





THE CHICAN@ LITERARY
IMAGINATION:

A COLLECTION OF CRITICAL STUDIES
BY FRANCISCO A. LOMELÍ

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Presentation

For all those who are scholarly concerned with Chicano culture and literature, to point out the most outstanding and influential Chicano/a writers is not a difficult task. Popular names such as Sabine Ulibarrí, Rudolfo Anaya, Alejandro Morales, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros or Cecile Pineda are rather familiar not only within the context of the American Southwest, but also all over the US, México, South America, and Europe. Spain is no exception, and Chicano/a writers visit our country invited to speak to an audience that is eagerly waiting to listen to American authors with ‘acento español.’ Every two years, for instance, an International Conference on Chicano Literature and Culture is hosted by a Spanish university, somehow proving the increasing interest this group has among the Spanish public. These conferences have turned into a ‘punto de encuentro’ among researchers from this side of the Atlantic and Chicano/a writers and academics from the other. Among the latter, names such as María Herrera-Sobek, Gary D. Keller, Genaro Padilla, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Manuel Martín, Nicolás Kanellos, or Gloria Andalzúa fill the bibliographic entries of the papers, essays, and MA and PhD dissertations that, in increasing numbers, are completed in Spain every year.

One of the most prolific and influential scholars in the subject of Chicano/a literature and culture is Francisco A. Lomelí, to whom this book tries to honor. There are many reasons for editing the present collection of critical essays. The more private ones are associated to our long-standing friendship with Francisco, the human being, whom we met as an undergraduate student in 1992 (Cañero) and a Doctoral Candidate in 1999 (Elices) at UCSB. But, although we cherish his closeness, we also admire the intellectual, the influential scholar, ‘el maestro.’ This respect comes from his inexhaustible academic career. He has widely published in the areas of Chicano/a Literature, Chicano Studies, American Southwest Literary History, Chicano Film, and Border Studies. Also, he has served as editor, guest editor, or member of the editorial board, of front-line journals devoted to expand the field of Chicano Studies (*De Colores*, *Confluencia*, *Discurso Literario*, *La Palabra*, *Latino Studies Journal*, *Bilingual Review*, *Ventana Abierta*, *Camino Real*, *Xalmán*, and many more). And he has edited, co-edited or written more than twenty books, some of which are seminal works in the field of Chicano Studies.

This collection of essays tries to give just a hint of the topics dealt with and covered by Professor Lomelí's productive career. Some of those who know Francisco's works may disagree with this selection, claiming that other seminal articles could have been included. Probably they are right. But our intention was to offer a broad view of his writings on the origins of Chicano/a literature and criticism and on Chicano/a authors, and therefore the book has been accordingly divided. The selection ends with an interview with Francisco in the year 2000, on a train coming back from Vitoria, Spain, when we were just breaking through the academy and found his support and guidance. We have taken too long to both publish the interview and edit this book, 'pero la espera valió la pena.' We believe Francisco Lomelí's articles compiled in this volume will provide the academic world with a bulk of very useful material, with enlightening and cleverly written papers, which will make it easier for researchers to dig into Chicano Culture and Literature.

We would like to end this brief presentation giving thanks to Francisco A. Lomelí for his 'sabios consejos' in compiling the different pieces of this volume. We are also indebted with the publishing houses and editors that first published the articles individually (*¡Gracias a todos!*). To the Instituto Franklin of the University de Alcalá and its personnel (especially José A. Gurpegui, his director) for making their 'Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin' the warmest home for this book. Finally to Chicanos/as from all times, to whom the book tries to reveal part of their literary and cultural past, present, and future. *¡Sí se puede!*

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Juan F. Elices
Universidad de Alcalá

I. Origins and Background of Chicano/a Literature and Criticism



An Interpretive Assessment of Chicano Literature and Criticism

The essay traces the literary, social and cultural roots of contemporary Chicano literature and its relation with American studies in general. Through a literary and critical 'archaeology' the article shows that, contrary to the general opinion, Chicanos, as well as their literature, are no recent immigrants trying to penetrate the mainstream. A revision of the different stages in the process of self-discovery, as well as the diverse manifestations of the creative energy from the works prior to 1965 and the wake of the Chicano movement to the contemporary Chicano Renaissance illustrates that American literary history is no longer a hegemonic activity pertaining to Anglo American literary circles. Notwithstanding obscurity, silencing and omissions, Chicano literary history emerges as another manifestation of tricksterism, as another side of the clever, survival-obsessed coyote, the character whose perseverance and ingenuity allow him to sidestep danger or locate sustenance. Chicano culture and literature is finally seen to participate of a wide variety of models, from Mexican literature to American science-fiction, from other contemporary Latin American writers to James Joyce, and to have inherent connections with the rest of the world.

There is little doubt that Chicano literature and the accompanying criticism are currently at productive stages of development. Their expansion and rate of growth have become a phenomena difficult to document, strictly due to the sheer quantitative proliferation. Greatly fueled by the impulsive fervor of the Chicano social movement of the 1960s and 1970s, known as a Renaissance or a "Florecimiento," the literature garnered a messianic bent during that era. At the peak of the social movement, and shortly thereafter, it was common to stress the literary production that addressed the immediacy, and urgency, of a historical situation. Without fully realizing it then, a historical posture was being promoted: we underscored how our people had not emerged out of a vacuum; yet, we seemed to speak from and to that contemporary vacuum. Little was intimately known about our collective background, so we mercilessly clung to our Mexicanness as if it were our last possession. We intimated and even intuited a rich tradition but our knowledge of actual works or artists was at best minimal. Most of us in 1970 were unable to cite a single noteworthy Chicano figure or text –César Chávez being perhaps the lone exception. Our incessant search inevitably resulted in enouncing

famous Mexican heroes who ruled the pages of Mexican textbooks or the dynamic realm of oral tradition. Somehow our historical memory had been either scarred or amnesiac in that we had drifted away, or nudged, from our previous cultural matrix. There was a dire need –spiritual as well as physical– to identify a homeland. It is not coincidental, for example, that most of the works during the height of the movement dealt, in one way or another, with providing historical/cultural renditions of Chicanos' search for what they were either in the present or in the past. Two works serve to illustrate this approach: *Yo soy Joaquín* (1967) by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (1971) by Alurista. We had become disconnected from our steps to relive that vague ephemeral past. Hence, a Neo-Indigenist trend emerged to try to fill that void. The Chicano Movement, then, represented a concerted effort to regain an ethos, a history and a social context.

But, the general impression of our culture today as well as our literature has been that we are recent immigrants trying to penetrate the mainstream. We have not been altogether convincing, not even to ourselves, that our presence in "el vasto norte," or what in 1848 became known as the American Southwest had deep roots and antecedents. Once landgrant holdings were parceled out, and owners were converted into labor force wage earners, much of our impoverished and powerless people were forced to accept the official Anglo American version of our conquest. What we called Aztlán offered much cognitive evidence as to our background in mythological and historical terms. As an attempt to salvage part of that loss, a quantum leap into a Nahuatl framework was tried, partially minimizing the centuries of Spanish colonial influence and the effects of territorialization under Anglo American rule. These were downplayed to instead highlight the 'brown/'white' dichotomy that seemed to spell our downfall through the post-industrial chambers of exploitation and second-class citizenry. The two pivotal points of convenient references usually targeted the Aztecs and the Mexican Revolution: the first represented a preferred crib of desired origins while the second marked a niche of redemption. Anything in between resembled a blur or a factor of lesser importance. Our essence rested on the nostalgic consumption of a simplification of ourselves, thus canonizing such important personalities as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Somehow, both distance and time had lessened our sense of diverse complexities to the degree that a civil war did not necessarily seem like a civil war, but rather, an extended clash between caudillos. In the meantime, we had been generally reduced to a landless and unskilled mass of people groping for a rightful place in a country that emerged strong as a result of our labor. Likewise, Chicano literature in the 1960s either concentrated, limitedly, on well-known Mexican symbols or identified situational experiences as couched in the barrio or the farm fields. The literary themes

revolved around identity and affirmation more than psychological or spatial discovery. This was a necessary and vital stage to undergo, the process of self-discovery, in order to first come to the full realization of how we had been efficaciously compartmentalized, and dehumanized, in American society. In part a purging effect, the politically motivated agenda to establish identity and pride had the function of redefining a new starting point for our people. Most significantly, it altered the focus from serving as work objects for majority society in order to concentrate on our own desires, delights and destiny. At that point we crossed a key juncture: from mechanically living out our external existence to intrinsically exploring our internal makeup. A work that best exemplifies this direction is “... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*” (1971) by Tomás Rivera. We began to recognize and tap into our potential as promoters of our creative and imaginative forces.

We did not fully anticipate where this recharged energy adequately fit in the larger scope of our historical gestation. Having regained a sense of awareness and presence, we initially did not know how to contextualize it within our past to measure it as just a one-time event or another symptomatic manifestation of our discontent. Most of our literature at the time centered around more urgent contemporary happenings in barrios, educational institutions, and the farm fields, while some critics opted toward indulging in literary history. The current events sometimes made it a requirement to devote the literary fancy to pressing social matters as they unfolded, but it became equally clear that a literary history was awaiting to be rediscovered. In hindsight, we can now pose the contrast between a sleeping giant about to be awakened (the common metaphor to characterize our people then) and the clever, survival-obsessed coyote (not to be confused with the smuggler of people, although he also depends much on an evasive character) that outfoxed its pursuers. The media promoted the metaphor of the sleeping giant in order to associate it with a social threat, possibly predisposed toward exercising an avenging wrath. However, the coyote, which best suits our oral tradition, more accurately reflects the attributes of perseverance and ingenuity to sidestep danger or locate sustenance. Our people, and consequently our literature, endured famine, turmoil and hardships. Many lows can be pinpointed throughout our development, but, most importantly, numerous significant highs can be highlighted. In other words, we in fact possessed a real past, not one invented out of rhetoric or political idealism, rather, one that had its own pulse and rhythm of existence.

In the area of literature, a massive corpus of uncatalogued Chicano works remained either lost, ignored or simply undisturbed by the watchful eye of a critical readership. These works tended to readily enter the realm of immediate oblivion but the reconstructive approach of the 1970s permitted, perhaps for the first time, to indulge in systematically combing lists or shelves for works from a generally forgotten

past. Works prior to 1965 appeared to comprise an amorphous and vague notion of prehistory. Chicano social evolution had been measured according to its association with Mexico and how we related or ceased to relate to our cherished country of origin. This framework is represented novelistically in the polemical work titled *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal. Even that latter work serves to illustrate a pre-Renaissance Chicano mindset through its unfolding of conflictive topics, such as assimilation and acculturation, the epic exodus from Mexico, a patriarchal system versus a transitional model concepts of authority, an iconoclastic optic of testing icons and hierarchies, etc. It is also worth noting that *Pocho* was not “rediscovered” until 1971 when an insatiable curiosity set in to systematically identify works by Chicanos prior to the critical year of 1965. Each uncovered text from a dusty shelf –and a foggy past– reinforced a sense of recuperating a part of our cultural expression. That object filled a void and broke new ground for uncovering others. Literary history suddenly assumed the role of an archaeological dig that provided greater and more expansive meaning to our ancestors and, most importantly, to our literary tradition. Each finding marked a coming to face with an empirical artifact from our past by piecing together disjointed fragments that miraculously survived. Together, these fragments provided a larger scope of the unknown by giving depth and breadth as well as concrete samples of writings that spoke of and in preterite modes. Thus, literary history did not have to depend on an in-group intuition of assumptions; clear and substantiating evidence was before us to uncover new ground of critical discourse. Literary history was no longer a hegemonic activity pertaining to Anglo American literary circles. For once, the argument could be supported that Chicano literature had a past, an evolution, stages of development and its own characteristics, oftentimes regionally bound to localized problematics and not totally dependent upon either Mexico or Anglo America. It can be argued that early Chicano literature established a particular discourse with other literatures, although that contact was not necessarily reciprocal. Its predicament was largely due to the stigmatization of being the creation of a conquered people: both American and Mexican literary circles ignored it, perhaps marginalizing it from a stand point of class and social status. In the United States, giving credence to a body of works written in Spanish did not suit well with the homogenizing trends of the nineteenth century. Chicanos basically clung to proven models of literary construct in relatively isolated cases of published works, but oral tradition continued strong despite the onslaught of new foreign influences or the social disintegration caused by the conquest and hardened by the institutionalization of territorial governance.

In other words, a diverse but extensive quantity of literary expression prior to 1965 deserves a rightful place in the annals of what we currently call Chicano literature.

Too often, teachers of this literature strictly devote their attention to works after the explosion of the contemporary Chicano Renaissance. Too frequently, professors fail to outline its historical development, thus giving the impression of literary hydroponics as if it does not have a legitimate past. Nothing could be further from the truth. Early works and authors before 1965 merit closer scrutiny and analysis because their situation repeatedly parallel or help explain the backdrop of more modern views. Besides, many of these early works challenge the conventional precepts of traditional genres—a most healthy exercise in order to assess a work's contribution by its intrinsic work and not according to boxed-in categories. Contemporary writers have not come onto the scene out of a vacuum; in other words, there is a history of literary antecedents. There exists a rich but at times modest background in what could be termed a written culture. Chicanos have a tradition of literary creativity and publishing since 1848 and before that the Spanish colony of New Spain evinces numerous samples of writings that are a direct product of what came to be the American Southwest or Aztlán. Therefore, Chicanos have not continued as illiterate or as unpublished as we are made to believe. Many myths set in to perpetuate that very notion because our place in American society oscillated between being low-class, unskilled workers and/or undesirable foreigners. Chicanos have not remained silent; their voice of pure imagination or discontent has generally been ignored or relegated to pockets of localities where the major society did not take notice or repressed acknowledging it. Works abound if we wish to find them: early monographic texts are perhaps scarce but an infinite amount of writings from all genres remain stored in microfilmed newspaper collections that require patience and time to extract. Without trying to sound dramatic, many texts are just waiting to be discovered as significant pieces of a larger puzzle. Only recently since the 1980s has a growing number of scholars proposed regional case studies in order to provide us with the larger picture of Chicano literary history throughout the Southwest and beyond. There is no doubt that the tip of the iceberg is now unveiling a larger mass of creative writings that uncover fascinating and revealing facets of our collective intrahistory.

Although we lack a practical text of literary history, no longer can we find refuge in the argument that no viable samples exist to sufficiently represent early writings. Specific works are readily available—at least in libraries. Chuck M. Tatum's *Chicano Literature* (1982) and *Mexican American Literature* (1990) offer a reasonable starting point with multiple examples and summaries. In two seminal articles titled “Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective” (1973) and “Cuatro siglos de la prosa aztlanense” (1980), Luis Leal delineates the trajectory of a myriad of texts that, previous to his accomplishing it, had not been incorporated into a single literary historical tradition. Luis Leal, possibly the father of modern approaches to Chicano

literary history, has contributed a number of valuable parameters to the field while providing an impetus to recording a legacy dating back to at least 1542. The following list offers some likely selections from before 1900:

1. *Relaciones* (1542) by Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: the first prose treatment that describes the peoples, flora and fauna of “el vasto norte;”
2. *Historia de la Nueva Mexico* (1610) by Gaspar Perez de Villagra: the first epic poem of the region –which includes the entire U.S.–, comparable to Ercilla’s *La araucana*;
3. *Los comanches* (1779?) by an anonymous author: one of the first dramatic pieces to indulge in localized politics in the conflictive frontier involving Hispanics and Comanche Indians;
4. *Writings of Junípero Serra* (1784?) by Junípero Serra: rich anecdotal prose about the early wanderings of the famous priest credited for the founding of many California missions;
5. *Los pobladores nuevomexicanos y su poesía, 1889–1950* (1976) by Anselmo Arellano: consists of the first representative compilation of early poetry from New Mexico that was transcribed from an assortment of newspapers (themes vary; “El idioma español” by L.M. Alarid is highly recommended);
6. “El corrido de Gregorio Cortez” (1895?) in “*With His Pistol in His Hand*,” compiled and edited by Américo Paredes: one of the first well-known Chicano ballads from Texas;
7. *Hijo de la tempestad* (1892) by Eusebio Chacón: one of the first political allegories in novel form that closely captures the social turmoil of the 1890s;
8. *The Squatter and the Don*, originally from 1885 by María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, recreates an important era of California history;
9. A variety of individual *corridos*, *decimas*, or *cuentos* call also serve the purpose of highlighting other desired aspects.

To amply characterize the period from 1900 to 1965 with early works prior to the Renaissance period, the following select works offer potential candidates for discussion:

10. *Cuentos californianos* (1910?) by Adolfo Carrillo: a collection of variegated topics from local color to urban depictions;
11. *Las primicias* (1916) by Vicente Bernal: a young man’s poetic repertoire consisting of nostalgia for his native land, New Mexico, and experimentations with both style and technique;
12. Again, Anselmo Arellano’s *Los pobladores nuevomexicanos y su poesía, 1889–1950* provides evidence of unknown writings from a large segment of writers who originally appeared in newspapers;
13. *Crónicas diabólicas* (1916–1926) de ‘Jorge Ulica’ (alias for Julio G. Arce) and edited by Juan Rodríguez in 1982: contains a wide variety of humorous anecdotes, *costumbrista* narrations, plus biting and specious journalistic essays;
14. *New Mexico Triptych* (1940) by Fray Angélico Chávez: a series of well crafted stories about cultural life;

15. *Mexican Village* (1945) by Josephina Niggli: provides a scintillating portrayal of a gallery of small town characters;
16. *We Fed Them Cactus* (1954) by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca: a nostalgic view of pastoral existence in the llanos lamenting the drastic social changes;
17. Mario Suárez's short stories, beginning in the 1940s, particularly "Señor Garza" and "El Hoyo:" present some of the first excellent depictions of flesh-and-blood characters from the barrios;
18. *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal: represents one of the most comprehensive and detailed views of a Mexican family's adjustments to American life while depicting a first-generation's dilemmas and an individual's awareness of self;
19. *City of Night* (1963) by John Rechy: offers a disturbing account of a young homosexual's urban picaresque journey through the sameness of alienating urban settings.

As one can see, there exists during the aforementioned periods an abundant quantity of diverse and challenging books to sufficiently engage in animated discussions about content, thematic preference, varied perspectives, relative significance, and uniqueness in characterization. Besides, each work cited is quite distinct from texts that later appear during the Chicano literary movement after the 1960s. There is no longer a justifiable reason why earlier writings are excluded from the core of literary presentations.

The year 1965 witnessed a unique bend of factors that combined to generate a new ethos and reverberated to create a totally distinct concept of Chicano literary imagination. For example, the stage was set through the emergence of two crucial events: as César Chávez's farmworker labor movement solidified, El Teatro Campesino, principally organized by Luis Valdez, revived and developed an artistic form of theater that revolutionized Chicanos' self-portrayal in popular or at times funky, grass-roots skits called *actos*. These garnished the two necessary sparks to incite the social explosion known as the Chicano Movement. The first provided the concrete framework for political commitment while the second prepared an artistic medium with which to hone *concientización* about our social plight, thus initiating the purging effects of a conquered mind. Commitment and accountability helped unleash a renewed activity among Chicanos in many arenas simultaneously and the poets and other artists joined this communal attempt to act out its self-determination. A cultural and political rebirth emerged by inducing our creative talents, thereby tapping into an integral part of our psyche and heart. Our repressed self emerged to assert our inner makeup with the objective of being active participants in determining modern history. The year 1965 has come to be known as the starting point for contemporary actualization.

Events accelerated to form new avenues of action and artistic experimentation. In 1967 a clear manifestation of a boom was in order: (1) the funding of *El Grito*

at Berkeley established an alternative outlet to adequately apply the social sciences to Chicano concerns, plus their inclusion of literary works created what would later be termed the Quinto Sol Generation; (2) Reies López Tijerina, through his Alianza Federal de Mercedes, called attention to the latent landgrant problem of New Mexico when they raided a courthouse; (3) Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales published his *Yo soy Joaquín*, a nationalistic poetic manifesto that embodied a rallying cry for renewal while rendering a historical outline of the Mexican; (4) the Brown Berets, a militant faction of the Chicano Movement, were formed to support proactive community functions; (5) in the meantime, the movement was crossing over from the farm fields into urban settings and particularly the educational institutions. As a consequence, this movement became one to be reckoned with as a multifaceted social upheaval demanding changes and offering solutions to achieve them.

