

Julián Olivares, A Brief Autobiography

I was born in idyllic Texas, in San Antonio. My father was born in Camargo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and raised in Rio Grande City. The first Olivares came to the *frontera*, Nuevo Santander, in the 18th century, from Olivares, a village near Sevilla, thus he became José Luis *de Olivares*. This village was the *encomienda* (fiefdom) of the Conde-Duque de Olivares and his descendants; hence I am descended, not from them, but from one of their vassals. The Conde-Duque was the *privado* of the king Felipe IV (what Cheney was to Bush). In grad school a professor called me “el Conde-Duque de Olivares,” to which I replied: “No, el Conde-Duque es mi padre: Julián Olivares Duque” (Duque being my father’s second surname).

My mother, Benicia Carrillo Vidal, descended from Canary Islands colonizers of San Antonio, and grew up on a farm in nearby Floresville. San Antonio de Béxar was colonized by 16 Canary Island families in 1731; my mother’s family was not among the original settlers. That same year Franciscan friars founded the missions of, Concepción, San José, San Juan Capistrano and San Francisco de la Espada. In 1718 padre Antonio de Olivares (my brother insisted he was a relative) founded the mission San Antonio de Valero, to become known as “The Alamo” (under the custody of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, which is why Chicanos never step inside it). Hence, whenever one of my “Fellow Texans” asks me when my family came to “this country,” I reply: “Before it was a country.”

After graduating from Brackenridge High School, I joined the Navy, attaining the rate of Hospitalman Second Class. Later after various stints in junior colleges (and dropping out of one minority-resistant university), I graduated from California State, Los Angeles, in 1968, with majors in Spanish and Latin American Studies. I lived in Los Angeles and experienced the Watts Riots and the East LA high school walkouts, while I worked nights at an industrial medical clinic, on the edge of Watts, while attending Cal State full time. Shortly after I left for graduate school at the University of Texas, the reporter Rubén Salazar was killed during the Chicano Moratorium against Viet Nam by a tear gas projectile that hit him in the chest. Although a Viet Nam veteran, I participated in protests against the Viet Nam War.

While in Los Angeles, I asked my dad to send me an application for work at the newly-completed Hemisfair in San Antonio. My dad sent it to me, I filled it out and returned it to him. He took it to the Hemisfair personnel office, and a lady told him: “We’re going to give him a good job when he gets here.” When I got there, I was given blue overalls, a rake, a sack and a stick with a nail at the tip for stabbing trash. I had become a ‘dive bomber’! As I looked me over in my accoutrement, I said to myself: “Bienvenido a Texas.” As a college graduate, however, I quickly became the crew chief of a group of *indocumentados*. I recall that my first paltry paycheck had an attached stub that said: “You have the right to work.”

A scholarship, or financial aid, would have made life easier for me during my undergrad and postgrad studies, but there were none back then for Chicanos and other minorities. At UT I studied Latin American literature, writing an MA thesis on the Peruvian poet César Vallejo, but, then, influenced by A. A. Parker, I opted to concentrate on the Spanish Golden Age, Renaissance & Baroque literature. Finally I received a Ford Foundation Dissertation Grant for Minorities (with a lot of thanks to Arturo Madrid) and completed the dissertation on a Baroque writer, *The Love Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo*, which after

many revisions and a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies, I published with Cambridge University Press (1984).

I came to the University of Houston, Department of Modern & Classical Languages, in 1981. I did a 12-year stint with Arte Público Press where I was editor of the *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, later *The Americas Review*. I published various editions of Chicano authors and literature, particularly *Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works*, and an anthology of short fiction, *Cuentos hispanos de los Estados Unidos*, still used in many Chicano courses. Because I was falling behind in Spanish literature, I left Arte Público; but I remained committed to Chicano literature, and continued teaching it. I also collect Chicano art and photography.

With the aid of a Ford Foundation Post-Doctoral Grant for minorities and a National Endowment Award to study Spanish paleography at the Newberry Library, I began six years of archival research on Spanish women's poetry of the 16th and 17th centuries at the Biblioteca Nacional de España and in Spanish convents. I enjoyed my conversations with cloistered nuns through the *locutorio*. This is a recess in the wall that has a double set of bars, through which one glimpses darkly the figure of a nun. On the side of the *locutorio* is a *torno*, which is like a large, vertical lazy susan. One puts an object—fruit, lace, letters, (and even a baby in the *torno* of the outside wall)—in the *torno* and gives it a twirl, and the nun removes it on the other side, and she does likewise. This is how I received manuscripts. The outcome of my research was an extensive, critical anthology and study, with the assistance of Elizabeth S. Boyce: *Tras el espejo la musa escribe: Lírica femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1993, Behind the Mirror the Muse Writes: Women's Lyric Poetry of the Golden Age) with a second revised edition, 2012. This book opened a new field of scholarship, such that there are now articles, dissertations, books, and conferences on the anthologized female poets; publications on them have served scholars for promotion and tenure.

In 1993 during a conference of Spanish poetry, the Society of Baroque & Hispanic Poetry was established, of which I was a founding member. I became the Editor of its journal, *Calíope*, 1993-2011.

I continued my textual scholarship, notably with the aid of a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, and completed a critical edition of María de Zayas y Sotomayor (1590- ca. 1650), *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (Catédra, 2000, Amorous and Exemplary Novellas), containing ten narratives within a Boccaccian frame. Zayas, a protofeminist, was the first Spanish female author of fiction to publish under her name (Beatriz Bernal published anonymously a book of chivalry in the 16th century, *Don Cristalián de España*). I completed editing Zayas's sequel, *Segunda parte del Sarao y entretenimiento honesto*, which was published along with the first part in two volumes, with the title—preferred by Zayas but denied by her editors—*Honesto y entretenido sarao*, with a reconstruction of the ideal texts (Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2017, <http://puz.unizar.es>). During this period, I also published an edition of studies on colonial and peninsular religious poetry, *Eros divino: Estudios sobre la poesía religiosa iberoamericana del Siglo XVII* (Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2010).

I also research, publish and taught the Spanish Civil War. My latest publication was an edition and study of a testimonial by a Spanish Civil War veteran (still alive at 100!): *Huyendo del fascismo* (Fleeing from Fascism), by Juan Jesús González Ruiz. He recounts the odyssey of 500,000 refugees from Catalunya to the French frontier—with many deaths from strafings by the German Luftwaffe Condor legion, hunger, hypothermia and suicides—and his incarceration with other Republicans in the French concentration camp in Argelès-sur-Mer, from which he escaped and soon after began writing his testimonial. His was

the first testimonial of the civil war, completed in April, 1939, the same month that Franco declared the end of the war. With his consent, I donated the manuscript to the Spanish Civil War Archives at the Biblioteca de Catalunya.

I retired from the University of Houston in 2015, where I taught a variety of courses, including Chicano literature and Golden Age literature, and women's literature of the period. Not a "scholarship boy" like Richard Rodriguez (*Hunger of Memory*), I applaud the scholarships and financial aid to Chicanos(as) by the Center for Mexican American Studies.*

*After 32 years affiliated with the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Houston, this autobiographical profile was requested by the former director of CMAS for the CMAS Newsletter, Faculty Profiles. In spite of numerous cuts and revisions, requested by the director—I guess to make it 'Chicano light'—, it was never published. This is an expansion of the original version.