’s baby. At an opportune moment, Esperanza communicates her intention to her idol, who responds “y yo quiero tener un hijo de Lady Di.”77 Not quite the response she anticipates, these words trigger a series of events, culminating in Lady Di’s demise and, eventually, that of Esperanza herself.

SUBJECT CATALOGING:

This work poses some exceptional challenges with respect to its subject cataloging. It is customary for book titles to indicate the subject matter contained within and, as this title suggests, the princess does die towards the end of this story. However, it is clear that Ricky Martin is far more crucial to the plot than is Lady Di. In fact, compared to Lady Di, who is first mentioned on the twenty-eighth page and whose name occurs only six times throughout the entire work, Ricky Martin is named approximately twenty, as early as the second page of this thirty-nine page edition. This corresponds roughly with the 170-page Hidalgo edition, in which Ricky Martin’s name appears approximately sixty-three times while Princess Di’s appears only fourteen. It also compares with the 145-page English edition, *Die, Lady, Die*, in which Ricky Martin’s name appears about seventy-seven times, while Princess Di’s does so just twenty-one.

SUBJECT CATALOGING: INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER(S) AND SETTING

For biographical fiction, Library of Congress allows us to assign the heading for the biographee, with “Form Subdivision—Fiction.” Since in this instance we have not one but two biographees, we need to establish their order of appearance based on their textual treatment. Ricky Martin clearly takes precedence over Lady Diana and is therefore placed in first position. In accordance with the *Special Provisions*, fictitious characters who serve as protagonists can only receive name headings if featured in multiple works by the author. Therefore, Esperanza is omitted, here:

600 1 0 Martin, Ricky—Fiction.

600 1 0 Diana, Princess of Wales 1961–1997—Fiction.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER(S) AND SETTING:
CLASS OF PERSONS TO WHICH THE PRIMARY CHARACTER BELONGS

The *Special Provisions* also allow the assignment of headings for the class of persons to which the primary characters belong. Allowance is also made for the assignment of subject headings for places, events or time periods,
if significant. In the Eloísa Cartonera 2003 edition of this work, there is no indication that Esperanza is a runaway. Therefore, while the OCLC usage of the subject heading: “Runaway Teenagers—Fiction” may accurately reflect the content of other versions of this story, it would be inaccurate to include it here. While there are several similarities among the different versions of this intriguing story, there are also substantial differences which warrant different subject treatment.

The setting of the story may also be included directly or as a subdivision. On this basis, the following subject headings are proposed:

- 650_0 Extras (Actors)—Argentina—Buenos Aires—Fiction.
- 650_0 Teenage girls—Argentina—Buenos Aires—Fiction.
- 650_0 Celebrities—Fiction.
- 650_0 Princesses—Crimes against—Fiction.

**Topical Access:**

The text of *La asesina de Lady Di* is replete with references to mass media and popular culture. Moreover, the author passionately dedicates his work to “aquellas admiradoras de Ricky Martín, aquellas beibis del rouge Revlon, aquellas adolescentes con sueños,”8 emphasizing that “esta novela escrita sólo sólo sólo para ellas.”9 It is clear that this is essentially a fictional account of the destructive effects of consumerism and mass media on contemporary society in general, and on youth and young women in particular. It is, therefore, no coincidence that our young protagonist is named “Esperanza.”

While the deleterious effects of mass media and popular culture are prevailing themes, a multiplicity of underlying themes converge to contribute to this story’s originality. Some of these include: wrongful death, magic, envy, friendship, betrayal, and photography. The theme of sexual abuse, although present, is not as developed in this edition as it is in other versions of the story. On this basis, the following subject headings are recommended:

- 650_0 Mass media and culture—Argentina—Buenos Aires—Fiction.
- 650_0 Wrongful death—Argentina—Buenos Aires—Fiction.
- 650_0 Magic—Argentina—Buenos Aires—Fiction.

**Genre Headings:**

- 655_0 Biographical fiction
  or
- 655_7 Biographical fiction. #2 gsafd
Urban Fiction


**Synopsis:**

This story is set in Barrio Miseria, a shantytown wedged between a cemetery and a garbage dump. Our narrator is Cruner aka Kruner, Cráter, Kráter, or Malambo, a frustrated punk rocker with a red Mohawk and a long facial scar, who lives at No. 221. When he is not eking out a living as a fisherman and petty drug dealer, Cruner passes the time with his four buddies. Homicide is on the rise in this neighborhood and soon, the mutilated bodies of Cachorro and Camila, two of the town’s most notorious residents, are discovered. Following the newspaper report, Cruner expects the place to be swarming with police and media but is disappointed to find that “siguió todo como antes.” The crime in Barrio Miseria is as pervasive as it is violent and, finally, when Cruner and his friends come face to face with death, it is at the hands of the barrio’s next generation of miscreants—the hip-hop kids.

**Subject Cataloging:**

Considered Chile’s “Gateway to the World,” Valparaíso has undergone significant development over the last few decades, resulting in a perpetuation of “the traditional bipolarity of the rich and the poor city.” Although “barrios cerrados/gated communities” exist in other Latin American metropoles, Borsdorf and Hidalgo observe that “the socio-spatial exclusion phenomenon” of those in Chile constitutes a remarkable distinction. In Valparaíso, for example, “the most attractive locations...are becoming inaccessible to the public.” In a 2003 article, Sonia Roitman also explores the social effects of gated communities, highlighting their increased social segregation, exclusionary nature, and accelerating crime rates with their increasing popularity.