The years 1968 and 1969 represent the prelude to a full blow-out, that is, the most visible mobilization of Chicanos across the spectrum of socio-economic and political fields of battle. Again, literature played a central role in developing key concepts, such as Aztlán, in modifying symbols, and in legitimizing a Chicano mode of expression called code-switching, Spanglish or bilingual. Alurista was the main promotor of Aztlán. His poetic enterprise became a national Chicano concern at the Youth Conference at Denver in 1969 when *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was adopted into the final platform. That document, along with *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, became the two better-known manifestos of the time: the former to propel a national Chicano social agenda and the latter to address the need for institutions of higher learning to become accountable in creating Chicano Studies departments. By then, Chicanos could allude to their origins, a homeland, a language, and the foundations were being set for greater participation in the political process which became more defined in 1970 through the founding of La Raza Unida Party. Some works reflected this Zeitgeist, namely *Los cuatro* (1969), a collection of militant movement poetry by Abelardo Delgado, Ricardo Sánchez, Raymond “Tigre” Pérez and Juan Valdez. The articulation of craft was not of the utmost importance; what mattered, above all, was the emotive, almost visceral plea for identifying and denouncing injustices. Art was definitely at the service of a social movement because Chicano artists recognized that art could only improve concomitantly with the progress of its procreators. So, art was a direct reflection of a group’s efforts to break barriers, undermine obstacles, dispel myths, and reconceptualize a fairer social order.

The year 1970 now stands out as a focal epicenter of literary consciousness. It denotes the changing guard from an emerging echo of disenchantment to a bona fide contemporary voice of unbridled imagination. Numerous events coincided that confirm

the view: (1) although *Chicana* (1970) by Richard Vásquez fell short of propagating a new thematic agenda, its title became emblematic of referring to a Mexican American story *a secas* as “Chicano;” (2) perhaps more significant was the initiating of the Quinto Sol Literary Award sponsored by the publishing house of the same name from Berkeley which subsequently served as the standard bearer of canon in the novel and short fiction genres—Tomás Rivera being the first recipient of that award for his now classic “... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*”; (3) the magazine *La Luz* from Denver Colorado, dedicated a section to the analysis of individual Chicano works; (4) also, the Centro de Estudios Chicanos Publications from San Diego State College embarked on an ambitious project of organizing the first annotated bibliography, which presented a skeletal compilation and whose value rested not so much in the quality of reviews but more in the format used to document such vital inquiries; (5) the founding of the journal *Aztlán* crystallized a sense of homeland through its title at the same time that it advanced ‘cientificismo’ in all disciplines in order to undergird sophisticated techniques of analyses; (6) the latter two examples further strengthen the area of literary criticism and it received an additional boost from the Ford Foundation when it earmarked funds for graduate studies; (7) a series of Chicano Studies departments were created in that year to address the recent trends of scholarship and cultural studies; and (8) La Raza Unida Party was founded by José Ángel Gutiérrez in Texas in searching for other viable means to represent Chicanos politically. As one can see, a united front of various factors converged to produce a macroscope of collaborative initiatives with direct repercussions in literature and criticism. These two fields not only found themselves in a spiral of productivity but also they were never to be the same again.

The early 1970s constitutes a most dynamic period of development in Chicano literature. The number of works produced exceeded previous projections and, qualitatively, the innovations were dramatic. The openly militant and unobscured expression, although still somewhat prevalent, gave way to more subtle forms of sophisticated techniques and transcendental thematics: Much of the literature had been viewed with smirks and silent assaults by a traditional readership, usually composed of academic departments. Some considered it too contrived with only ulterior motives while others regarded it a mock imitation of ‘high-brow’ literature which at times it was. The perception persisted to categorize it as being adulterated political pamphleteerism and/or folksy popular expression that seemed subpar and unclassifiable. However, landmark works broke new ground: *Floricanto en Aztlán* (1971) by Alurista fuses two languages—while blending Nahuatl aesthetics with a contemporary barrio concerns; “... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*” (1971) by Tomás Rivera presents the migrant worker as the collective protagonist in a neo-realist mode by fragmenting time, space and structure; *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) by Rudolfo

A. Anaya establishes a captivating story of apprenticeship, thus signaling a struggle for survival in a changing epoch that ignores spirituality, myth and tradition; *Estampas del Valle y otras cosas* (1973) by Rolando Hinojosa-Smith creates a postmodern novel about a fictionalized Chicano space –much in the tradition of Faulkner and Garcia Márquez, except devoid of magical realism– which is decentered but held together by a gallery of loosely connected characters; *Actos* (1971) by El Teatro Campesino embodies the first modern collection of Chicano skits molded with an unforgettable *rascuachi* flair and wit, creating a style shattering theatrical form that became internationally known; *The Day of the Swallows* (1971) by Estela Portillo-Trambley offers an ambiguous archetypal play that operates at various allegorical levels while hinting at a burgeoning feminism of either altering the world order or sacrificing oneself for those changes; and *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974) by Miguel Mendez contributes a highly poetic *frontera* novel about a people’s tragic journeys of suffering, at the same time that variants of language occupy the central focus. Criticism, however, did not enjoy a popularity parallel to its literary counterpart. Early examples essentially appeared unnoticed. Perhaps the first attempt that remained unacknowledged until 1976 was *Breve reseña de la literatura hispana de Nuevo México y Colorado* (1959) by Jose Timoteo López, Edgardo Núñez, and Roberto Lara Vialpando, whose modest account traces the literature’s longstanding tradition as a natural and well-known phenomenon. They do not indulge in the polemics of definition; they simply discuss its evolution in a matter of fact fashion, citing specific works. They comment on the exclusion of this literature: “tanto en libros históricos como en poesía popular. Nada (se) dice de los tradicionales romances españoles que todavía se cantan en los valles del Río Grande y de San Luis. Tampoco (se) menciona el teatro popular y tradicional de los campesinos de Nuevo México y Colorado” (8). Already in 1917, Miguel Romera-Navarro, in *El hispanismo en Norte-América: exposición y crítica de su aspecto literario*, prophetically observes: “La historia y exposición del hispanismo literario en Norte-América están por escribir(se). Ni un solo estudio, comprensivo o superficial, popular o erudito, se le ha dedicado” (1). Critical discourses basically remained undeveloped and rudimentary in nature until the early 1970s. Possibly the best exposé of literary criticism prior to 1970 is Francisco Armando Ríos’s “The Mexican in Fact, Fiction and Folklore” (*El Grito*, 1969) in his dealing with three distinct but related areas. Felipe Ortego y Gasca, in his dissertation “Backgrounds to Mexican American Literature” (1971), exemplifies the first comprehensive and encyclopedic treatment of Chicano literature. A non-orthodoxical approach, mixing scholarly analysis with bato loco jargon, is carried out by Jesús “El Flaco” Maldonado in *Poesía chicana: Alurista, el mero chingón* (1971). It was in the early 1970s that the publishing apparatus increased dramatically, including both criticism and creative works, in such journals as *Revista*

Chicano-Riqueña, *De Colores*, *Caracol*, *Tejidos*, *La Palabra*, *Maize*, and *Mango*. Other journals that later dedicated special issues were: *Latin American Literary Review*, *Mester*, *Bilingual Review*, *Denver Quarterly* and *The New Scholar*. One of the most significant highlights of criticism between 1970 and 1975 was Juan Bruce Novoa's theoretical precept of "literary space," as modified from Mircea Eliade, George Bataille, Juan Ponce and Octavio Paz. For once, serious theoretical considerations were thought proposed in analyzing and judging this literature, instead of solely depending on thematic approaches.

To best illustrate the meteoric proliferation of Chicano literature and criticism, a quick review of bibliographies is telling. For example, in 1971 *Bibliografía de Aztlán* contains a mere 6 items of Chicano works, the remaining 12 items being of either Mexican origin, Chicanesco works, or other indirectly related summaries. In contrast, by 1976 *Chicano Perspectives in Literature: A Critical and Annotated Bibliography* by Lomeli and Urioste lists a total of 127 annotations, including some early works before 1965. In the same year, Juan Rodríguez began to circulate his *Carta abierta*, an on-and-off-again enterprise, that injected critical dialogue, promoted polemics and satire, and tendered witty and succinct judgements from the editor, plus, most importantly, he inserted didactic materials as well as brief reviews on recent works and trends. Rodríguez served multiple purposes: as a database, he was our Chicano books in print, the first reviewer, the first to provide critical annotations, a general informant about happenings, plus our literary counselor about leads and things to avoid. Ernestina N. Eger, in *A Bibliography of Criticism of Contemporary Literature* (1982), meticulously documents the "explosion of critical activity" in Chicano journals, mainstream sources and international outlets. By 1985 Roberto G. Trujillo and Andrés Rodríguez, in *Literatura Chicana: Creative and Critical Writings Through 1984*, compiled a spectacular biography of 783 items, ranging from typical entries to dissertations, video and sound recordings. This incredible rate of growth seems imposing, especially when we consider that less than 20 years ago the anachronistic debate revolved mainly around the existence of such a body of literature.

After 1975, the advantage held by creative writings over criticism waned. Fundamental changes began to occur in both camps. Most of the established Quinto Sol Generation writers (Rivera, Anaya, and Hinojosa as novelists, and Alurista as a poet, with Portillo-Trambley being the exception) grounded their narratives in culturalist terms while receiving sanctions and backing from a Chicano publisher in depicting certain cultural values and social types. Their objectives coincided in destereotyping the Mexican while making concerted efforts to put the Chicano on the literary map of American letters. In essence, their view of the subject conveyed an epic framework that presented a people in a horizontal perspective. The concentration on spatial portrayals

(i.e. New Mexico, the migrant worker, Texas) serves to support this contention. Part of their goal was to give a global scope while providing historical depth, sociological heterogeneity and a complexity of characters. They desired to break away from the straightjacket of unidimensionality and stereotypes. Despite becoming classics, they were initially limited to covering much space without grounding their stories on specificity. The next ensuing group of writers, whom I call the Isolated Generation of 1975, answered the call but from totally diverse points of origin. Instead of reporting (in the novel: Alejandro Morales, Ron Arias, Isabella Ríos, and Miguel Méndez to a degree; Bernice Zamora in poetry), they advance a vertical conceptualization of marginalized social sectors. The latter group opts toward probing Chicano characters and circumstances with a magnifying glass in order to unearth the internal dynamics of a single place, even if it means exposing the contradictions and the harsh realities beyond an illusory optimism. The Isolated Generation joined the Chicano literary ranks, not through Chicano support, but roundabout by experimenting with other models: from Mexican Literature of the Onda to American science-fiction, from other contemporary Latin American writers to James Joyce. Oftentimes, they went abroad to publish their works (i.e. Alejandro Morales in *Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, 1975, and Miguel Méndez in *Peregrinos de Aztlán*, 1974, or as in the case of Isabella Ríos, she produced her work *Victuum*, 1975, out of her garage). This generation offered works that at first impression did not prescribe to predictable means or ends. At the center of their creativity was the issue of language –not as an Aluristian preoccupation but a linguistically universal one. Thus, their works are wrought with ambiguity: they express more than what we first imagine. Besides, their optic is microcosmic in order to explore the paradox and they resort to the allegory to inject greater meaning and echoes of intertextuality.

Another salient group to emerge with impetus in 1975 was the women writers. They, in a sense, embrace a similar orientation as the Isolated Generation by underscoring female characters and issues. They introduce a focus that had been previously underrepresented as men were usually limited in their perspective of female roles and dimensions. As has become poignantly clear, these roles and dimensions revealed external male impositions that either bordered on stereotypes or a narrow range of characterizations. Similar to previous Chicano literati, they set out to rectify the situation of a recognizable gap. Unanimity in their approaches should not be sought because their differences are as heterogeneous as any other group. However, certain trends can be traced. For example, the first wave of Chicana writers couched their writings in a cultural setting, obviously influenced by the nationalist vogue. This continues to a degree but changes as they hone their subject matter and explore personalized circumstances. Some of these first authors, that is, Bernice Zamora in *Restless Serpents* (1976), Dorinda

Moreno in *La mujer es la tierra: La tierra de vida* (1975), Sylvia Gonzales in *La Chicana piensa* (1974), and Angela de Hoyos in *Arise, Chicano and Other Poems* (1975), engage their writings in a critical dialogue found in the Chicano movement. Their vantage point tried to balance a culturalist with a feminist view. Soon thereafter, the intensity of Chicana feminist became heightened with such works as *Bloodroot* (1977) by Alma Villanueva and *The invitation* (1979) by Ana Castillo. The double message of culture and gender becomes further fused, but the emphasis now leads towards a feminist vein. Consequently, the 1980s, instead of being designated as the decade of the Hispanic should receive the acclaim as the decade of the Chicana writer since they made the greatest strides and that included criticism.

The late 1970s experiences a relative shortage in groundbreaking works in the overall Chicano scene with the exception of Chicanas. Criticism made significant advancements through a series of rhetorical experimentations and paradigms. Joseph Sommers, in "From the Critical Premise to the Product: Critical Modes and the Applications to a Chicano Literary Text" (1977), designs a controversial comparison of three critical approaches (the formalist, culturalist and socio-historical), while dismissing the first two and opting for the last. This spurred defenses and rebuttals, but most of all it generated interest and critical dialogue to deal with Chicano texts. It was no longer safe to hide behind the mechanical process of achieving objective analysis. Thus criticism at this time gains an important ideological element to properly place literature in the context of production vis-à-vis the hierarchical notions of what literature has been for the dominant classes. The new concept of criticism, beyond thematics, style or characterization, was further strengthened by Ramón Saldivar's pivotal article, "The Dialectic of Difference: Toward a Theory of a Chicano Novel," in which he related intrinsic textual dynamics with social and literary history. No longer would Chicano literature be situated as isolated from any other literature, especially American; it became increasingly vivid that it had inherent interconnections with the rest of the world.

The 1980s encompasses a greater acceptance in some mainstreaming. Again, Chicanas appear to spearhead the most noteworthy creative writings. To account for this burgeoning, criticism also has expanded in scope by forming new theoretical foci, ranging from applications of Bakhtin to Walter Ong, or in simply originated theories relevant to minority literatures. One sample of this trend is the upcoming issue of *Discurso Literario* (1990) that offers a diversity of approaches. In addition, other developments have enhanced a wider readership: (1) major conferences zero in on questions related to reconstructing the canon in similar topics to reconceptualize literary sclerosis; (2) internationalization through conferences in Germany, France,

Spain and Mexico augment the sphere of acceptability beyond the U.S. borders; (3) ambitious reference books are organized to accommodate the geometric growth of demand such as *Chicano Literature: A Reference Guide* (1985) and *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Chicano Writers* (1989); (4) Chicana authors lead the forefront through a keen feminist mode of innovations and insight, thus leaving an undeniable imprint in both Chicano and feminist letters (i.e. Lorna Dee Cervantes' *Emplumada* (1981); Pat Mora's *Chants* (1984); Lucha Corpi's *Palabras de Mediodía/Noonwords* (1980); Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiabuala Letters* (1986); Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1985); Helena María Viramontes's *The Moths and Other Stories* (1985); Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* (1986); and Denise Chávez's *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986)); a diverse crop of anthologies appear, such as *A Decade of Hispanic Literature: An Anniversary Anthology* (1982), *Hispanics in the United States: An Anthology of Creative Literature* (1980), *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (1983); *Antología de la literatura chicana* (1986); *Contemporary Chicano Poetry: An Anthology* (1986); the *Palabra Nueva* series of poetry and prose; and Harcourt Brace Jovanovich's *Mexican American Literature* (1989), Sandra Cisneros' American Book Award for *The House on Mango Street*, Nash Candelaria's Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award for *Inheritance of Strangers*. Gary Soto's American Book Award for *Living Up the Street*, and Lionel García's PEN Southwest Discovery Prize for *Leaving Home*.

The 1990s have continued to produce fruitful results in the field of Chicano/a literature for the variety, breadth and range of such expression. If the 1980s served as a strong notice of Chicano/a's presence in literary circles, the 1990s clearly have left an indelible imprint of their impact. Questioning the literature's place in American letters now seems an anachronistic gesture. In other words, it is no longer necessary to state that it has come of age but to reaffirm that it is in fact enriching the general American literary landscape with new voices, groundbreaking thematics and renewed vistas. Experimentation has been taken to new heights while challenging conventions within the literature and outside of it. A proliferation of perspectives has become a stamp of originality in the recent writings, thus exploring every possible social and individualized experience. The variety of trans-generic writings is particularly noteworthy, thereby underscoring hybridities, cross-fertilizations and remapping of literary impulses. It is now more common than not that works transcend a single generic construction, as is well evinced by the proliferation of memoirs, (auto)biographies, quasi-diaries or journals, *testimonios*, ethnographies, mystery novels, detective narratives and many others. Conventional literary forms have become the central issue of numerous works in which their respective category becomes questioned, defied or altered. Examples of such writings are Norma Cantú's *Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995),

Luis L. Rodríguez's *Always Running: La Vida Loca; Gang Days in L.A.* (1993), Rubén Martínez's *The Other Side: Notes from the New L.A., Mexico City and Beyond* (1992), Marisela Norte's poetry recordings, Louie García-Robinson's *The Devil, Delfina Varela, and the Used Chevy* (1993), Luis Urrea's *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (1993), Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997), Michele Serros's *Chicana falsa* (1995), Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), Estevan Arellano's *Inocencia ni pica ni escarda pero siempre se come el mejor elote* (1992), and Graciela Limón's *The Memory of Ana Calderon* (1994) and *Song of the Hummingbird* (1996).

Another recent trend is the development of the detective and mystery novels, becoming an important sub-group of Chicano/a writings. Among some of the more outstanding works are Rolando Hinojosa's *Partners in Crime* (1985), Rudolfo Anaya's *Rio Grande Fall* (1996), Michael Nava's *Golden Boy* (1988), Lucha Corpi's *Cactus Blood* (1995), and Manuel Ramos's *The Ballad of Gata Guerrero* (1994).

As can be ascertained, Chicano literature has come a long way from its humble beginnings of epic poems, popular verses of El Viejo Vilmas of the 19th century, *corridos*, hidden writing in a lost newspaper, manifesto, *rascuachi* publications or garage ventures. It is currently gaining much acclaim at an international level and, finally, penetrating the exclusive clubs of American literature circles. Whereas omissions used to be the role, Chicanos and Chicanas are now highly solicited creative voices and theoretical technicians who can fill the literary shadows of American experience. Chicano literature has garnered a special niche because it has maintained close ties with its sources of inspiration. It continues relatively free of commercialism although this fact is becoming more of a dilemma to avoid. The pressures are mounting to join the mainstream, but it appears that Chicanos and Chicanas are proceeding cautiously to retain authenticity while fine tuning the unpredictable spheres of the imagination. It is precisely for that reason that the literature finds itself in a mushrooming moment of popularity and high regard.

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An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence

A myth has persisted that the body of literary expression known as Chicano literature only parallels the popular usage of the word “Chicano,” implying that its origins should be explained in terms of the mid-1960s. True, most, scholars emphasize its recent development, what Juan Rodríguez calls “floreCIMIENTO” and Philip Ortego calls a “Chicano Renaissance,” but the media in general reinforce the myth that our people –and, thus our literature– are strictly a recent contemporary invention.¹ Though conveniently descriptive for an uninformed mass media, such attitudes are to a degree detrimental because they perpetuate, sometimes unconsciously, the portrayal of our people as a “sleeping giant” on the verge of waking up, thereby assuming there has been a dormant stage. The truth of the matter is that our literature has been perceived with as much confusion as have our people, the extreme case being that traditional literary circles do not admit its existence nor do they acknowledge its birthright. Though viewed as an invisible minority, Mexicans have always been a strong force in the Southwest, particularly in the areas of custom, architecture, foods, geographical names, agriculture, and the arts.

Our literary expression has remained vigorous through oral tradition and folklore, but unfortunately the language barrier has not permitted it to transcend cultural lines. It has never made an impact on Anglo-American literature, subsisting marginally as if it were not a part of the overall American experience. However, the rebellious and militant 1960s left an imprint on us as Chicanos. We came to the full realization of the capabilities we had at our disposal through the written word. If in the past literature represented a means with which to express a passing moment of beauty, in the sixties it became a concrete mechanism with which to convey images of our particular experience. In a sense, we had to undo a long history of misconceptions, distortions, and caricatures that misrepresented our way of being. The Chicano Movement provided a context in which we could function, thrive, and finally declare our artistic independence and demand self-determination—the right to define our art in its own terms.² The literary movement in the sixties advocated a cultural identity that previously had been stigmatized by the nebulous notion of a supposedly a historical people. From this affirmation of Chicano identity emerged the need to confront ourselves as a living

paradox –as foreigners in our native land. We took serious note of economic defeats in our history, but at the same time we recognized our triumph of cultural survival.³ Literary activity for part of our cultural presence in the Southwest, even though it has been ignored by dominant society.⁴

Before developing a panoramic view of Chicano literature, we should first know some of the workings of literature. The creative art of using language reflects collective conditions when an individual chooses to write down a real or imagined experience.⁵ From another perspective, literature is a medium for imagination, not limited to seeing reality for what it is, but including what might be. Francisco Jiménez states: “By the term ‘literature’ we meant imaginative use of language to interpret human experience.”⁶ In fact, it may well go beyond a given time and space, though these elements influence the writer’s fancied construct of the world. The protagonist in the novel *Pocho* alludes to this idea when he tells his mother:

Mama, do you know what happens to me when I read? All those hours that I sit, as you sometimes say, “ruining my eyes”? I travel, Mama. I travel all over the world, and sometimes out of this whole universe, and I go back in time and again forward. I do not know I am here, and I do not care. I am always thinking of you and my father except when I read. Nothing is important to me then, and I even forget that I am going to die sometimes. I know that I have so much to learn and –so much to see that I cannot possibly have enough time to do it all, for the Mexican people are right when they say that life is only a breath.⁷

The authors of *Chicano Perspectives in Literature* see the question of literary expression in still other terms when they add:

Literature mirrors the multiple personalities and motivations, the small victories, and the quiet suffering, the outcries and the anguish –existence in its many phases. Literature assimilates all possible experience in order to recreate an original reality.... For these reasons, literature is history, economics, psychology, philosophy, politics and sociology molded by the acts of inspiration and creativity into a literary form which aims to produce an *effect that transcends the limits of merely informing*.⁸

Explicitly stated, its purpose does not have to be practical, nor its dividends, immediate. Its objective is generally long-range, preferring to elicit a more intense or wiser life-awareness.

Chicano literature fulfills all the criteria above, and it underlines an ideology of *Chicanismo*, a social-artistic awareness within the bounds of our culture. It is imperative to discuss the origins of this literature in terms of an old phenomenon as well as in terms of a new one. It was not part of an overnight revelation. Chicano writings became noticeable in the mid-sixties, but further research soon verified a continuous

literary tradition that had survived almost submerged in anonymity, marginal to what was accepted by Anglo-American. Our literature is characterized by two distinct beginnings. The year 1848 marks its *historical beginning* because the Mexican-American confrontation determined that Mexicans in the United States automatically became Chicano (circumstantially, at least, since the term was in very limited use at time). The more contemporary date of 1965 is significant as a *symbolic spiritual rebirth* or resurgence. That year the Teatro Campesino joined the social struggle of La Causa with César Chávez. Literature and social reality converged in an inseparable entity.⁹ Like the tip of an iceberg, the year 1965 represents a larger and unknown body of artistic activity that had been ignored—one of the best kept secrets of the Southwest for 120 years. This period of Chicano literary history has been accurately described by Philip Ortego as the “Dark Ages” in American letters. It was not until the beginning of a new era in 1965 that the Chicano boom began in all the arts—literature, painting, murals, music. The arts became modes of expression for the Chicano movement as its members established a close relationship, each nurturing the other.

One issue that consistently arises is whether Chicano literature deserves to be called an entity in itself or whether it fits within American, Mexican, or Latin-American literatures.¹⁰ There are those who make the distinction according to linguistic differences: if written in English it is supposed to indicate its American ties; if written in Spanish then it is associated with Mexican or Latin-American literatures. If we use this scheme, however, how do we account its interlingual blending, its binary nature, and its bisensitivity, the Chicano’s access to diverse avenues and shades of expression? We are led to many answers. Philip Ortego classifies it as an integral part of the Hispanic period that constitutes a segment of the overall American experience.¹¹ If this is true, why has American literature refused to accept it? Certainly other factors besides physical borders have to be taken into account, for example, actual interaction or *convivencia* with Anglo Americans, and the issue of acceptance. The fact that we have been categorically excluded and alienated from any significant participation at the decision-making level means that we are perceived as nonentities, a people without a voice. Such institutional ostracism and estrangement means that, for all practical purposes, Chicanos have never been seen as part of American history. Luis Leal observes: “To consider Chicano literature as part of American literature is an object too idealistic, at least for the time being, for socially Chicanos are considered a group apart”.¹²

Others suggest that our literature should be embraced under Mexican letters when Spanish is the principal language used.¹³ The general notion here is that Chicanos represent a lost orphan overtaken by a dominant culture, who never relinquished the Mexican heritage completely. Though partly true, such an attitude fails to measure

Chicano creativity on its own terms. It does not take into account linguistic uniqueness, distinctive shades of meaning, and historical purpose. Also, it implies that Chicano writing must form a part of Latin-American literature, since a larger number of Chicano and Chicana writers (including critics) have received their formal training in Spanish Departments. Admitting the influence of certain Latin-American authors such as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Juan Rulfo is not enough proof to claim this literature for the literary tradition of Latin America.¹⁴ Most writers “borrow” or look elsewhere for inspiration: all writing is a human attempt to find the meaning of the world; Chicano expression is no different, except that here Chicanos are carrying out the activity in a Chicano context of historical circumstance and social conditions.

We find the definitive answer to the original question of what is Chicano literature in the authors themselves. But what is Chicano? Usually nationality resolves any doubts, but a cultural identity based on ethnic background deserves special consideration in view of the fact that Chicanos perceive their creative efforts apart from, though much related to, American and Mexican traditions. The Basques in Spain, the French in Canada, and the Irish in Northern Ireland all face a parallel problem of identity. We are dealing with a literature within a dominant culture, whose posture is to make a stand against what the latter dictates, and to reach for “poetic autonomy” by resorting to two languages (and their variants) at will, and to their respective emotional substances. Both language and feeling contribute to this unique stance. *Bless Me, Última* is clearly a Chicano work, not simply because the author, Rudolfo Anaya, meets the definition of a Chicano (an American of Mexican descent), but also because his novel was imagined in Spanish but written in English. His worldview is culturally based, that is, Chicano based.

Many critics insist on defining Chicano literature by the product instead of by the producer. They demand a picture of social reality that is based on a clear-cut political theme, accompanied by unmistakable local color. They wish literature to serve as an instrument for combatting oppression, a social document or manifesto, narrow in scope. To establish a priori guidelines, to define the literary space¹⁵ in which Chicanos should write is to impose preconceptions and curtail creativity. Literature requires a free spirit if it is to nurture the idea of liberation. Moreover, writing according to restricted subjects harms Chicanos’ ability to produce literature. Then the myth that our scope is confined to narrow horizons is really fulfilled. No one questions Kurt Vonnegut’s right to fantasize, yet some are suspicious of Ron Arias’s (in *The Road to Tamazunchale*) apparent lack of realism. Literature cannot be expected to satisfy only our need for representative images. Lesser forms of it merely imitate; higher forms succeed in recreating.

Our literature needs to be judged according to universal literary criteria, but its own particular modes of expression and motifs should not be sacrificed in the

process. Its origin already implies distinctive features, such as the motif of the barrio, codes of meaning through interlingualism, and the relationship between Anglo and Mexican histories. Our cultural roots are embedded in the Mexican heritage. However, our contact with Anglo culture has created a new protagonist –the Chicano– who is markedly different from his two main influences.

Chicano literature has its essential beginnings in the Southwest, though many migrated to the Midwest and Northwest during this century. According to Luis Leal, “we can say that Chicano literature had its origins when the Southwest was settled by the inhabitants of Mexico during Colonial times and continues uninterrupted to the present”.¹⁶ It began as an extension of Mexican letters because the Southwest was a part of Mexico, however distant it was from the cultural center of Mexico City. Due to its location in the extreme northern frontier, this region was pictured as a territory that both belonged and did not belong to mainstream Mexico. A strong sense of geographical isolation contributed to this state of limbo, between two worlds, and not within any particular one, as if it were destined to become a sort of “buffer zone” between the two cultures. The concept of Aztlán, a spiritual identification with the land of the Southwest as a homeland rightfully ours, embodied our Indo-Hispanic origins.

If the literature is an expression native to this geographical area, it should be possible to point out examples of antecedents that demonstrate a degree of originality. Somehow from the Southwest emanated an aura of mystery and curiosity, attracting a long series of expeditions. One explorer, Fray Marcos de Niza (1539), wrote an important account titled *Relación del Descubrimiento de las Siete Ciudades*. Francisco Vásquez de Coronado followed suit in 1540. He believed the legend of the Seven Cities of Cíbola, the Gran Quivira, and that belief motivated his explorations. After nine years of wandering alone in what is today the Southwest, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca wrote a significant work, *Relaciones* (1542), relating his encounters with numerous Indian tribes, with details about the flora and the fauna. His writing demonstrates the “region’s constant influence and omnipresence”. Later in 1610, Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà published a poetic chronicle about New Mexico called *Historia de la Nueva México*, based on actual history he experienced during Juan de Oñate’s conquest of that area in the 1590s. Other written material of this period documents the colonial enterprise, usually containing elements of literature, for example, Don Pedro Baptista Pino’s *Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la provincia del Nuevo México* (1812).

The majority of literary expression prior to the conclusion of the Hispanic Period in 1821¹⁷ is in the form of folklore, a popular literature in the oral tradition. Usually, invented stories were combined with actual history, the speaker retelling it from one generation to another. This style of transmission is particularly appropriate

to our Hispanic heritage as well as to our Indian background, both rich sources of oral tradition whose literatures sometimes depended on it almost totally. Capitán Farfán, a soldier in Juan de Oñate's expedition, presented a play, perhaps the first one in the Southwest, on April 30, 1598, near the present site of El Paso, Texas.¹⁸ Besides this and a few other known examples, literature consisted of an almost infinite number of *romances* (narrative fragments), *corridos* (ballads), *cuentos* (folktales), *alabados* (religious hymns), *décimas* (poems composed of ten-verse stanzas), and other forms.¹⁹ The folk literature established a solid foundation for future creative endeavors in written forms by individual authors. This oral tradition remains an active source of inspiration to the present time.

During the Mexican Period from 1821 to 1848, the literature adopts a more Mexican base using most of the same models and in a sense nationalizing these forms by emphasizing the local region and subject matter. In this period numerous printing presses were founded. The first was set up in Texas in 1813, but most of the early presses began to have an impact in the 1830s and 1840s. Newspapers were the main source of sharing creative writings until the Anglo and Mexican conflict became the dominant subject of essays and editorials. Oral tradition remained relatively unchanged except that it acquired more of a local flavor, referring more and more to history, instead of alluding only to anecdotes from Europe.

Between the years 1849 to 1910, sometimes called the Transition Period, written literature reflected the linguistic and cultural contact with Anglo settlers and accentuated the identity crisis. For the most part the oral tradition continued with as much vigor as ever. It became one way to overcome the stigma of being a conquered people. Newspapers of that period reveal an active, literature-oriented people. These presses were gradually taken over and filled with Anglo views as the economic structure was infiltrated by Anglo-American entrepreneurs. Some *Mexicanos* chose to mix with the new settlers while keeping their identities, others tried to assimilate completely. Still others resisted strongly. They created newspapers with alternative views, social clubs (actually clubs for cultural resistance), and literary societies in which to cultivate "*la lengua de Cervantes*." This cultural self-defense was particularly evident in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado where isolation allowed a degree of autonomy and freedom of expression. The Spanish language's dominance gave the area a distinct advantage—a real link to our Hispanic and Mexican heritage. This was truly a case of a country within a country, something not possible in places like Texas and California because the Anglo presence dominated virtually every area of cultural life. The literature of this period of transition is extremely diverse: much of it is in search of regional identity; some of it attempts to associate itself with our Hispanic background through a

jump back in time (a fact that explains, in part, the term “Spanish–American”); another portion incorporates elements of the English language. Anselmo Arellano, in *Los pobladores nuevo mexicanos y su poesía, 1889–1950*,²⁰ verifies such a variety. There we find poetry commemorating family events (such as weddings or deaths), lyrical outbursts of love or nostalgia, and also poetry addressing social concerns, issues of land and language. While most of the poetry speaks of social rituals, a considerable portion demonstrates that there indeed existed a cultural clash and friction. The Chicanos of the period were not silent and docile; they consistently set claims to the rights they had enjoyed prior to the Anglo occupation. One example is a poem by Jesús María Alarid written in 1889 (“El Idioma”), in which he advocates the acceptance of both English and Spanish as two equal official languages of the Southwest.²¹ Perhaps the first novelist of the region, Eusebio Chacón published two short novels completely in Spanish in 1892. The fact that his works build on storylines and characters from such classics as *Don Quixote* demonstrates some isolation from his literary contemporaries, but his inclusion of local color marks him as firmly rooted in social reality.²²

The Interaction Period between 1910 and 1942 is characterized by two basic factors: first, the adjustment by Chicanos to having to share the Southwest with Anglos; and, secondly, an increased influx of Mexican immigrants. There was a general realization of having lost a power base which had formerly provided a sense of dignity. Economic alienation became a real threat as cheap labor became plentiful; there arose an institutionalized system of exploiting Chicanos and *Mexicanos* alike. Literary expression remained rich in the oral traditions, but any efforts to create publishing houses usually were aborted or they confronted insurmountable obstacles. Newspapers continued to voice contemporary issues, to print literary excerpts from local people, and to include translations of numerous works from Mexico, Spain, and Latin America. Much effort was made to maintain cultural contacts with other Hispanic countries. Small literary societies endured, whose members depended on newspaper presses to publish isolated works, most of which have been lost due to lack of interest on the part of monolingually oriented libraries. World War I, the Great Depression and other historical events limited participation in aesthetic activities. Survival demanded more attention. As Luis Leal points out, the diffusion of literature was reduced to publications by such associations as LULAC, Alianza, and other societies whose function became political in the struggle for equal rights,²³ combatting systematic propaganda against the Mexican. We find isolated cases of published works during this period, but none of them appear to have caused other writers to follow their lead toward a self-sustaining tradition of writing. Vicente Bernal, a New Mexican, died in 1915 before his book, *Las Primicias* (1916), was published. Today his work is cherished by surviving family and

friends, and by a few interested critics. Felipe M. Chacón introduced his own *Poesía y Prosa* in 1924, written in both English and Spanish but mainly Spanish. José Inés García used the *El Faro* newspaper facilities to print his numerous books of poetry in Trinidad, Colorado, between the late 1920s and early 1930s. Fray Angélico Chávez, another New Mexican, wrote poetry and prose from a mystical and spiritual tradition in *New Mexico Triptych* (1940), *Clothed With the Sun* (1939), and other books. No one followed up what these writers began, but their work does demonstrate that not all literature was limited to newspapers. More significant is that while we do not notice much influence by contemporary Mexican writers in their work, we hear clear echoes of the Mexican literary past. Isolation is a factor here too. A more positive way of looking at our Southwest literature is as an expression in its own right, often retaining a Mexican flavor due to our Indo-Hispanic heritage, even when English is used.

The Pre-Chicano Period between 1943 and 1964²⁴ was a time for many Chicanos to make small breakthroughs in the publishing world in isolated cases, despite the latter's generally unreceptive attitude. Acceptance of Chicano manuscripts was truly a rare event, although a few managed to penetrate this field, controlled as it was by Anglo-American standards and tastes. The Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943 in East Los Angeles left a permanent mark, a harsh lesson in history for Chicanos: these incidents of persecution underscored our position vis-a-vis American society. Our small gains in material progress were clouded by major obstacles to other social changes we sought. A turning point in our history, these events brought to the surface the dark side of becoming an "American." Among many Chicanos there emerged hints of a new awareness of differences in style and language that set us apart from Anglo culture. Coming to grips with our circumstances, many writers tried to provide self-portraits of our people to show us as we are, countering the negative depiction of the Mexican in American literature and mass media. There were four principal reasons why Chicanos did not write more literature during the Pre-Chicano Period: (1) a negative social stigma that Mexicans could not write, (2) the emphasis given to English at the expense of Spanish expression, (3) the false illusion of equality after World War II and the Korean War, and (4) our systematic exclusion from any significant educational mobility by a society that needed a ready-made unskilled labor force and labeled our people as such. Despite these conditions, some writers do stand out for their important contributions: Arthur Campa for documenting the oral tradition in *Spanish Folk Poetry in New Mexico* (1943); Mario Suárez for providing one of the first developed complex Chicano characters in his short story "Señor Garza" (1947); and José Antonio Villarreal for publishing the forerunner to the contemporary Chicano novel, *Pocho* (1959), through a major Eastern publishing house. Many of the writings produced during this period, though sporadic and usually

unrelated to each other, foreshadow the crucial crossroads Chicanos met later in the mid-1960s, when we would look more clearly at the choices we faced: to assimilate, to rebel, or to create other alternatives.

The year 1965 marks the beginning of the Contemporary Chicano Period or Renaissance of Chicano letters, an explosion or general boom in every literary genre. For the first time, our literature made concentrated effort to put forward and foster images and characters from our experiences. There was a keen emphasis on a search for authentic ways to express our society, our language, our reality. The adequacy of conventional and traditional literary modes was questioned. With renewed awareness, Chicanos rallied around the issue of identity, choosing the term “Chicano” voluntarily. It became the term of pride to replace other less adequate labels such as “Spanish American,” “Latin American,” and to some extent “Mexican American.” If a rebellious spirit emerged at this time, it was one of cultural affirmation and historical reevaluation, while demanding a sense of dignity. Chicano literature of that time fulfilled a social role as an instrument or vehicle for change. The most obvious example is the Teatro Campesino directed by Luis Valdez, which promoted a type of literary expression that would reflect Chicano problems and themes. Initially, its primary purpose was to function as a didactic device for farm-workers; it set out to mirror the *campesino’s* plight, to lead them into action and thus support the *huelga* in César Chávez’s labor struggle. The Teatro Campesino not only created an interest in such modes of creative expression, but it also sparked our imaginations toward more ways to present our reality, and new ways to understand it. The Teatro Campesino presented situations on stage that pertained directly to the audiences for which it was intended, portraying, for example, *campesinos*, students, *vendidos* (sell-out), and current issues like the Vietnam conflict and mythology in Mexican history. In the introduction to *Actos*, Luis Valdez states:

The nature of Chicanismo calls for a revolutionary turn in the arts as well as in society. Chicano theatre must be revolutionary in techniques as well as content. It must be popular, subject to no other critics except the pueblo itself; but it must also educate the pueblo toward an appreciation of *social change*, on and off the stage.²⁵

The Teatro Campesino led the vanguard of one strong Chicano literary tendency, bringing social consciousness into all forms of literature. The political fervor of this period of civil rights demands generated an insatiable idealism, which, for Chicanos, became translated into early Movement poetry, that is, into instigative poetry with strong political overtones. Aesthetic qualities were often sacrificed in favor of social awareness. The main concern was a Chicano style cultural nationalism stressing barrio themes, a historical uniqueness and our Indian heritage, particularly Aztec. Rodolfo

tries to confront the present. Poets like Angela de Hoyos, Alurista, Sergio Elizondo, and José Montoya reevaluate what is uniquely Chicano and what has been imposed by the dominant society. For example, Alurista makes a conscious effort to revive Amerindian cultural values while rediscovering the Aztec world of symbols:

mis ojos hinchados
 flooded with lágrimas
 de bronze
 melting on the cheek bones
 of my concern
 rasgos indígenas
 the scars of history of my face
 and the veins of my body
 that aches
 vomita sangre
 y lloro libertad
 i do not ask for freedom
 i am freedom²⁸

While Sergio Elizondo recreates the detours and contradictions of the making of self-identity in his epic poem *Perros y antiperros* (1972), other poets such as Angela de Hoyos in *Chicano Poems for the Barrio* (1975) and José Montoya in his classic poem “El Louie” examine the barrio as victim and as a place where a distinct code of experience reigns.