Set in Valparaíso, *Barrio Miseria 221* allows us to see how crime in this area is self-perpetuating. When, in an interview on the authorship of his work, Daniel Hidalgo states, “Quise retratar el abandono de Valparaíso,” it is precisely the negative effect of this urban planning that he seeks to portray through fiction.
Although we are told that Cruner is a fisherman—“Trabajo en una caleta como pescador,”16—this occupation is not a focal point of the story, therefore “Fishers” is not a good choice of subject heading in this instance. Again, this title benefits greatly from the application of the *Special Provisions*. Based on these, the following subject headings may be applied:

**INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER(S) AND SETTING:**

**CLASS OF PERSONS TO WHICH THE PRIMARY CHARACTER BELongs**

- 650_0 Drug dealers—Chile—Valparaíso—Fiction.
- 650_0 Poor—Chile—Valparaíso—Fiction.

**TOPICAL ACCESS:**

- 650_0 Drug abuse and crime—Chile—Valparaíso—Fiction.
- 650_0 Juvenile delinquency—Chile—Valparaíso—Fiction.
- 650_0 Slums—Chile—Valparaíso—Fiction.

**POSSIBLE GENRE HEADINGS:**

- 655_0 Urban fiction.

**Historical Fiction and Satire**


**SYNOPSIS:**

During the final year of the existence of the Council of Trent, the aged Bishop Procopius, one of the most prominent prelates of the Council, is occupying a basement with one of his beautiful young students, Gitona. The Bishop is experiencing a *crise de conscience* because of his ongoing affair with Gitona and tries to come to terms with his emotions by keeping a journal of his most private thoughts. In identifying the source of his own madness, “una locura cuyo nombre es Gitona,”17 Procopius also acknowledges that what he really seeks is “la libertad absoluta”18 from the oppression and depression that pervade Trent; that what he needs, above all, is love.

**SUBJECT CATALOGING:**

One of Lamborghini’s satirical techniques is his careful selection of a protagonist. He draws his representative of the Sacred Assembly not from the rank and file, but from its highest echelons. Thus, Bishop Procopius personifies the Council of Trent in all of its documented inconsistency. He is also the prism through which we see its effects.

**INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER(S) AND SETTING:**

**CLASS OF PERSONS TO WHICH THE PRIMARY CHARACTER BELongs**

- 650_0 Bishops—Italy—Trento—Fiction.
- 650_0 Catholics—Italy—Trento—Fiction.
Topical Access:
The Council of Trent is listed in first position. Using the *Special Provisions for Increased Access to Fiction*, the following subject heading is suggested:

611 2 0 Council of Trent (1545–1563 : Trento, Italy)—Fiction.

Genre Headings:
Although this is an example of the treatment of historical fiction and satire, we are guided by the *Special Provisions* which encourage the application of the “same principle of specificity used in non-literary cataloging.” The term “Historical fiction” does not appear as a genre heading in the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) list, since it is considered too broad. However, it is included in the Association for Library Collections & Technical Services’ Guidelines on Subject Access to Individual Works of Fiction, Drama, Etc. (GSAFD).

Again, in keeping with the guidelines of the *Special Provisions for Increased Subject Access to Fiction*, adjectival qualifiers indicative of the language of the work or “that reflect the characteristics of the author, such as nationality, religion, sex, ethnic background,” have been omitted. The following headings are representative of this work:

655 _7 Historical fiction. #2 gsafd

655 _0 Satire

Conclusion
As is evident, the libros cartoneros represent a rich resource for scholars and others with interest in the humanities and in Latin American studies in particular. As literary works, they are as thematically diverse as the geographic areas that they represent. Academic institutions with strong programs in the humanities will want to ensure that these works can be easily accessed, so that scholars may benefit from them. Latin American studies, comparative literature, and linguistics programs will especially benefit from enhanced access to these works, some of which have been “contrabandeadas al portunhol salbaje.” Provision of subject access to both fiction and nonfiction libros cartoneros will be beneficial to all types of library users, but especially those whose research needs are the subjects of these works.

The difficulty of subject access to humanities materials has long been recognized. Various reasons for this have been posited, such as “the imprecision of humanists’ language,” or “the interdisciplinary nature of some humanities research.” While attention has been drawn to this issue, it is compounded by an equally persistent problem of access to works emanating from Latin America and the Caribbean. Since the libros cartoneros represent a relatively new area of research, the provision of optimal access through subject headings will contribute significantly towards their discovery by scholars worldwide. This will be very much in keeping with the “democratizing and
empowering character of the networked information environment” in which we now live.

This paper has focused on the creation of enhanced access to the fiction genre in libros cartoneros through application of the Special Provisions for Increased Subject Access to Fiction, but I hope that it will also be considered as part of a larger effort to expand the knowledge and appreciation of Latin American and Caribbean literature.

NOTES


3. Ibid., 73.


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., colophon.


12. Ibid., 3.

13. Ibid., 11


15. Daniel Hidalgo, “Quise retratar el abandono de Valparaíso’ [entrevista a Daniel Hidalgo, en La Tercera, por Ricardo Careaga].”


18. Ibid., 9.

20. Ibid.

21. Douglas Diegues, Brazilian-Paraguayan poet and founder of the cartonera, Yiyi Jambo, has spearheaded a movement among authors of the “Triple Frontier” to use “portunhol selvagem,” a hybrid language comprising mainly Portuguese, Spanish, and Guarani. An example of such linguistic experimentation can be seen in this work by Joca Reiners Terrón: *Transportunhol borracho: 15 joyitas bêbadas de la poesía universal contrabandeadas al portunhol salvaje* (São Paulo: Dulcinéia Catadora, 2007). Diegues’s ode to the Paraguayan model, Rocío, provides another good example of this language.


**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