A third kind of poet makes a symbolic-philosophical contribution, demonstrating that some writers are not limited to one trend. Nevertheless, we can point to a substantial group that tends to go beyond easily identifiable Chicano themes or situations. The earliest one to accomplish this is Ricardo García in *Selected Poetry* (1973). He writes surrealistic poems with dreamlike passages through, conflicting spheres of the mind, both unconscious and conscious. Although Tino Villanueva’s versatile *Hay Otra Voz. Poems* (1972) deals with Chicano characters, his main concern is the transformation of the “I” into the “we” in a realm of infinite time. Juan Bruce-Novoa in *Inocencia Perversa/Perverse Innocence* (1977) is intrigued by metaphysical and philosophical questions about sex as it pertains to the “self” and “otherness” of a person. In *The Elements of San Joaquín* (1977) and *The Tale of Sunlight* (1978) Gary Soto seeks a description of the world through the precision of the poetic word, while allowing humble experience to become the main thrust as the poetic voice.

A fourth category of poetry is composed of women who draw on the above tendencies from the perspective of uniquely Chicana forms of feminism. With diversity and purpose, they explore all areas of human existence: politics, cultural affirmation, women’s issues, barrios, poetics, and philosophy. Angela de Hoyos is highly regarded for transforming social topics into poetry, for capturing an ethnic ideology in humanistic terms. She writes: “I was born too late/ in a land/that no longer belongs to me/(so it

says, right here in this Texas History).²⁹ In *Restless Serpents* (1976) Bernice Zamora uses memory-flashes of key incidents in her formation as a woman to show how the past forms a living part of the present. The poet taps many dimensions of her experience in order to confront her own shadows and to relive moments of peace. Her restlessness coils and uncoils, eliciting feelings that have been repressed through time and soothing them. Lorna Dee Cervantes uses concrete images of personal anecdotes; and she probes her Mexicanness as an element of her identity with which she is not fully acquainted:

Sometimes she is my mirror:
la mexicana who emerges con flores,
con palabras perdidas,
con besos de los antepasados.

Somewhere in a desert of memories
there is a dream in another language.
Some day I will awaken
and remember every line.³⁰

Another literary genre, the essay, is a distinct mode that serves as a platform for issues to be raised, theories to be expounded, and concepts to be proposed. In the early stages of our literary renaissance, the Chicano essay manufactured ideas that later were taken into other forms of literature. For example, *El Grito* in early 1967 and *Aztlán* in 1970 began to publish essays that set out to disprove such notions as cultural determinism, stereotypes, and historical classifications. These essays were unprecedented and helped determine intellectual efforts to document Chicano forms of thought and culture through interpretative and analytic approaches. Authors assimilated ideas such as cultural pluralism, social heterogeneity, historical vision, and cultural nationalism; they transformed these concepts into more realistic, fairer portraits of the Chicano people than those done by non-Chicanos. Essays such as those by Octavio Romano, Francisco A. Ríos, and later Rudy Acuña and Juan Gómez-Quiñones have all expanded *Chicanismo* as a philosophical basis in their respective essays.³¹ Their writings are inspirational to Chicanos who wish to express themselves creatively through literature.

Still another literary genre, the short story or cuento has flourished in folklore, and still continues to be a main source of imagination and creativity. It is relatively easy to find short stories transcribed from the oral tradition, for example Juan Rael's *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México* (1957); but rarely was this early short fiction created by one author. Oftentimes authorship is attributed to a collective participation of shared experience. Most of this area is still open to further considerations and findings. Mario Suárez's "Señor Garza" (1947) is generally regarded as the first well-known cuento. It portrays an amiable character who lives his life by a nonmaterialistic

philosophy. In “The Week in the Life of Manuel Hernández,” Nick C. Vaca reveals an existentialist, rather pessimistic attitude toward life in contemporary society with all of its problems. Vaca, in a sense, views the Chicano as a nonfolkloric being. He does not believe those who depict him as a “noble savage.” This attitude becomes more apparent in some of the cuentos in “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” by Tomás Rivera, who achieves an important synthesis: his work is rooted in folklore, in the inner dimension of psychologically based drives that struggle with mental obstacles, and the tragedies of farmworkers who experience social exploitation. Sabine Ulibarrí, on the other hand, in *Tierra Amarilla: Stories of New Mexico* relies on folklore at times, but his main concern is to recollect and reconstruct memories of humor’s part in the life of a small town in northern Mexico.

After poetry, the novel receives perhaps the most attention and dissemination. Its dramatic structure and its depth of characterization mark it as an advanced form of literary development among a people. It takes time and effort for authors to reconstruct the world as they perceive it. The novel functions as an *extended* metaphor of life, which represents complex human relationships, encapsulating what otherwise would take many approaches and disciplines to explain. Although there were early novelists such as Eusebio Chacón who published novels as early as 1892, José Antonio Villarreal is the initiator of our modern novel. His *Pocho*, published in 1959, was ignored and virtually unknown until the Chicano literary renaissance was well-established around the year 1969.³² Tomás Rivera with his “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” (1971) made the first impact, winning the Quinto Sol National Literary Award in 1970. Other works occurred first, however: for example, *City of Night* (1963) by John Rechy, *The Plum Plum Pickers* (1969) by Raymond Barrio, *Tattoo the Wicked Cross* (1967) by Floyd Salas, and *Chicano* (1970) by Richard Vásquez. Rivera developed a complex and fragmented narration from various perspectives that converges in one character at the end. He found complex elements in the apparently simple lives of migrant workers. Rudolfo A. Anaya in *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) introduced the best-known character in the Chicano novel—Ultima, a *curandera* or folk healer, who teaches the young protagonist about the cosmic forces of Good and Evil. Oscar Zeta Acosta presented an irreverent macho protagonist in such daring and harsh novels as *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973). In 1974 Miguel Méndez made public his controversial work *Peregrinos de Aztlán*, which experiments seriously with different variants of the Spanish language, from standard to “Spanglish” to *caló*. During the same year, Isabella Ríos, the first Chicana novelist, copyrighted *Victuum*, her novel about a psychic woman who has visions of knowledge; however, this work remained relatively unknown until 1979. Ron Arias revolutionized Chicano novel writing in 1975 with *The Road to Tamazunchale*

by combining fantasy and reality into the unified story of an old man making every effort to live imaginatively in his last moments of life. Also in 1975, Alejandro Morales brought out *Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, dealing with the hard-core barrio life of drug addicts. Other significant novels are *Estampas del Valle y otras obras* (1973) by Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, who recreates the life of a valley through short sketches of a wide range of characters; and *El diablo en Texas* (1976) by Aristeo Brito, who also tells about a region, a demoniac and humorous one in this case. In the last decade, the Chicano novel has expanded greatly our store of self-images, the multiple forms we must have in order to conceive our diversity of experience.

The last genre of this discussion, the theatre, is generally thought to be most fully represented by the Teatro Campesino, but there are other important types of Chicano theatre. The Teatro Campesino established the *acto* as the main vehicle of theatrical representation, with its emphasis on immediacy; the *acto* was conceived as the product of a collective effort to present a social issue. Estela Portillo de Trambley was one of the first to deviate from this style: she created a symbolic work, more subtle in its theme of spiritual liberation. Her work *The Day of the Swallows* universalizes human reactions, their contrasts and hidden motivations. Doña Josefa, the protagonist, chooses to keep her lesbianism secret because the townspeople imagine her to be saintly; in the end, she is forced to commit suicide and therefore she becomes a martyr for the possibility of creating a new order. El Teatro de la Esperanza from Santa Bárbara also presents actos, but its contributions have more variety of topics and approaches to depicting Chicano reality. On the other hand, Nephtalí de León stands out for writing theatre of the absurd that deals with characters and situations that are not necessarily identifiable as Chicano. Although the Teatro Campesino remains the principal promoter of Chicano theatre, especially with the famous *Zoot Suit*, there is evidence of new trends and of experimentation with new techniques.

Chicano literature has undergone many phases and changes, depending on the historical period, on how the Mexicans have been perceived, and on how they have been projected. It has kept its integrity despite the odds and setbacks. It should be pointed out that this literature has developed apart from *literatura chicanesca*,³³ that is, writings about Chicanos from a non-Chicano point of view, which have tended either to romanticize or to denigrate our people historically. Chicano literature has become a medium in which we may tell our own stories and feelings without relying on others to tell them for us; it is an assertion of our place, exploring themes that are pertinent to our situation in dominant society. Just as *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez is talked about as a “new” American play, Chicano literature deserves more attention as a phenomenon in its own right. It reflects our people and our realities through our own creativity.

NOTES

¹ Philip Ortego has coined this expression in a number of publications, but the one we wish to cite is "The Chicano Renaissance" from *Introduction to Chicano Studies*, edited by Livie Isauro Durán and H. Russel Bernard (New York: Macmillan, 1973: 331-350). Juan Rodríguez presents his concept in "El florecimiento de la literatura chicana" in Carlos Monsiváis' *La otra cara de México: el pueblo chicano* (México, D.F.: Ediciones "El Caballito," 1977).

² This became particularly evident in Denver, Colorado, when the famous "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" was formulated in 1969 by Alurista in a national conference where it was symbolically stated: "We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which we are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops, and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continent." Quoted from Ernie Barrio, ed., *Bibliografía de Aztlán* (San Diego: Centro de Estudios Chicanos, San Diego State, 1971: p.v.)

³ Though commonly known today, these ideas are found amply developed in David Weber's *Foreigners in Their Native Land* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973). At the same time, they appear in a poetic form in the classic poem titled *Yo soy Joaquín* by Corky Gonzales, published originally in 1967.

⁴ Octavio Romano was one of the first essayists to expound on these ideas in his essay "The Historical and Intellectual Presence of Mexican Americans," *El Grito*, 2: 2 (Winter 1969): 32-46.

⁵ To fully understand the meaning of the term "literature," we might recall its etymology from Latin "letra," meaning letter, or as French popularized the idea of "littera," meaning writing.

⁶ Francisco Jiménez, "Chicano Literature: Sources and Themes," *The Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe* 1: 1 (1964): 4-15.

⁷ José Antonio Villarreal, *Pocho* (New York: Doubleday, 1959: 64.)

⁸ Francisco A. Lomelí and Donald W. Urioste, *Chicano Perspectives in Literature: A Critical and Annotated Bibliography* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications, 1976: 9). Beyond the first word, the rest of the underlining is done for further emphasis and is not in the original text.

⁹ Luis Valdez, the founder of "the Teatro Campesino, indeed set out to utilize this popular theatrical form to create a consciousness among the exploited farmworkers, which fulfilled his concept of beginning a social revolution from the "grass roots" level. His objectives were clear: to educate and to entertain.

¹⁰ Luis Leal discusses the present issue in great detail in his well-researched study "Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective," which appears expanded in *Modern Chicano Authors*, edited by Joseph Sommers and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979: 18-30.)

¹¹ The three concepts referring to an intrinsic duality are attributed to the following critics, respectively: Juan Bruce-Novoa, Philip Ortego, and Tino Villanueva, who have contributed much to the development of the theory of Chicano aesthetics and literary history.

¹² Leal, L. "Mexican American Literature," 19.

¹³ One particular proponent of this idea is Salvador Rodríguez del Pino in *La novela chicana escrita en español: Cinco autores comprometidos* (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe, 1982).

¹⁴ The question of autonomy is further clouded by publications like *PMLA* that list Chicano literature under the contemporary Latin-American section while other major publications prefer to include it within American literature.

¹⁵ Juan Bruce-Novoa develops a similar line of reasoning in his controversial article "The Space of Chicano Literature" in *De Colores*, 1: 4 (1975): 22-42.

¹⁶ Leal, L. "Mexican American Literature," 22.

¹⁷ See Luis Leal's article, in which he establishes a parallelism with Latin-American literature and how it also had to struggle for recognition and autonomy separate from Spanish literature during the Colonial Period. Our study is based on the historical divisions he proposes, except where we deviate in the more contemporary period.

¹⁸ Note that the year 1598 is extremely early compared to the first English-speaking play presented between 1699 and 1702 in New England. Soon after the play by Farfán was presented, it has also been documented that another well-known play, which was historically based and motivated, was introduced: "Los moros y los cristianos" on September 8, 1598.

¹⁹ For further information, consult the collection by Juan B. Rael called *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México*, 2 volumes (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1957); also, Arthur L. Campa's master's thesis, "New Mexican Spanish Folk-Tales," from the University of New Mexico, 1930. Besides, some authors make a big distinction between creative literature and folk literature by the manner in which each is transmitted and also who is responsible for its creation.

²⁰ It represents an important book of reference with regard to what was written in New Mexico newspapers, plus it provides possible sources for further research in this area.

²¹ See Anselmo Arellano, *Los pobladores nuevo mexicanos y su poesía, 1889-1950* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications, 1976: 37-38).

²² The first ones to cite his short novels (*Hijo de la tempestad* and *Tras la tormenta la calma*) are Lomeli and Urioste in *Chicana Perspectives in Literature*.

²³ Leal, L. "Mexican American Literature," 27.

²⁴ Here Luis Leal calls it the Chicano Period, whereas some historians refer to it as the Mexican-American Period.

²⁵ Luis Valdez, *Actos* (San Juan Bautista, Calif.: Cucaracha Press, 1971: 2).

²⁶ Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, *Yo soy Joaquín* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972: 6).

²⁷ Ricardo Sánchez, *Canto y grito mi liberación* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973: 87).

²⁸ Alurista, *Floriscanto en Aztlán* (Los Angeles: Chicano Cultural Center, ueLA, 197: poem #40).

²⁹ Angela de Hoyos, *Chicana Poems for the Barrio* (Bloomington, Ind.: Backstage Books, 1975: 12).

³⁰ Loma Dee Cervantes in "El sueño de las flores" in *Mango* 1: 1 (Fall 1976): 3.

³¹ See the landmark essays in order of the mentioned authors: "Goodbye Revolution: Hello Slum," *El Grito* 1: 2 (Winter 1968): 8-14; "The Mexican in Fact, Fiction and Folklore," *El Grito* 2: 4 (Summer 1969): 14-28; *Occupied America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); and "On Culture," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 5: 2 (Spring 1977): 29-47.

³² It is interesting to note that this novel is not cited in *Bibliografía de Aztlán* (1970) done in San Diego State, but was actually “rediscovered” shortly after that.

³³ See Lomelí and Urioste’s discussion of such a concept in *Chicana Perspectives in Literature*, 12.



Po(l)etics of Reconstructing and/or Appropriating a Literary Past: The Regional Case model

*... cuando en un futuro lejano se haga la historia sobre la vida cultural de Las Vegas
(New Mexico), se tendrá que afirmar que 1892 es el año de las sociedades literarias y
de ayuda mutua.*

La Voz del Pueblo (4/9/1892)

*... whenever in the far future a history is done of the cultural life of Las Vegas
(New Mexico), one will have to affirm that 1892 is the year of literary and mutual aid
societies.*

1. PROLEGOMENON: FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF IDENTITY TO THE EXPLORATION OF A LITERARY LEGACY

Until the 1970s it was not altogether clear whether Chicanos could trace their literary tradition much before the contemporary period. A definite void or fissure seemed to exist between the present and the past. Understandably, literature created by Chicanos was perceived by most as a recent by-product of the Civil Rights movements in the 1960s and the radical experiments of the 1970s, that is, as pamphleterism or engagé expression. The ultimate goal at the time was to address the political urgency of the times, for example, by focusing on identity, an image warfare against pernicious stereotypes and the reconstruction of ethnicity. Viewed as intrinsically contemporary or young by many, the literature possessed qualities that encased an expression of renewed vitality and originality relative only to recent social phenomena. Although uplifting in vindicating past social ills, its combative spirit systemically targeted the American socialization process, as well as its institutions, that had denied our Mexicanness. It was an effort to recapture and refocus our imagination as a viable form of liberation. As a result, the notion of an historiographical black hole before 1965 emerged as if to imply that only Mexico could be identified as a referent point of our being. The idea was that of a quantum leap from limbo to centerstage in order to reclaim a rightful place in modernity by bringing into question our long standing invisibility and second-class status.

This was the case for most of Aztlán, with the exception of New Mexico in which Mexico was nothing more than a distant memory. New Mexico as a remote

region within *el vasto norte* (the vast north) shared a sense of a distinct past and a history –almost as a cultural island–, easily pointing to the chain of pueblo settlements along the Río Grande in the form of a continuous civilization dating back to the previous millennium. Contrary to Californians, for example, New Mexicans were not a product of cultural hydroponics, but rather descendants of a long tradition dating back to the turn of the sixteenth century and longer with the inclusion of Native-American bloodlines. Also, contrary to Texans and Arizonians, New Mexicans were not overrun by Anglo Americans, but instead, maintained a semblance of themselves through time by retaining part of the power base in economics, politics and the means of production. New Mexico's remoteness, at first a liability –for it inhibited growth and made frontier life harder– later became an asset culturally in the preservation of a regionally unique ethnos. The Hispanic literary production of the aforementioned regions bears this out. In fact, it can be stated that by the end of the nineteenth century, New Mexico experienced an early literary renaissance and autonomy like no other region, judging from the massive amount of works produced within its boundaries (Lomelí 1990).

New Mexico, more than any other region in what became the American Southwest, knew empirically and intuitively that it had a past. Although its Hispanic peoples had lost many of their original holdings from Spanish landgrants, they were not all reduced to a mere laborer status (Camarillo) or urban pariahs. Memories of past glories were commonplace in conjunction with an acute historical consciousness about a change in their status. Besides, these New Mexicans did not feel like recent immigrants, nor could they be described as such, because they could trace their background to eight, ten or more generations. We are dealing here with a resilient, deeply-rooted, and proud people who created a regional culture through gumption and ingenuity while having a number of characteristics proper to their area. New Mexico's isolation and remoteness contributed to producing a hardy stock of people who were initially motivated to colonize by their Spanish zeal and culturally conditioned by indigenous and Mexican experiences. Fray Angélico Chávez views the process in these terms:

From the start, the Hispanic colony of New Mexico, for reasons of geography and the circumstances of the times, had little connection with New Spain, which was much later to evolve into present Mexico. Nor had she anything to do with the later thrust into Texas, Arizona and California. This New Mexican enclave developed, or degenerated in some ways, if you will, in almost complete isolation from Spain and the rest of Spanish America, yet proudly (if rather pathetically) 'Spanish' in its self-identification. This was due to the people who established the culture, the pastoral character of the region, the almost complete lack of education as well as cultural separation from the rest of the civilized world for over two centuries. (245)

The result is a syncretism of forms, tastes, values and outlooks, strongly influenced by a distinct cuisine, a linguistic reservoir of sixteenth-century Spanish and Native-American dialects, a religious iconography and styles of worship, plus an architecture, sometimes called Santa Fe-Pueblo, “which accentuates Spanish building techniques and Native-American pragmatism to offer harmonious spatial representations between nature and humankind” (Lomelí 1988: 84).

2. BETWEEN PARADIGMS AND FINDING MODELS FOR RECONSTRUCTING A LITERARY PAST

Concerted efforts in documenting early Chicano literary history either went unnoticed or initially stirred little interest. Some of the first attempts lacked scientific backbone in their quest to satisfy an insatiable thirst for folklorism and quaint depictions of romanticized settings and characters. Aurelio M. Espinosa in 1915 was the first to offer a working model in “Romancero nuevomexicano” (New Mexican Ballads) by proposing the residual Spanish framework, suggesting that lore from the region derived directly from Spain. His hispanophile slant led to a discussion and analysis of traditional poetic forms, as if they were principally ‘uncontaminated’ vestiges imported from Spain. Espinosa’s model did not involve literary history per se, but other followers, such as Nina Otero-Warren in *Old Spain in Our Southwest* (1936), Arturo L. Campa in *Spanish Folk Poetry in New Mexico* (1946), and Juan Rael in *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y Nuevo México* (Spanish Tales of Colorado and New Mexico, 1957), perhaps more compilers than critics, certainly contributed to the promulgation of a folksy portrait couched in purely Hispanic terms. Such an emphasis later motivated Carey McWilliams in *North of Mexico* (1949) to label much of this trend as part of a “fantasy heritage,” that is, a convenient self-invention in order to appease the dominant culture while making Hispanic cultural modes more palatable.

A significant deviation from the above occurred in 1959 when José Timoteo López, Edgardo Núñez and Roberto Lara Vialpando, in *Breve reseña de la literatura hispana de Nuevo México y Colorado* (A Brief Survey of Hispanic Literature of New Mexico and Colorado), had as their primary objective the categorization of extant writings. Another important difference lies in that they do not strictly concentrate on poetry or short fiction, including remarkably scintillating assessments on the novel and theatre. In addition, the focus is not to render folkloric popular expression, but rather to approach the subject with sensitivity and a critical eye, particularly by intimating the cultural conflict paradigm without fully developing it. Although rudimentary in nature and methodology, they nonetheless offer some semblance of a literary history for New Mexico, offering such pithy evaluations as: “Las novelas en Nuevo México [están]

escritas en un español sencillo y casi dialectal lleno de modismos y giros propios del Suroeste” (17) (The novels in New Mexico are written in simple and almost dialectical Spanish, full of idioms and registers proper to the Southwest). Unfortunately, their efforts remained completely obscured or forgotten until the middle 1970s when New Mexico once again became a focus of attention for its abundant collections of writings. Nonetheless, they established a key paradigm in a modest but comprehensive attempt at commenting on all genres while providing early examples of the variety and scope of New Mexican literature. Their efforts, however, would not be in vain.

In 1971 two independent events were to take place: Philip D. Ortego’s completion of his dissertation titled “Backgrounds of Mexican-American Literature” and the publication of *Bibliografía de Aztlán: An Annotated Bibliography*, edited by Ernie Barrios. The former studies at length the origins, place and dilemmas surrounding this newly discovered body of ‘American’ literature by showing its trajectory and range. Ortego expands its conceptualization as a well-entrenched literary tradition, thus dismissing the notion of being a recent phenomenon. In many ways, his work modernized and established links with the past as described by the authors of *Breve reseña*. On the other hand, *Bibliografía de Aztlán* represents the first critical annotated bibliography, which served as a starting point for Francisco A. Lomelí’s and Donald W. Urioste’s augmented version in *Chicano Perspectives in Literature: A Critical and Annotated Bibliography* (1976). Barrio’s *Bibliografía de Aztlán* coalesced entries into a brief listing, causing one to wonder if that was all Chicanos had produced up to that time. Furthermore, the inclusion of various works by Mexicans and Anglos implicitly questioned the literature’s definition and intrinsic nature. The unresolved question left for a curious reader is as follows: Is there more and how far back can we go? Ironically, *Pocho* by José Antonio Villarreal was uncovered or rediscovered at the same time the bibliography was in press, too late to be included.

Luis Leal shortly thereafter in 1973 made some startling assertions in documenting Chicano literary historiography in his famous essay “Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective.” First of all, he proposes a functional definition for the literature that is neither limited nor dogmatic, but, most of all, he situates Chicano creativity within a larger diachronic context between American and Mexican relations, particularly as an extension of Mexico while retaining a distinctiveness in its literary constructs. Therefore, he clarifies and qualifies much of what was previously considered a void, meticulously demonstrating that contemporary writings do indeed have antecedents and a background. His groundbreaking interdisciplinary work uncovers evidence and gives historical validity to what others had intuited yet had not been able to prove. Leal expounds on an “inter-literary historical” framework

(Lomelí “Interhistoria literaria”) and especially on a didactic periodization to better appreciate the development and evolution of the literature. The result is the first most comprehensive description and analysis of the various components comprising Chicano expression from the beginnings to its most recent manifestations. For the first time, this literature gained cohesion, an identity, a face and a *raison d’être* as a unique entity but not apart from both Mexican and American historical developments. Chicano literature, as the bridge between the two, stood apart but also inextricably tied to both.

Luis Leal’s inter-literary historical model later served as the framework with which to subsequently speak of regionalism or *Aztlán* as a unifying concept, not only in a mythical sense but also in nationalistic literary terms, supporting what Guillermo Rojas in 1973 has called “literatura aztlanense” (literature of *Aztlán*). Others like Francisco A. Lomelí, in “An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence” (1983), have expanded this model as a working paradigm with which to fill in gaps and insert newly discovered texts. Still others like Raymond Paredes in “The Evolution of Chicano Literature” (1982) and Alejandro Morales in “Visión panorámica de la literatura mexicoamericana hasta el boom de 1966” (1976) have concentrated on either the American and the Latin American aspects, respectively. In addition, other referentially specific approaches include María Herrera-Sobek’s Chicana feminist overview in *Beyond Stereotypes* (1985), Chuck Tatum’s general summary in *Chicano Literature* (1982), Luis Leal *et al.* (1982) focus on a given time frame in *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970-1979)*, Cordelia Candelaria’s in-depth examination of a single genre in *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (1986), as well as Nicolás Kanellos’ treatment of theatre in *A History of Hispanic Theatre in the United States: Origins to 1940* (1990), and Ramón Saldívar’s theoretical focus on narratology in *Chicano Narrative: Dialectics of Difference* (1990).

In other words, there currently exists a proliferation of critical approaches in dealing with the vast variety and sheer volume of both contemporary and early works of Chicano letters. But most of all, the literary vacuum notion of a disinherited past has waned considerably, because dealing with an historical backdrop is no longer an oddity; it is now a requirement in doing serious scholarship in the field. The 1980s definitely marked an upsurge in this area of study, whereas previously only a few isolated cases could be identified. Chicano literary historiography has reached a peak for various reasons: the literature’s legitimacy is no longer as much in question, which has prompted further examination into many phases of literary creativity, especially that which relates to its historical contextuality. Aside from the purely theoretical or comparative pieces in article form, much critical space in book-length manuscripts is devoted to the restoration of a literary legacy. New developments in this regard are

slowly coming to fruition through original, even daring, groundbreaking scholarship, thus offering at times an oppositional view of American literary evolution, or at least complementing the latter's deficiencies with substantiated information while also challenging the culturally monolithic canon of American literature. The central motive is simply to claim a rightful place in this constellation of literary production vis-a-vis Anglo-American hegemony. Some might consider this mere revisionism, but in effect it denotes a revamping of biased criteria and exclusionary standards.

One key consideration that functions as a handicap has been language, often used as the first and fundamental determinant to either consider a work's value or relegate it to obscurity. Obviously, much of the early writings in Spanish only reached an audience of the same language group, thus limiting its later dissemination among Anglo-American literary historians. A linguistic ethnocentrism has traditionally been in operation, for example, as justified by Mabel Major and T. M. Pearce in *Southwest Heritage* (1938):

Most Americans ... have read only books made in the tradition of Europe and written in the English language.... Moreover we shall frankly relate all other cultures in the Southwestern scene to our contemporary American life. There are good reasons besides expediency for our doing this. While civilization here is greatly enriched by contacts with other cultures and languages, today the dominant strain seems clearly to be Anglo-American, with its ever increasing tendency to spread its influence and to absorb its competitors. (2)

Language, then, like culture, has had political implications for the peoples who rivaled in their quest for domination and influence after the American conquest of half of Mexico in 1848. The degree of contempt toward the native cultures by the new settlers has had long-lasting repercussions in attempts to recover a legacy, in certain occasions using original archival documents as wrapping paper. Cleve Hallenbeck notes:

Most of the provincial documentary material dealing with the Spanish period in New Mexico has forever disappeared. Complete records once existed in the archives at Santa Fe, for the Spaniards had a passion for preserving attested memoranda of every event, however insignificant. All the archives in the province ... were destroyed in the great Pueblo Revolt of 1680. Then most of the archives covering the period 1693 to 1846 were burned or otherwise disposed by the early Anglo-American officials, who could not read Spanish. (viii)

3. CONCEPTUALIZING A MODEL: PROBLEMATICS VS. FLESHING OUT ITS APPLICATION

The establishment of an adequate historical framework for early Chicano literature certainly has had its difficulties. There still remains the nagging question of when and where this literature originated, and the pertinent issue of overlapping with

Mexican and American traditions. Few agree as to its exact historical inception because the people whom we study as producers of that literature have undergone a constant transformation of various nationalities, political borders and affiliations of identity: from indigenous to Spanish subjects, from Spanish to Mexicans, to Americans, to ethnic or Chicano and, for some, to Hispanic or Latino. Some critics suggest its beginnings at the point of initial contact between Europeans and Native Americans in what was the outer fringes of the northern frontier of New Spain. Luis Leal, Juan Bruce-Novoa and Francisco A. Lomelí refer to the early explorers such as Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in *Relaciones* (Reports, 1542) or Fray Marcos de Niza in *Relación del descubrimiento de las siete ciudades* (Report on the Discovery of the Seven Cities, 1539) as possible sources for implanting a written literary tradition in the region. As the Spanish language coalesced human experience from an Hispanic prism, there is undeniable proof that the indigenous world view and oral narrative culture also contributed significantly toward infusing a new expression. No wonder Cabeza de Vaca feels himself oscillating between two worlds after his extensive contact with various Indian groups, as if he were a transformed person, no longer only Spanish. To Juan Bruce-Novoa, this explorer intimates what a third culture would become, and by extension, what a Chicano would be.

To Luis Leal (1973), the psychological impact had less importance within the extant socio-historical forces as defined by the geopolitical interplay between Mexico and Anglo America. Instead, regionality and consciousness of race played primary roles in determining Chicano literary history. Therefore, the only requirement for a work to be considered under this rubric was for it to be written by a person of Mexican descent, no matter how remote or recent, regardless of status of the publication and/or dissemination (i.e. monograph, manuscript or oral transcription). This inclusive and flexible criterion encases a methodology based on a definite sense of regionality from which to measure a people's self-reflections through the imagination. Leal provided a macro-context of confluence, defined a power struggle between cultures, outlined specific trends applicable to Chicana-related events and unearthed titles and authors lost in the annals of dispersed documents.

In the process of erecting demarcations and parameters, one pivotal concern has emerged: how to grapple with the politics and poetics of reconstructing and/or appropriating a literary past. In doing so, is there in fact a danger of historical imperialism by adopting a work or author that supposedly pertained to another set tradition, or to no tradition at all? For example, by claiming Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's *Historia de la Nueva México* (History of New Mexico, 1610) as a significant component of early Southwestern written tradition –applicable equally to Mexican as well as Chicano literatures–, are we committing historical piracy? How would we resolve the potential paradox of John

Gilmary Shea's assertion in 1887 that Villagr a's work represents "The First Epic of Our Country?" If that is the case, how can we explain that it has remained one of the best kept secrets in the field of American literary historiography? Indeed, who appropriates what and when can be a puzzling dilemma. By subsuming or claiming something as our own, we are declaring that it is rightfully ours. In addition, we could be accused of fabricating a past for the sake of having one, or that we are randomly taking authors and works out of a hat or out of context. Accordingly, the accusation might emerge of being regarded as clever fabricators of an artistic reality that was never there. Is there in fact an attempt to create figments of our imagination to justify the purported vacuum of a past? Not only that, but it might be claimed that, to support our findings, we use others' materials to prove our arguments. How then can we verify a literary past that is truly our own? Besides, what might be the implications, if any, of claiming a proper literary history? Are autonomy and independence in these terms possible when various degrees of conquest, assimilation, mixture, cooptation, intermarriage and adaptation have taken place within a society partly responsible for erasing our past?

4. RECLAIMING VS. APPROPRIATION: A MATTER OF RELATIVITY OR TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

The questions posed above offer numerous inferences difficult to unravel. First of all, it is not an easy task to rectify misconceptions about a people who historically have been labelled as non-generators of significant events or contributions, even if the facts bear out to the contrary. Recent revisionism now proves that a systematic approach toward eliminating Mexican influence was surreptitiously and overtly practiced since the nineteenth century. The objective was to replace Mexicans and their institutional apparatuses so as to Americanize them into a more 'modern' mold, eventually creating the impression that it had always been thus. The cinematographic projection of the Western frontier represents an illuminating example of the twentieth-century techniques utilized to accomplish such a mission, and from there implant a whole new image of what actually occurred. This is considered rewriting history for the sake of promoting hegemony and conveniently justifying it. Therefore, Chicanos' reexamination of past events and the acknowledgement of an imposed social order becomes critical in dealing with a convoluted background that was not solely Chicanos' doing.

Reclaiming it is not only viable but necessary, even if it involves appropriating it. The procedure is not frivolous nor misguided because Chicanos have as much right to a past as any other people, whether it is recognized by others or not. Given the entanglements of double allegiance and mixed alliances through conquests and shifts in identity, it is not contradictory to regard one work as common to two national and/or

ethnic literary histories. Few would quibble today about the classification of Alonso de Ercilla's *La araucana* (1569) as a foundational work of Chile –and by extension, Latin America–, although it was always claimed by Spain until modern times. Likewise, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relaciones* (1542), Don Pedro Baptista Pino's *Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la provincia del Nuevo México* (A Succinct and Simple Exposition of the Province of New Mexico, 1812), and Fray Gerónimo Boscana's *Chinigchinich* (1825?), as integral parts of early Hispanic regionalistic writings, clearly constitute a part of the written tradition from which Chicano literature would eventually emerge. These books no longer figure much in discussions on early Mexican works, existing marginalized in a type of limbo. Their regional construct makes them different and grounds them within a tradition of neglect on both sides of the border. Appropriation here, then, implies a reclamation project while properly making connections between a modern work and past literary production. Since it seems obvious that Chicanos did not spring up like mushrooms in the 1960s nor from the ashes of nothingness, by extension of that logic neither have their writings. In other words, a present-day work has an attachment to the immediate or remote past. Thus, bodies of literature possess an inviolable past, an historical source or backdrop from whence they derive, regardless if the self-identifier is evident or not. The point is adamantly clear: there is ample evidence of literature produced by peoples of Mexican descent even before the term Chicano –or for that matter, Mexican American– existed. Hypothetically, one author and his works could have experienced at least three changes in formal identity: a book from 1819 would be Spanish; another from 1831 would be Mexican; furthermore, another from 1849 could be termed American (in a matter of thirty years, note the differences); and after 1970 his works might be classified under the category of Mexican American or Chicano canon. This does not represent a far-fetched example, but rather a viable sample of the complexity involved in labelling works and authors. Literary history, however, does not meander as much as the herein presented transitory changes of nationality or rubrics.

Appropriation, consequently, becomes an indispensable methodology of revisionism and a medium for the reconstruction of origins, antecedents and background, all within a framework focusing on regional expression in the shadows of memory. Having been forgotten and ignored by Mexican circles –only as mere footnotes of frontier life–, they faced harsher times under the Americans through the politics of misunderstanding and poetics of indifference. It is essential for Chicano criticism to confront these thorny issues because it is best equipped to untangle webs of affiliation and belonging. Many of the early works embody an array of voices that fell through the cracks of legitimacy and real consideration for the chronicled perspectives contained within. Under Spanish and Mexican rule, they became lost voices in a silent desert; during American rule,

they generally typified incomprehensible utterances of undecipherable sounds that registered little meaning. Their marginalization simply became compounded with time to the point of becoming a part of a general amnesia toward an Hispanic or Mexican presence in the Southwest. In this way, reconstructive literary history can be understood as a method by which to fill in gaps, reformulate nuances and recharacterize literary perspectives from the point of view of the people who created literature. Revisionism is crucial, but even more so is reconceptualizing basic questions to better appreciate the inner workings and underpinnings of a people in a state of flux and change in their world view. Early Hispanic material and discourse provide the type of insight rarely found in Anglo-American sources about the development of the Southwest as a unique regional entity.

5. THE REGIONAL CASE MODEL: A VIABLE POINT OF DEPARTURE

Locating documents or materials, although still an adventurous task, is no longer an impossible feat because it does not imply working with a dearth of information. Quite the contrary, the over abundance demands new strategies for scrutiny and analysis. The main complication entails identifying, cataloging and handling dispersed sources and organizing them into some coherent fashion. It normally requires a detective's sense of perseverance and an archaeologist's willingness to pursue unorthodox clues. For instance, it is naive to expect most of the needed sources in a single centralized collection, neatly packaged; all options must be kept open to explore the most unlikely of places, turning over every stone. When researching the nineteenth century in a given region, for instance, we must approach such a period in the same way that it evolved, or at least in its own terms, while recognizing the primitive state of archival collections and library science. Counting on easy access tends to lead to quick disillusionment. It is perhaps best to examine the routes of trading and commerce, because books, newspapers, monographs and other pertinent documents travelled those same routes. This way, the researcher can piece together isolated bits of information from a wide variety of collections or sources to create a representative composite portrait of a desired period and/or region.

Efforts related to reconstructing a literary heritage imply resorting to creative research methods more within the confines of interdisciplinary studies. Fortunately, concentration on a specific geographical area offers many advantages and provides a focus with realistic parameters. General sources such as Hubert Howe Bancroft's volumes of historical compilations and chronicles (e.g. *Memorias* by Manuel Alvarez in 1825) might represent a start for a contextual groundwork. Beyond that, branching out into obscure sources becomes essential to unearth fragments of materials that

have miraculously survived. Aside from isolated sources, monographs and specialized collections, much patience is advised to peruse with a clinical eye every possible newspaper collection, a natural informal repository. Many salient official documents mysteriously disappeared and most books vanished, but it became impossible to completely erase the chronicled quotidian experiences found in newspapers. Newspapers contain the live pulse of history in the making and therefore merit more serious consideration as a primary source for documenting a literary legacy. For that reason, it is still vital to index newspaper collections, ranging from the Historical Society in Kansas City to the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, or from the New Mexico Archives in Santa Fe to special collections in San Antonio. Within a region such as New Mexico, it is just as important to examine the small town newspapers to evaluate cultural activity at a micro-local level. Only then can we uncover the dynamics of literary tastes of the times, including works read and discussed, and the type of organizational infrastructures, such as the famous *sociedades literarias* created to deal with literacy, rhetoric and aesthetics. The examination of these sources unveils a social and artistic reality much different from what is generally known, thus increasing our appreciation for the people who read and wrote during the harsh times of the frontier.

Despite the wealth of written materials that gives testimony to a reservoir of early poetic or fictionalized accounts, few critical paradigms have been proposed to study them. Scholarly indecisiveness has predominated, opting instead to focus on specific works, periods or genres. Few have hinted at a regional case model which might best permit conceptualizing a scope in a grander scale of interrelated and interdisciplinary data, including ethnographic and anthropological besides literary. Most approaches over specialize in dealing only with a parcel of the available materials with a limited contextual portrait. Much insight and discussion fall between the cracks. Some of the significant contributors are Rosaura Sánchez's monographic analysis of nineteenth-century novelist María Ruiz de Burton, Nicolás Kanellos' treatment of Hispanic theatre, Luis Leal's literary configuration of Aztlán, Genaro Padilla's discussion of autobiography, María Herrera-Sobek's and Tey Diana Rebolledo's vindication of the Chicana, and Clara Lomas' rediscovery of women writers.

Although these approaches provide invaluable results in Chicano criticism, the regional case model's distinction lies in being both diachronic and synchronic, eclectically dealing with written and oral sources. Concentrating on a single geographical area allows for viewing a complex network of interfacing data that provide a three-dimensional representation of a regional society. The cross-sectional stratification offers a more complete picture of trends, happenings and ideas. It encompasses historical revisionism, cultural anthropology, theories on culture, consciousness of race and class,

partisan politics and literary theory. Besides, a region such as New Mexico, Arizona or Texas, appears to have an identity all of its own as shaped by the people, myths, historical gestation, interaction with others and their unique sense of cultural practices. Region functions as an immediate identifier, a cultural matrix or an insular feature to which people relate. In other words, region becomes the outer visible crust of what we study from within, providing the cultural elements of what is filtered through the creative literary act. Region is the *patria chica* (homeland) within all of us that somehow captures our essence or synthesizes what we believe ourselves to be.

In the case of New Mexico as a distinct geographical and cultural entity, it certainly possesses a series of unique qualities. A few stand out: permanence, marginality, remoteness and endurance. In addition, New Mexico was injected with an early enthusiasm and optimism after Juan de Oñate's expedition in 1598. Spanish explorers were hopeful to repeat their luck as they had with México-Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital they conquered in 1521. Myths and legends about Quivira, Seven Golden Cities and other fantastic stories fertilized the Spanish imagination, often driven by fiction more than facts. The name of 'another Mexico' stuck but reality quickly set in when colonizers began to settle next to Indian pueblos, realizing the harshness of frontier life and the demands of the high desert. The new settlers became good students and in part imitators of the native peoples' lifeways through the necessity for survival. Contact was immediate, borrowing was expected and interrelationships were common. Because of isolation and distance from central Mexico, the region became a self-sufficient artery of civilization that developed with little outside influence. The sense of insularity and uniqueness grew with time to produce a network of pueblos and villages along the Río Grande that had to count on their own wits to survive. For that reason, New Mexico has viewed itself as a lost frontier (Lomelí 1988) from the rest of the world with a strong attachment to place.

It is not surprising that New Mexico would produce a deeply rooted literary tradition. Because of the region's believed potential, it attracted many visitors with a flair for hyperbole and adventure. Chronicles proliferated, diaries abounded, and accounts and *memorias* tried to persuade others of greatness. A literary tradition quickly prospered as it responded to an insatiable desire to dwell on fantasy, legend and larger-than-life happenings. This in part explains the first theatrical representation, Capitán Farfán's "Los moros y cristianos," along the Río Grande in 1598 and the early composition (1598-1604) and expeditious publication in 1610 of Gaspar Pérez de Villagrás's voluminous epic name, *Historia de la Nueva México*. These cannot possibly be perceived as literary flukes. The region developed a strong sense of itself and from there emerged numerous other incipient writings, including Miguel de Quintana's

semi-mystical poetic renditions for which he was investigated, and finally exonerated, by the Inquisition (Colahan and Lomeli). Other writings, such as *Los comanches* (ca. 1777), attest to a consistent productivity, despite the circumstances under which many works were written. Although it would be exaggerated to declare New Mexico a literary hotbed during the Colonial period, nonetheless the variety of writings seems remarkable considering the region's major infliction of poverty and isolation.

By the time the printing press arrived in New Mexico by 1834, thanks to Father José Antonio Martínez, who spurred a notion of Hispanic pride and autonomy, New Mexico was a well established –though still poor– cultural entity. A literary tradition, both oral and written, and syncretically infused with Indo-Hispanic elements, was thriving. The printing press, along with the production of newspapers and the expeditious dissemination of information, simply added and enhanced what was already there. Newspapers, consequently, became publishing outlets for writers besides being instruments of fact and opinion. New Mexico's prominence grew dramatically in the 1880s and 1890s with the coming of the railroad, causing a renewed cultural vigor and economic prosperity. The written word gained even more importance as a tool of partisan struggle and as a rhetorical tool of carving the imagination. The result produced positive effects in the field of creativity, prompting a new age of latent writers to manifest themselves through the newspaper as forms of regional expression. Anselmo Arellano in *Los pobladores nuevo mexicanos y su poesía, 1889-1950* (The New Mexican Colonizers and Their Poetry, 1976) was one of the first contemporary anthologists to document the presence of past poetic voices who otherwise remained unacknowledged. Again, these are not isolated accidents of literary history, but rather mere examples of the vast collection of voices generally forgotten. When efforts such as Arellano's are combined with Erlinda Gonzales-Berry's edited collection of essays, *Pasó Por Aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition, 1542-1988* (1989), the regional character and local artistic development gain a degree of coherence and unity. Such conceptualizations confirm the need to take into account more than mere titles and authors. The regional case model offers both an effective and practical approach to study literature in its proper cultural-historical context. A corollary contention is that if other critics concentrate on the literary production of other states of the Southwest, then we could authoritatively claim a much clearer concept of long-term Chicano/Hispanic aesthetics. An in-depth study of the four to five more Hispanic/Mexican states could potentially provide a broader mosaic of early Chicano creativity, establishing once and for all a rich legacy in these arid but hardly wretched wastelands.

In addition, there is the matter of dealing with artifacts from what might be regarded as the official folkloric culture. In the first half of the twentieth century, it

became fashionable to collect and compile folkloric materials (see Espinosa, Otero-Warren, Campa, Rael, etc.), appropriating Hispanic music or rhyme or quaintness, but overlooking other artifacts with a politically sensitive content. Part of the objective involved reconciling past tensions with Anglos while romanticizing their own culture as a simple, pastoral society imbedded in superstition, myth and legend. This aura of hardy simpleness served as the discourse to camouflage difference and thus gain greater acceptance. It cannot be coincidental that New Mexico was reluctantly admitted into the American Union in 1912, only after lengthy discussions with regard to the sufficient Americanization and allegiance of the territory and its people.

Despite the rubric of folklorization that generally reigned, Chicano expression branched out into various other arenas and forms. Popular tradition continued but also evolved in conjunction with more sophisticated forms, often paralleling literary trends and developments of Latin America, Spain and Europe. In other words, a significant amount of carefully crafted writings were produced that attest to a serious intent in message, structure or language. Although anonymous folkloric samples might have sparked more interest, historical accuracy reveals this should be counterbalanced with a flourishing of individualized writings that bespeak of a rich tradition. Newspapers obviously reflect the phenomenon as it unfolded with thousands of poems, short stories, serialized novels or dramatic segments. Samples such as the herein mentioned are not a rarity; quite the contrary, they abound in a massive scale. Instead of being labelled as exceptions, they constitute the norm. The principal problem resides in unearthing, indexing, and cataloging them in order to place them in a framework that first explains a series of stratified misconceptions.

Beyond the writings themselves, we soon encounter an infrastructure that promoted their creation: increased newspaper subscriptions, more bookstores and libraries, renewed interest in monographs and an overall abundance of artistic activity. The figures are telling: between 1879 and 1900, 283 newspapers were launched in the state of New Mexico, and of these 44 alone correspond to the city of Las Vegas, New Mexico (Stratton 24), which served as the epicenter of a modest but important Hispanic literary renaissance (Lomelí 1988). Among some of the New Mexican authors to benefit from this resurgence are Eusebio Chacón's *Hijo de la tempestad* (Son of the Storm) and *Tras la tormenta la calma* (Calm After the Storm) in 1892, Manuel C. de Vaca's *Noches tenebrosas en el Condado de San Miguel* (Spooky Nights in the County of San Miguel) and *Historia de Vicente Silva y sus cuarenta bandidos, sus crímenes y retribuciones* (History of Vicente Silva and His Forty Bandits, Their Crimes and Retributions) from 1899 and 1896 respectively, Porfirio Gonzales' *Historia de un cautivo* (A Captive's Story) in 1898, and many others (Lomelí 1989). Perhaps the best way to measure the spiraling

activity is by the number of new *sociedades literarias* founded in the northern part of the state, which functioned as centers of debates, poetic recitals and literary workshops, as well as institutes for rhetorical refinement in the art of political discourse, plus they provided mutual aid to people in need. There are claims that in Las Vegas, the hub of the renaissance, where six *sociedades* were founded in 1892 to add to the total of eight for a city of 3,000 inhabitants. Activity was such that the following anonymous but prophetic comment appeared in *La Voz del Pueblo* on April 9, 1892: “cuando en un futuro lejano se haga la historia sobre la vida cultural de Las Vegas, se tendrá que afirmar que 1892 es el año de las sociedades literarias y de ayuda mutua.”

Specialized approaches can be proposed to deal with such a diversity of materials and factors, but the regional case model is the only one to explicitly seek out comprehensiveness and interdisciplinarity. The complex nature of a region invites close examination of information, ranging from cultural politics to the studies of institutions, or from racial relations to governmental policies, or from infrastructural influences to the notion of imported ideas. This model presupposes social history as a dynamic process of change and interests, and literature is but one more contributing element within the larger picture. Since reality is stratified in multiple directions, consisting of long-term effects and one-time events, the composite is to be illuminated by explaining the relationship of the parts to each other. In this way, literary history becomes a science about origins, evolution, renovation, constants, dialectics and historical consciousness. It is perhaps the best way to know how a people has participated in history as well as how they have created it.

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Background of New Mexico's Hispanic Literature: Self-Referentiality as a Literary Historical Discourse

"Bajo tales condiciones tan adversas, el mestizaje cultural fue inevitable."
Don Pedro Bautista Pino, *Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la provincia del Nuevo México*

"The Southwest is a mosaic, not a synthesis."
Albert J. Guerard

1. OVERVIEW: HISPANIC LITERATURE AS AN ENDOGAMOUS TOOL FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

Understanding the full scope of cultural identity in New Mexico entails the task of recovering a rich and long literary past. With that in mind, much unorthodox, interdisciplinary research has focused on unearthing forgotten archives and manuscripts from diverse and sometimes unexpected sources. Individual attempts are coming together to form a vast diachronic macro-text of past regional writings in order to document a more complete literary portrait of the Southwest. This study aims to create a framework to better understand the evolution of a Nuevomexicano literary consciousness. As a way of illustrating such a framework in a specific narrative, Porfirio Gonzales's novel, *Historia de un cautivo* (1898), will be examined briefly.

To capture the magnitude of New Mexico's literary history, it is important to document Nuevomexicanos' stature in the general society in order to piece together an authentic portrayal of events, social dynamics, and personalities. This larger context can yield a number of important criteria for delineating distinctive characteristics: cultural makeup, participatory agents, politics, economics, gender, worldview, class, language, and, of course, literary traditions.

New Mexico's early Indo-Hispanic writings are unique because a vague but real notion exists among the general populace of possessing a long-standing past. We must remember that the region started to play a major role when incorporated into the larger context of Spanish folklore and myth barely forty-seven years (i.e., by 1539) after Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean. This is certainly not the case in other regions with a strong Indo-Hispanic presence such as California and, to a degree, Texas and Arizona. New Mexico's remarkable qualities and features permit the distinctive confluence of

factors that emerged during the early phases of Spanish exploration in the Americas. Although regarded as isolated and remote from pivotal cultural centers like Mexico City or Lima, New Mexico attracted early attention as a new crossroads of human migrations whose potential was fueled by myth, including the myth of largely unrealized riches, and the network of Native American settlements along what is now the Río Grande. These became the foundations of viable social structures where a livelihood was possible within otherwise harsh natural surroundings. The area eventually saw Native American and Hispanic lifestyles blending through time, borrowing from each other to transform their original forms. The literature that developed reflects a cultural dynamics found in no other region with an Indo-Hispanic presence.

The New Mexican enclave developed in isolation from mainstream New Spain as the Hispanic peoples acquired and adapted to their new geographical area, either using Native American pueblos as starting points and social references or by creating parallel colonies near what was already there. Thus, cultural identity has been shaped by the string of communities along the Río Grande much as Mexico City was influenced and fashioned by Tenochtitlan and Lago Texcoco. From this process a regional ethos emerged: The *chilero* cycle – dependent on the cultivation cycles of chiles – permeates virtually all aspects of life, including views of time and culinary habits. Linguistically, a sixteenth-century Spanish (*turbina* for dress or *coyote* for a social caste of mixed bloods) developed into a lingua franca with numerous Native American accents and terminologies (*cusca* for stingy, or *coyaye*, a herb also known as *escoba de la víbora* or snake's broom). Religious worship and iconography conformed to the environment of de centralized institutionalization by forging a sacred mecca, such as the Santuario de Chimayó (a sacred shrine in northern New Mexico), and by religious practices in which the *Penitentes* assumed the role of an *ad hoc* religious institution. Native Americans' close affinity to the land merged with Hispanics' pastoral economy to promote a notable attachment to place. An architecture, sometimes called Santa Fe-Pueblo, combines Spanish pragmatism in building techniques. At the same time, Native American aesthetics offer harmonious spatial representations between nature and human needs (Lomelí 1987: 81-83).

The singularity of these elements accorded New Mexico an inimitable place in what eventually became the literature and letters of the Southwest. Although attention to New Mexican writings in Spanish has often been superficial, even perfunctory, there is no doubt that the overall production occupies a special place in what the Southwest has to offer. The sheer volume of *crónicas*, *memorias*, *relaciones*, *diarios*, *historias*, and many other trans-generic writings gives evidence of an obsession with documentation (including incursions into fanciful imagination) for the sake of accountability, and,

in some cases, for self-aggrandizement, but fortunately so, for posterity's sake. The magnitude of these writings has gone unheeded mainly due to the materials' dispersion in various archives (e.g., Mexico City, Madrid, Kansas City, and Amsterdam), exacerbated later by their disappearance and by the stigma of Spanish being a "second-class" language. Although startling to many, it is a fact that quantitatively, Hispanic peoples throughout the continental United States far exceeded in productivity all other ethnic and racial minority cultures up to the end of the nineteenth century. And, in the context of Hispanic literature, I would argue that production by Nuevomexicanos is superior in longevity, variety, and abundance.

Literary production by Nuevomexicanos manifests another distinction: it is the first and earliest cluster of Hispanic writings to be dealt with as a corpus unto itself, despite the deficient methodologies to define it as such in *la tierra adentro del vasto norte* (the inner lands of the vast north). Although critical attention to this literature has tended toward the perfunctory (see, e.g., Mary Catherine Prince's "The Literature of New Mexico" [1918] and Mabel Major, Rebecca W. Smith, and T. M. Pearce's renowned *Southwest Heritage: A Literary History With Bibliographies* [1938]), what emerges from such treatments is an undeniable recognition of a body of Hispanic writings—as vague as that recognition might be.

Many years before an organized discourse existed, critical minds often reflected on these writings, contemplating their interrelationships. For example, Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà's 1610 *Historia de la Nueva México* (1992) demonstrates his clear notion of the written literary foundation taking hold in the region. He refers to his chronicle as an enterprise within "nuestro (our) Nuevo México" of which he feels an intimate part. On one occasion he even compares Aztec writings to the contributions of others before him, such as Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, and Fray Marcos de Niza, obviously suggesting a body of works with a certain regional focus and common features while distinguishing them from mainland Mexican culture. He considers writing in Mexico in the "hieroglyphic mode" in contrast to "*la grandeza y excelencia/Del escribir ilustre que tenemos*" (the greatness and excellence / of the noble writing that we have) (Villagrà 1992: 6).

A sizable number of chroniclers thereafter focused on New Mexico with a particular propensity for comparing both Mexicos, often deviating into either a discourse of disenchantment or embellishments of wishful thinking. But they rarely lost sight of New Mexico as a focal point and axis of literary inspiration. The Río Grande region eventually took on the qualities of an autochthonous natural and human area, serving as a magnet for critical discussions and fanciful recreations in literary works. Hernán Gallegos and Don Pedro Bautista Pino effectively demonstrate this in their respective

Relación y conclusión del viaje y suceso que Francisco Chamuscado con ocho soldados hizo en el descubrimiento del Nuevo México (Narrative and Conclusion of the Trip and Event that Francisco Chamuscado Accomplished With Eight Soldiers in the Discovery of New Mexico [1581])¹ and *Exposición sucinta y sencilla de la provincia de él Nuevo México* (Succinct and Simple Treatise on the New Mexico Province [1812]). Even Miguel de Quintana in 1732, in his semi-mystical poetry, claims a local autonomy vis-a-vis the standards imposed by the local ecclesiastics of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, New Mexico (Colahan and Lomelí 1989). The region's distinctiveness is also reflected in oral tradition and folk theater, which were not limited to the written page. *Los comanches* (1777ca) and *Los tejanos* (1854ca), two popular folk plays, capture local concerns while contrasting them with those found among Plains Indians and Texans.

As early as the 1830s, Manuel Alvarez initiated an embryonic critical appraisal of a specific work, thus continuing the conceptualization of a distinctive regional literature. He highlighted the Native Americans' inclination toward politics and expressed amazement at their ability to import news on far-away events such as Hernán Cortés's conquests. He notes

Del [Oñate] dicen de el y todo el efecto que se hizo, que para tanto ruido corto, el Capitán Gaspar de Villagrà que se halló pudiente [sic], escribió un libro en metro castellano. (Of him [Oñate] they say his colonizing enterprise had great impact, and, when all was said and done, Captain Gaspar de Villagrà stood out as a prudent man, having written a book in Castilian meter). (Alvarez 2264)

A cultural self-referentiality was in place during the formative years of the territory's traditions, catching impressions and images of creativity in the region, especially in relation to the conflict caused by the encroachment of Anglo Americans around 1848. One popular example that metaphorically captures the sentiment is the following:

Nuevo México mentado,
has perdido ya tu fama,
adonde yo fui por lana
y me vine tresquilado.

Alluded New Mexico,
you have now lost your fame
where I (we?) went for wool
I returned sheared. (Campa 526)

We see repeated glances backward at the origins and gestation of a literary expression rooted in New Mexico. Another early assessment of Villagrà's epic poem occurs in 1885 by Mexican critic Francisco Pimentel:

The *Historia de la Nueva México* has two laudable features, one in the contents, and the other in the form, to wit: the fidelity with which the facts are related, and the simplicity and naturalness of the style and the language. This is really remarkable in the period when gongorism predominated. (Pimentel 142-143)

Immediately thereafter, in 1887, John Gilmary Shea wrote a groundbreaking essay, “The First Epic of Our Country. By the Poet Conquistador of New Mexico, Captain Gaspar de Villagr a” (Shea 1887), considered the first in-depth discussion of this important poetic text, an important chronicle that unfortunately remained forgotten until the 1990s.

If doubts remained about the legitimacy and importance of early Nuevomexicano literature, they were dispelled by the latter part of the nineteenth century when literary production increased dramatically via newspapers. New Mexico gained in stature and in peculiarity, even leading some historians and politicians to inject it with further elements of myth and thus augment its exoticism. Two examples suffice: William G. Ritch’s *Aztlan: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico* (1885) and *An Illustrated History of New Mexico from the Earliest Period of its Discovery to the Present Time, Together with Biographical Mention of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Citizens of Today* (*Illustrated History* 1895). The two works framed the territory’s uniqueness within the confines of the mythic homeland of the Aztecs, that is, Aztl n. No other region has so caught the romantic fancy for its cultural composition and diverse history; even California is known more for its weather and natural resources. If New Mexico conjured up images of C bola and Quivira for the early Hispanic explorers, its magic has prevailed to this day, promoted first to attract settlers, and, later, a tourist industry based on cultural voyeurism, whence the emergence in the 1920s of the modern version of what the original explorers sought: the “Land of Enchantment.”

In spite of this romanticized past, Nuevomexicanos had to struggle for survival in a society in which the balance of power was against them. By 1878, when the railroad arrived, pastoral life was being interrupted by waves of changes and hostile acquisitions of land, minerals, and agriculture. The railroad introduced new products, facilitated trade, and brought a diversified economy (and, as a consequence, material prosperity). Although economically splintered and politically factionalized, however, Nuevomexicanos made great strides in the field of literature thanks to the proliferation of the printing press and the growth of an audience of readers. Nuevomexicanos began to realize their potential as creators of literary expression, making the easy switch from the backdrop of a rich oral tradition to the written medium. If the concept of a New Mexican literature had been initially latent, almost intuitive, and heavily influenced by the constructs of history, after the 1880s the notion became explicit, unequivocal, and freer in its fancy. A tradition had not been born; this was a renaissance –the first of its kind by any American minority group– where socioeconomic circumstances and human dynamics permitted a florescence, almost an explosion. Suddenly, the written word became accessible to large numbers of people, and a constellation of writers

coalesced from individual voices into collective congregations, artistic groups, and even literary societies.

The new incursions into literary expression seem to have spurred a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Publishing outlets afforded Nuevomexicanos the vehicle to articulate what had been repressed since the Mexican-American War, which had left them feeling “voiceless and expressionless” (Paredes 1987: 1079). This newfound freedom of stylized expression, particularly in Spanish, provided the needed impetus to dwell on matters pertaining to the imagination. Newspapers became important instruments of cultural-artistic dialogue. As Nicolás Kanellos notes:

Besides supplying basic news of the homeland and of the Hispanic world in general, advertising local businesses and informing the community on relevant current affairs and politics of the United States (often through unauthorized translations of the English language press and/or news agencies), Hispanic periodicals additionally have had to offer alternative information services that present their own communities' views of news and events. At times this information has had to take on a contestatory and challenging posture vis-a-vis the English-language news organizations and U.S. official government and cultural institutions. (Kanellos 239)

Newspapers assumed the roles of both text and a multifaceted medium of cultural and informational exchange. In them we find the transmission of social values, both overt and subliminal, plus a forum for public debate through polemical editorials and essays. Above all, the newspaper became the meeting ground between the oral tradition of a people and attempts at either experimental or polished writings on a wide assortment of themes and subjects. Newspapers expressed what was in the people's minds and hearts that could be put down in writing. In that sense, they represented an externalization or out-pouring of ideas and sentiments, thus serving as a modern form for the long-standing desire to document everything in sight, as evinced in colonial accounts and chronicles. But the newspaper is a fragile medium, and, as a consequence, the Hispanic people's faith in the newspaper as a viable means of expression motivated them to collect and compile newspaper writings as a body of literature. Regarded by many as useless and cumbersome, newspapers remain the single largest, most comprehensive (and most neglected) stock of daily history constituting the legacy of a people (Grove, Barnett, and Hansen xv).

It is a well substantiated fact that more Spanish-language newspapers were founded in New Mexico than anywhere else in what became the American Southwest (Stratton 1969, Arellano n.d., Lomeli 1987). Perhaps the greatest proliferation is found in Las Vegas, New Mexico, where newspapers doubled as chronicles of daily events and as literary outlets, serving as the base for the Las Vegas Renaissance. Beginning in

the 1870s, the city itself experienced a boom that created and cultivated a readership – a situation propitious for producing literature. Cultured language, verbal wit, and an ingenious flair with words were highly prized abilities, and writers with such skills received social accolades and prompted the creation of literary groups. From this ambience emerged a conglomeration of *sociedades mutualistas* (mutual-aid societies), originally community-based support networks and fringe benefit associations (Amaro Hernández 3), which evolved into full-fledged literary societies. The objectives of the mutual-aid societies expanded “to investigate and debate questions and subjects of social, literary and moral character” (Arellano n.d.: 3). They promoted group consciousness and served as training grounds for politicians, orators, social workers, and literati.

The Las Vegas Renaissance “transversed unprecedented social, class and political affinities with the intent to define their own literary map” (Lomelí 1990: 16). Unlike subsequent minority groupings many years later, such as the Harlem Renaissance (largely directed by white patrons), the New Mexican literary societies were a native mass movement that represented Indo-Hispanic society at all levels, promoting published writings both popular or elite. Powerful and influential persons are indeed known for their contributions, but the salient feature of the Las Vegas Renaissance is the participation of people from all walks of life:

No one leader stood out nor did anyone in particular direct it... [I]t was both a popular and middle-class event. The movement became a happening totally apart and separate from Anglo literary interests (and circles), and it can be interpreted as a show of cultural strength by a conquered people. (Lomelí 1987: 90)

The increase in literary expression mirrored socioeconomic conditions, including an emerging middle class and frequent attempts to internationalize literary tastes and connect locals with cosmopolitan sources. It became common-place to find writings by New Mexicans alongside those from Mexico, Spain, Germany, Nicaragua, Czechoslovakia, Argentina, and France. A wide range of moods, themes, experimentations, and styles offered variety and sophistication. Indo-Hispanic New Mexico was by then overcoming its image of backwoods illiteracy but remained unrecognized in the literature of the Southwest or, at best, was seen as part of the “sagebrush school of literature” (Martin 4). A definite movement was in vogue: between 1879 and 1900, 283 newspapers were launched in the state of New Mexico; of these, forty-four were produced in the city of Las Vegas alone (Stratton 25). Of those forty-four, sixteen were bilingual and thirteen were exclusively Spanish-language newspapers (Stratton 24), many of which were direct outlets of the literary societies. In 1892 eight of these societies were thriving in Las Vegas, accounting for a remarkable amount of cultural activity. A burgeoning

center of creative activity found itself in full bloom, and the Spanish language benefited greatly while gaining new vitality and importance. In 1881 *Revista Católica* detailed the following:

La prosperidad física, moral, artística y literaria de Las Vegas progresa a grandes pasos.... La cantidad de libros y papeles, que entra en Las Vegas, es pasmosa. Aquí se publican periódicos diarios, hebdomadarios y mensuales. El trabajo de las imprentas no tiene bastantes obreros para dar abasto a los muchos encargos que reciben. (Physical, moral, artistic and literary prosperity of Las Vegas advances in great leaps The quantity of books and papers that enter Las Vegas is astounding. Daily newspapers, weeklies, and monthlies are published here. The work of printing shops does not have enough workers to supply the many orders received). (Actualidades 543)

Amid this cross-national hybridization, Nuevomexicanos continued to develop and promote their own cultural agenda. Hispanic writers were juxtaposed with, even compared to, consecrated authors from other lands, thus placing the former in an illustrious group. The implication is clear: whereas political and economic marginalization characterized their immediate plight in Anglo America, their intellectual and literary prowess empowered them to transcend social restrictions. To emphasize the point, *La Voz del Pueblo* in 1891 highlighted the exceptional talents of an illustrious poet:

Don Eleuterio Baca, fiel y digno discípulo de Calderón y Lope de Vega, el primero de los poetas Neo-Mexicanos ... es uno de esos genios que la madre naturaleza da pocos al mundo." (Don Eleuterio Baca, loyal and meritorious disciple of Calderón and Lope de Vega, the first among New Mexican poets ... is one of those geniuses that mother nature gives to the world). (Arellano & Vigil 3)

Whereas socially, Nuevomexicanos were experiencing institutionalized segregation, they could metaphorically rub elbows with the classics.

This renewed confidence unchained a variety of literary manifestations, some imitating established forms, some attempting to found new local archetypes, and some melding popular folkloric forms with more purely literary genres. In this context, we can better understand Manuel M. Salazar's picaresque *La historia de un caminante o sea Aurora y Gervacio* (*The Story of a Roamer, that is, Aurora and Gervacio*) from 1881, or some of the historical *cronovelas* (chronicle novels) from the 1890s, such as Manuel C. de Baca's 1896 *Historia de Vicente Silva y sus cuarenta bandidos, sus crímenes y retribuciones* (*History of Vicente Silva and his Forty Thieves, Their Crimes and Retributions*) and his 1892 *Noches tenebrosas en el Condado de San Miguel* (*Gloomy Nights in San Miguel County*), published serially in *Sol de Mayo*, either of which today might be called a documentary or *reportaje* novel. These novels imitate well-known models, but their principal concern is to provide local substance and content. That is, these adapt a literary

form to local reality. Eusebio Chacón, in the *Dedicación* to his two works *El hijo de la tempestad* and *Tras la tormenta la calma*, pinpoints his commitment to the regional novel as a genre: “They (the novels) are a genuine creation of my own fantasy and (are) not stolen nor borrowed from *gabachos* or foreigners. I dare lay the foundation ... of an entertaining literature on New Mexican soil” (Chacón 1892, 2, my translation). If Chacón’s first novel unfolds the perils of a region’s ridding itself of totalitarianism and disguised forms of social control, his second work is an imitative exercise in deciphering morality and redefining honor. His main concern is to put fiction at the service of social issues, but part of his fascination is with behavioral ambiguity. While Chacón pioneered the “authentic New Mexican novel,” many Nuevomexicano writers, particularly in the 1890s, set out to captivate a readership anxious for stories relevant to their social milieu, offering a wide range of poetry, *coloquios* (dramatic pieces) or *actos* (skits), short stories, and literary essays that contrasted the starkness of current events with aesthetic intrigue and verbal ingenuity.

The 1890s saw the greatest production of literary pieces, many of which are yet to be read and studied. The dilemma becomes how to extract from these texts a viable corpus of Nuevomexicano writings, for many of these works were not archived and were thus lost. More problematic than faulty storage were social stigmas and linguistic biases. Spanish-language newspapers suffered the same destiny as many of the important documents from colonial New Mexico: Most American scholars in the nineteenth century concentrated more on preserving English-language materials, thus contributing to the destruction, disfigurement, or dispersal of Spanish-language documents. That is precisely why any endeavor to recover the bits and fragments of Nuevomexicano literature, from whatever sources and through whichever means, is so vital to reconstruction of a forgotten past.

2. HISTORIA DE UN CAUTIVO BY PORFIRIO GONZALES: A TURN OF THE CENTURY NARRATIVE

An author who exemplifies some of my previous arguments is Porfirio Gonzales (1863-1920), a renowned pioneer educator from the Las Vegas area who suffered a fate similar to many Nuevomexicano writers of his time —*postergación* or relegation. Others worthy of critical consideration are Apolinario Almanzares, José Escobar, Vicente or Luis Bernal, Secundino Baca, Josefina Escajeda, Eleuterio Baca, Jesús María H. Alarid, José Inés García, and Higinio V. Gonzales.

Gonzales’s short novel, *Historia de un cautivo*, which appeared in 1898 in the Las Vegas, New Mexico newspaper, *La Voz del Pueblo* as a ten-part weekly serial, encapsulates many of the sentiments of Indo-Hispanics at the turn of the century

when their condition oscillated between continuity as an unstable territory and official statehood. The uncertainty produced ambivalent allegiances that often bordered on the contradictory. Gonzales's novella, like many written during this era, seems simple and straightforward. An almost nostalgic romanticism shapes the central theme of granting a person something that rightfully belongs to him, with some luck involved. The work in part captures a regional history of past conflicts by telling a captivity story within the *indita* tradition in which the central focus is rectifying the captive's social condition. The narrative framework offers identities that are layered and mixed; intrigue is paramount and harmony is reinstated. The storyline, at least on the surface, presents the problem of double identities and the natural outcome of inevitable wealth for the survivors. Gonzales's hero, Esteban Stankiwicks, is a rich Swede adopted by a Norwegian family. Stanki befriends and falls in love with a Mexican maiden, Margarita Molina, who had been captured in childhood by the Apaches. Esteban also becomes a victim of captivity and is eventually mortally wounded by the Apaches and dies in the arms of an unsuspecting traveler who relates the unfolding events.

The plot offers a Cervantes-style narrative in which reality is muddled by the use of deliberate ambiguities and confused identities; Gonzales provides a series of leads (literally a trail) that takes the reader in many directions beyond the simple reunification of a family. First, the blending of historical and literary contexts results in ambivalence. Further, the allegorical aspect of the story defies either realism or romanticism. In addition, the narrative mixes fantasy (e.g., inherited riches) and desire (e.g., finding an identity lost through circumstances).

Part of its intrigue rests on its *sui generis* qualities and resonance, but the novella contains much more: its explicit reference to important historical markers grants it some authority. For example, it establishes a parallelism between 1898, the time of its publication (which also forebodes the turn of the century into modernity), and 1842, the fictional time of the novella in which the old order of Mexican rule foreshadows Anglo American domination. Either way, double preparations for a changing future—in which peoples of diverse origins will commingle—seem to be in progress. If the primary fears in 1842 were of violence, lawlessness, and Indian raids, in 1898 the greatest anxiety is about long-overdue statehood and a troubled integration into an Anglo-American world. The novella is a way to comment on the significance of such landmarks in history.

Don Eduardo Pérez de Molina, the narrator, main character, and patriarch is the "Apache maiden's" father; he is the touchstone of reality who tries to achieve social harmony by bringing the loose pieces together. Not by coincidence, Don Eduardo is a colonel who lost his daughter to the Apaches some fourteen years before the action of the novel; he measures all events by the degree of Apache threat in the Southwest. To

Don Eduardo, the region is a place of strife that demands domination –that is, a place still in the process of becoming. The process of recovering his daughter Margarita, by extension, can be taken as a symbolic act of reclaiming what is rightfully his equivalent to the retrieval and possible redemption of his homeland and honor. The novella's title, *Historia de un cautivo*, is ambiguous. One might think that the romantic motif of captured Europeans or *mestizos* confines the story within the *indita* tradition or that the captivity alludes only to Esteban Stankiwicks's situation. The reference is a generic one, for each character is living out a kind of captivity. In other words, the work encompasses what might more appropriately be termed "*historia de un pueblo cautivo*" – the history / story of a captive people – suggesting shifts in affinities within the context of a conquest.

Esteban is discovered to be a nobleman who, unknown to him, is the heir to a huge estate. Margarita then manages, with meticulous documentation, to convince her lover's relatives that she is the true benefactor of Esteban's inheritance. Esteban's relatives are caught in a web of some intrigue, forced to turn Esteban's inheritance over to Margarita. Thus, Margarita goes from being a "primitive" (an Apache maiden) to a modern corporate owner who renounces her double past – Apache and Mexican. By marrying Esteban's brother, she completes the circle of assimilation into monied mainstream American society. The question that emerges is: Is there a price to pay for such quick social mobility in a region in which identities are still in flux?

Gonzales's short work embodies a number of other interesting considerations. For example, the term "*historia*" can mean either history or story (or both, as Cervantes might have preferred), thus representing a double-edged commentary on the social evolution of the times. Clearly, this work romanticizes social relations with the histrionic techniques of shifting identities to achieve a felicitous suspense, but it lacks the superficiality of nineteenth-century dime novels and the caramelized content of Helen Hunt Jackson's 1884 *Ramona*. Narrative perspective is expertly handled by Gonzales as the story unfolds around Don Eduardo, much like a whirlwind of discoveries and revelations that soon evolve into new opportunities. Although Native Americans cause physical harm and are described as "savages" and antagonists, facile monolithic polarizations between them and others are generally lacking. Margarita, after all, has become Apache by living with them for fourteen years and she never belittles them. The traditional cowboy-and-Indian framework is missing because the characters recognize an implicit process of assimilation and blurring of difference as well as the value of upholding a *mestizo* culture.

The novella, then, foreshadows changes that were about to take place in the twentieth century – analogous to the kinds of changes experienced by Mexicans in the late 1840s. The text contains a prophetic note of sweeping transformations. Even though

the ending seems to be a happy one, a doleful mood permeates the narrative, recalling Eusebio Chacón's *El hijo de la tempestad* (1892) and its symbolism of disharmony and social turmoil. The work presents closure and resolution, but it also suggests quandary, misgivings, and skepticism.

Porfirio Gonzales, in the final analysis, delivers an ambivalent novel with competing messages: He comments on the tribulations of the past as he intimates radical, fundamental changes in the near future. *Historia de un cautivo*, therefore, encases the discourse of a region's self-referentiality as it comes to grips with its turbulent history and begins to negotiate with elements of the outside world and inevitable influences. In that sense, the work is both entertaining and mildly foreboding.

Judging from the various sources cited, including *Historia de un cautivo*, New Mexico has been a major presence in Hispanic texts since the colonial period. Nuevomexicano literature very early is recognizably localized, specific to the region. By tracing texts from various historical epochs, we can appreciate the development of a Nuevomexicano literary ethos. *Historia de un cautivo*, as an example from a well sustained literary tradition, has remained overlooked, and the unresolved dichotomies and troubling dilemmas that the novel brings to light, have often been misunderstood or misinterpreted. What is required now is to retrace the steps of the Nuevomexicano literary tradition, unearthing texts that remain hidden in early newspapers or that lie unread in archives. Further research into and careful critical discussion of these narratives will unravel meanings that have heretofore been compromised, and will, at last, allow a comprehensive history of our Nuevomexicano literary heritage to emerge.

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NOTES

¹ Hernán Gallegos's "Relación y conclusión del Viaje y suceso que Francisco Chamuscado con ocho soldados hizo en el descubrimiento del Nuevo México" appears in Vol. 15 of Joaquín Pacheco and Francisco Cárdenas's edited *Colección de documentos inéditos, relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y colonización de las posesiones españolas en América y Oceanía, sacados, en su mayor parte, del Real Archivo de Indias* (42 Vols., Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel B. de Quirós, 1864-1865).^o

Chicana Novelists in The Process of Creating Fictive Voices

"Your voice is lost to me, carnal"

Lorna Dee Cervantes

Chicana literature in the early 1980s finds itself at a precarious juncture, even in terms of the number of works being published. Some critics attest to a quantitative drop while others hint at a qualitative ascent. Within the body of Chicana literature, however, one fact remains constant: critical attention still lags far behind in proportion to the number of publications that have recently come to light. In fact, the modest boom of critical studies that proliferated during the 1970s has not made a significant impact on promoting new research to bring Chicana literature into some degree of world prominence or at least to the threshold of the American mainstream. Although remarkable gains have been made in this regard, Chicana literature seems to maintain some form of marginality among more traditional literary circles. If this assessment of its current status appears to be bleak, the picture becomes miserably amplified with respect to literature written by Chicanas, whose efforts have been generally ignored or misunderstood and stigmatized as being less rigorous in their approach to producing literature.

Chicana writers did not organize as an interest group until the special issue dedicated to "Chicanas en la Literatura y el Arte" in *El Grito* (1973).¹ This marked what Rita Sánchez later termed "breaking out of the silence"² and posited a critical stage of inner reflection in order to vindicate a historical gap that had endured and somehow gone undocumented for a long time. Chicana feminism had apparently gone unnoticed and the year 1973 can perhaps be regarded as the key point of departure for contemporary writings by Chicana authors whose inclinations were to accentuate an experiential perspective that focused on a woman's world view, her immediate sphere of social interactions, and concerns of a feminist nature. Thereafter emerged a series of special issues in journals addressing Chicana topics, and entire journals such as *Comadre* were created with the objective of providing a distinct forum to delve into issues earmarked by a particular interpretation and response that would differ considerably from both males

and Anglo women. Literature written by Chicanas not only became a significant voice of the Chicana experience but also a mainstay in more contemporary trends with the purpose of breaking new ground and exploring further areas of human expression.

Thus far, Chicana poets have enjoyed some critical discussion, although they have not attained the same attention as their male counterparts. And, within this panorama of relative neglect toward Chicana creativity in general, the novelists have fared even worse as is evidenced by the alarmingly low number of critical studies devoted to novels written by Chicanas. True, this is partly attributable to the small number of female novelists, a total of four contemporary writers by the early 1980s: Berta Ornelas, *Come Down From the Mound* (1975); Isabella Ríos, *Victuum* (1976); Gina Valdés, *María Portillo* (1981); and Estela Portillo Trambley, *Trini* (forthcoming). With such a limited number of writers, it is no wonder that each writes strictly in her own individual style, thus avoiding any groupings or schools for followers. Their contribution as a whole has been to embark on portraying women as the central participants in a given situation as a natural outcome of their world view with respect to males.

The scarcity of Chicana fiction and its respective criticism seems to involve a variety of self-perpetuating factors. In terms of the actual numbers of works produced. There are those who point to the pressures of a society that essentially functions according to male interests in order to explain the inhibitors that discourage women, be it overtly or covertly. Some scholars, when pressed, allude to the limited availability of Chicana works by suggesting a lack of maturity in their ability to handle the craft of writing. As Evangelina Enríquez and Alfredo Mirandé state in *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*: “Chicana literature ... suffers from a lack of exposure in major publishing circles and is perhaps considered less than legitimate by some critics.”³ The writers themselves are aware, to varying degrees, of the psychological impact of writing in an unsupportive environment. If approached about why their novels receive minimal attention, the authors might answer confidentially that even Chicana publishing houses do not enthusiastically take the necessary risks with their works.

The psychological discouragement women writers are subjected to is carefully outlined by Eliana Rivero in a key article, “Escritura chicana: la mujer,” where she posits a series of conditions particular to women as they are viewed as a socio-sexual class quite apart from and dominated by a male-oriented society:

... la mujer *como grupo*, en paralelo a conjuntos raciales o sociales que históricamente no han estado asociados a la producción de “Cultura,” no ha tenido todavía la definición sociocultural requerida, la aprobación del código de costumbres y de tiempo de ocio necesario —con las sanciones y facilidades apropiadas— para una dedicación profesional a la escritura, *de la misma forma en que la puede disfrutar el hombre*. El sistema aún no lo permite; sólo lo dificulta.⁴

The author proceeds to point out the sacrifices and commitment required by anyone involved in such intellectual endeavors; in addition, she also expounds on the additional demands placed on women labeled as “extrañamente agresivas” or accused of being of the inclinations “que no se avienen a su naturaleza femenina” when they achieve creative prowess. Here, the critic develops what Margarita B. Melville terms a situation defined as being “twice a minority.”⁵ Rivero believes that Chicano society restricts women’s opportunity to fully exercise moral and mental independence by curtailing their “desenvolvimiento.” She adds that if women manage to become intellectuals, “Son, en su mayoría, escritoras o creadoras o artistas o críticas que existen en el ‘destierro espiritual’ con respecto a sus compañeros de profesión” (5).

Social and historical factors, deeply rooted along sexual lines, have no doubt contributed to the view of woman’s state as marginal in her milieu, thereby augmenting her relative exclusion from the main course of what male values deem significant. In literature, as in most activities, the effects on women tend to produce detrimental – although sometimes subtle– results, for example, in not being granted the same degree of legitimacy. In addition to this, the Chicana fiction writer is faced with another dilemma: the lack of a fundamental egalitarian relationship with male writers, forcing her to endure unfair and disparate comparisons with other authors. As Rivero explains:

... hasta que estas variables no se controlen, hasta que la base material (y las actitudes culturales) sean iguales para escritores para escritoras, resultará ilógico. ‘antihistórico’ (y ridículo) esperar el surgimiento de *una* Rolando Hinojosa, de *una* Tomás Rivera, de *una* Alurista, de *una* Rudolfo Anaya, de *una* Miguel Méndez.... Es un asunto de peras y de olmos. (7-8)

In short, literary criticism by Chicanos suffers from the same malady as its Anglo counterparts in not probing the creative production of women. And when Chicana works do appear they are rarely viewed critically to determine and decipher the author’s intentions with respect to the literary standards they challenge. The underlying implication is that the issues women writers raise are not of great magnitude or importance. This conclusion can be easily verified by citing the astonishingly scarce bibliographical entries that deal directly with Chicana novelists.⁶ The present study, then, attempts to remedy the obvious oversight on the part of Chicana criticism while focusing specifically on two novelists, Berta Ornelas and Isabella Ríos, who represent two distinct views on the art of narrating and whose works symbolize an attempt to create fictive voices.

Although our objective is not to resolve the differences between what critics consider male and female literature, a number of scholars have examined this controversial topic. For example, in *Sexual Politics* Kate Millett substantiates the claim

that men and women do not represent separate species, but in many respects they represent separate cultures.⁷ Research on the subject admits that works by women do not necessarily differ from those by men except in certain intangibles such as the role of feelings or patterns of self-perception or self-awareness—a variety of concerns of maximum interest to many Chicanas. Patricia Meyer Spacks, perhaps one of the more outstanding theoreticians on women writers, proposes conceptual delineations within what she terms “the female imagination,”⁸ a provocative precept governed by a series of constants. She maintains that “Changing social conditions increase or diminish the opportunities for women’s actions and expression, but a special female self-awareness emerges through literature in every period” (3). To Meyer Spacks, the female novelist faces basically the same problems as any novelist, that is, she might be concerned with human relationships, personal identity, or the interchange between society and the individual. To this, she adds:

Still, there appears to be something that we might call a woman’s point of view—except that that sounds like a column in the *Ladies Home Journal*—a vague enough phenomenon, doubtless the result mainly of social conditioning, but an outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the centuries. (4-5)

The author sees a pervasive socio-sexual class consciousness on the part of women writers in that likenesses among women are more fundamental than differences. This would have us believe that literature written by Chicanas qualifies more as female literature than as a cultural-historical component of Chicano literature. The implications are, of course, many and problematic in nature, thereby complicating the issue of what constitutes this body of literature. Within the same line of what Meyer Spacks puts forth, Simone de Beauvoir comments: “A man would never get the notion of writing a book on the peculiar situation of the human male, a man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man.”⁹ The general consensus would have us believe that the male view is the norm or standard by which to evaluate literature. If this is so, then literature becomes merely another medium through which to express—through symbolic means—power or politics by asserting one group over another.

Literature written by Chicanas is viewed from diverse perspectives: from those that stress its scant historical background to those that emphasize its recent composition as a variegated whole. Although new names are being discovered, only a few Hispanic women distinguished themselves in prose before the mid 1970s: among these are Nina Otero Warren and Jovita Gonzales, who concentrated on short stories and folktales. Meanwhile, poets were generally better known, mainly due to their sheer numbers,

but most of them occupied only limited space in old newspapers and rarely achieved recognition. In the case of the long narrative, a New Mexican, Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca, was the first woman to receive some acclaim during her time for *We Fed Them Cactus*, published in 1954. A *sui generis* work which combines the chronicle and the novel, its focus is to recall *vaquero* days in New Mexico with a definite romantic tone of nostalgia; in it the author evokes the rough existence of ranch life and exalts the hard work of her people. Her literary acceptance, not by coincidence, is directly linked to her high economic stature among *hacendados* of her region, thus providing a retrospective view of *los de arriba*. Her orientation is not geared to exposing social conditions as they could have been, but rather she glosses over past history as if to justify and accept it. Despite her attitude of social acquiescence, some critics prefer to categorize her as an isolated case both as a woman writer and as an assimilationist. Her enigmatic persona becomes a moot point for she had no subsequent followers or emulators in her line of writing and left only a mild legacy by having intrigued readers with her work's title.

It is not until 1974 or 1975 –depending on whether we adhere to date of copyright or date of publication– that the first contemporary novel by a Chicana appears: Isabella Ríos copyrights her work *Victuum* in 1974 but publishes it in 1976, and Berta Ornelas makes her work *Come Down From the Mound* known in 1975. This sudden emergence of two novelists basically coincides with the International Women's Year of 1975, a key landmark when women around the world took significant steps to make their presence felt in all areas of social activity, literature being no exception, Ríos and Ornelas set out to break new ground by concentrating on the story rather than on style. Whereas 1975 serves as a focal point in time for Chicanas producing novelistic ventures, Marcela Trujillo argues in "The Dilemma of the Modern Chicana Artist and Critic" (1977) that the stage had already been set: "The impetus of the woman's movement together with the Chicano movement contributed to the Chicana's latent potential and so she began to focus in on her particular feminist experience through the arts."¹⁰

Chicana contributions to novel writing aptly coincided with a key development in the Chicano novel in general that began in 1975, when an intense interest in experimentation effected new trends. Such novels as Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamanzuchale* (1975) and *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975) by Alejandro Morales revealed a new direction in narrative technique that corresponded more to what was in vogue in other world literatures. Through all of these efforts, the Chicana novel came of age: both subject matter and focus were structured to contort social reality with the objective of offering new images of the mental state beyond the identity search that was previously evident in *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal and *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) by Oscar Zeta Acosta. Among the dramatic changes that occurred,

novelists examined a wide variety of social issues as they affect the individual often relating situations to philosophical or ethical questions. The creation of community, as Tomás Rivera proposes, does not become a literary production in and of itself because the novelists after 1975, including Chicanas, sought to reshape archetypes of the sort that had been underrepresented in literature.¹¹ In this sense, cultural setting acquires less importance, for what matters above all is the dynamics of conflict between the individual and external forces. Ethnicity is no longer the ultimate aim but instead becomes a natural component of those who participate in the action. A conscious ideology of culture is now supplanted by the individual's circumstance as it becomes shaped and influenced by social agents. The result, then, is an internalized notion of self within a specific historical time in order to exhume a human drama of universal implications and regenerative possibilities.

Chicana novelists have made some significant strides in the aforementioned areas of experimentation in that they have expanded what Juan Bruce-Novoa terms the Chicana literary space.¹² They have, in fact, created women characters distinct from those of male authors by portraying females in ordinary and demystified roles. Their emphasis does not aim to idealize but rather to develop characters that offer some sense of verisimilitude as beings of flesh and blood. Even if their attempts have not been totally successful or convincing, it is difficult to deny that most protagonists in works written by Chicanas emanate a felling of breathing a woman's "herstory", or situation.

Evangelina Enríquez and Alfredo Mirandé in *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* make some worthy observations about literary expression by Chicanas in general that are also applicable to novelists. For example, they state: "... Chicana literature has probed deeper and more perceptively into the female situation and psyche than its American and Chicano predecessors" (178). To this they add a comment on the achievements by Chicanas although they do not specify the novel:

Chicana writers address themselves to dilemmas of Chicano/American identity, male-female relationships, female roles within the family, and even female-female relationships. These subjects are marked by the intimate urgency of the first-person narrator in many cases: they refute prevalent stereotypes of women; and they allow for surprisingly lifelike characters in real-life situations. Interestingly, specific points in time and space –that is, either a historical backdrop or real locations– are not infrequently missing in Chicana writing. Landscapes or settings can be a more symbolic fabric against which characters and situations are played rather than real geographic entities. At the same time, personal experience and an autobiographical tendency in this fiction does away with detached accounts. Thematically, interfamilial relationships assume rich new dimensions: male-female relationships are conveyed via abstract expression and images; and the new frontier of female relationships is treated with astounding

force that pushes back the literary perimeters American and Chicano authors have only begun to define (178-79)

In effect, many of the aforementioned points make themselves manifest in the two novelists that are about to be analyzed.

1. COME DOWN FROM THE MOUND: LOVE AND POLITICS

Aside from standing out as the first contemporary Chicana novelist, Berta Ornelas accomplishes another feat: her work, essentially political in nature, focuses on a present situation instead of dwelling romantically on the past, as was customary in previous writers. *Come Down From the Mound* (1975) unfolds the conflict between love and politics and shows how the protagonist seeks to reconcile the two. Aurora Alba, a young idealist and political activist, finds herself in the process of deciding whether to join the traditional political system or abandon it. Some background information is provided by an omniscient narrator who alludes to her previous militant tendencies when she was a student, showing her to be a reliable person to further a cause for social change.

When the novel opens, Aurora appears as a student-teacher in the position of making concessions to her beliefs in order to promote change from within the system. This represents the ideological backdrop of the novel as well as the personal crossroads for the protagonist. Her apparently virtuous principles, however, become muddled by ulterior motives relating to her romance with her adolescent idol, Jesús (Chuy) Santana, a twenty-six-year-old City Commissioner. The double-edged challenge symbolizes the struggle between the two young characters: Chuy wants to conquer her physically to satisfy the Don Juan in him, and by the same token he wants to claim her politically to secure yet another faithful follower. Most of the action involves this interplay of two people who commingle and talk beyond each other, thus accentuating their distinct approaches to using the political system for their own ends.

Some critics might dismiss the work as fluff, but it does have redeeming qualities on a variety of levels. As a political novel, it attempts to demonstrate how a small but growing empire can be infiltrated to change its priorities and, consequently, reduce the negative influence of power. Also, the work can function as a simple love story that a young reader might enjoy. Given its lack of breadth and narrative complexity, the novel is nevertheless effective in telling a story that is both political and romantic and in which either aspect can be regarded as the foreground or background. The convergence of the two opposing storylines allows the theme to emerge: love's capacity to conquer the evils of power.

The protagonist Aurora Alba, whose name embodies double idealism by symbolically repeating the concept of “dawn,” seeks a new beginning to better days—or ways—in both love and politics. In her first appearance, Aurora functions as an omen to Chuy when she accidentally interrupts him in the act of massaging a pant-suited buxom blonde in his office. The interruption marks the point when his licentiousness comes into question. Aurora, then, serves as the catalyst for his acquisition of a limited awareness of the boundless manipulations he enjoyed at the expense of women. While total reform might not be in sight for Chuy, the mere presence of Aurora Alba no doubt disturbs and curtails his free movement. She not only contributes to the breaking of his exploration of women but becomes instrumental in weakening his position as a corrupt political figure. From the outset, the protagonist resembles in appearance a vestige of the militant 1960s, choosing faded blue jeans and a chambray shirt as an informal uniform so as to blend in with high school students. Aurora attends a campaign party for the young Chicano Commissioner, who soon becomes infatuated with her but then feels challenged by her indifference to his advances. Not accustomed to rejection, especially by women, he sets his sights on establishing a close relationship with her at all costs, as he says, “to find out what makes her tick.”¹³ What emerges is the characters’ mental and attitudinal distance from life in general. Chuy feels mystified by her clouded nature, hidden impulses, calculating disposition, and feistiness; in other words, he views her as a true exception to the shallow simple-mindedness of the female lot he has known. She defies his mental construct and image of women while provoking his urge to evaluate and reach a new synthesis.

Chuy Santana, obsessed with acquiring political power, is a charismatic paladin whose influence extends to both sides of the border in a southwestern town, presumably in Arizona. His sphere of influence is such that he creates a small empire through astute and sometimes unscrupulous dealings with others from the dominant political structure. This idea is emphasized metaphorically in the novel in at least two ways: a drawing of the Pyramid of the Sun visually introduces each of the thirty-seven chapters, and numerous allusions are made to Santana’s *cacique* qualities. On one occasion, Aurora remarks sarcastically:

You must be one of those incarnate *dioses Aztecas*. Their *caciques* used to be considered incarnate gods. The only thing that confuses me, though, is that the *conquistadores* were supposed to have decimated them all. But undoubtedly one of them got away. Tell me, how did you manage to give them the slip? (36, emphasis in the original)

Aurora, herself challenged, becomes determined to topple this self-made, political god, which clearly helps to explain the thrust of the novel’s title. By contrast, Chuy

Santana feels driven to accumulate wealth and property through any opportunistic means, justified by his desire to solidify his position in the community. With his self-serving goals, he seeks office for the lucrative gains of local politics. He admits openly that money figures as his ultimate hero and only guiding light, secondary to nothing. Santana comes to symbolize the political system and its resulting corruption, which breeds more of the same and relies on creating a network of loyal followers from whom to collect future favors, thus perpetuating a vicious circle. As Aurora points out, this form of politics distorts the virtue of loyalty: “that loyalty blinds a man. And that’s the kind of loyalty you Chuy command. You thrive on it, you wallow in it” (163).

Aurora, having become an active member of the Cratican Party, learns the inner workings by which a political system coopts, corrupts, and diverts itself from those it aims to serve. Her idealism quickly comes in conflict with political reality, as her righteousness, civic pride, and concern for the poor are not enough to overcome the entrenched institutions that contain built-in mechanisms for self-preservation. She comes face to face with a fortified machinery of an almost invincible nature. Disillusioned as a consequence, yet uncompromising in attitude and deeds, the protagonist manages to win over Chuy Santana but not the system she sought to change. Her final victory entails lowering him from his pedestal, allowing him to succumb to love by renouncing his political career and his crooked ventures. While not prostituting her principles, she convinces Chuy not to prostitute his.

Although the storyline is usually developed in a shallow fashion, often containing more dialogue than action, the novel does include a definite female perspective on events. The perspective that dominates involves self-awareness through the undetached accounts of various women, some of whom still appear as stereotypes. Essentially, the novel focuses on Aurora, whose story reveals a multidimensional person involved in a series of conflicts and showing an assortment of psychological traits. Through her influence, she indirectly leads a group of female friends into a new consciousness that recognizes women’s lot in society. Aspiring to become a writer –an almost gratuitous aspect of the work which is left hanging– she experiences a sense of liberation in planning to produce a book about sex, a subject she considers crucial to establishing egalitarianism between men and women. Her ideas never crystallize and remain undeveloped, perhaps due to the distractions she submits to. However, she verbalizes strong sentiments against marriage because she believes it to be an institution in which women are compelled to give more of themselves than men, and she views children as encumbrances to a possible career. The result clearly demonstrates that the protagonist equates male/female inequalities with the unfair and corrupt political system established by tradition. As the novel dramatizes women in diverse activities, it posits the notion that one needs to search for something

other than what is considered the norm. Near the end, Aurora reaffirms an ideological position based on seeking new values when she says: "There are too many myths that have to be broken. It takes time to do that" (244). In addition, she sees history as nothing more than a version of events by those who write it, implying that "herstory" has been relegated to a marginal status.

The novel suffers in other ways, especially in its confusion of identity labels; at times it opposes "Mexican" and "Chicano," denigrating the latter. At other times there is an attempt to gloss over ideological concerns so as not to appear dogmatic in the narrative. Also disturbing is the protagonist's idealization of her father while barely mentioning her mother, a point which becomes belabored and moot. Despite giving her mother little importance as a central figure, Aurora does mystify some popular women figures who have achieved a legendary status such as Adelita, Valentina, and María Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez. Some might argue that this view of women does not carry over into her daily interactions with other women and thus she falls victim to creating unnecessary hierarchies. Another debatable issue in the work is language: Spanish is dealt with as an oddity, almost excusing the Spanish speakers for their speech by providing translations and at times mocking a nonfluent speaker who tries to communicate in English.

Despite some glaring weaknesses in handling the narrative, the novel contains a reservoir of valuable material for consideration with respect to women's treatment of love versus power. The narrator aims to discredit political structures and their canons as well as introduce revised concepts of femininity in relation to changing social roles. For once, some of the action and male characters are perceived through a woman's eyes and psyche, although this perspective is not meant to be understood as fixed but rather evolving in its own right. In the novel Aurora serves as the motor for potential change once she finds herself in a position to exercise her convictions and beliefs. In this way she represents those who assertively seek to institute fundamental changes on various levels: male-female relationships as well as political structures. But, above all, her greatest weapon is love, which she uses to instill in a man a voluntary recognition of fault, thus helping him acquire a new level of understanding toward women as well as a new sensitivity toward basic concepts of justice. The final question remains: who conquered whom? One thing is certain, the protagonist does not lose anything and Chuy substitutes his ambition with affection for Aurora.

2. *VICTUUM*: A FEMALE TRAJECTORY TOWARD KNOWLEDGE

In the second work, *Victuum* (1976) by Isabella Ríos, we have the first novel about psychic phenomena in Chicana literature, and it seems significant that a woman wrote it. The first *Bildungsroman* about a Chicana, the novel defies any single

classification by expanding the scope of Chicana fiction in general. Its science-fiction quality somewhat resembles Arthur Tenorio's *Blessing From Above* (1973), whose thematic thrust deals with the intervention by an outer space being. Here, however, the main emphasis is on tracing a woman's "herstory" via the theme of traveling through life, an abstraction which becomes particularized by Valentina Ballesternos' own life story. Above all, there emerges a complete representation of a woman's psyche in its various stages of development within the metaphysical context of the universe. The storyline exemplifies a search for a cosmic self that goes beyond the cultural context of works such as "... y no se lo tragó la tierra." Additionally, it can be regarded as a biographical novel about a woman who comes into contact with inexplicable phenomena. The work also demonstrates a close link with folkloric beliefs that border on magical realism through its acceptance of supernatural events and objects as ordinary happenings. The protagonist's physical and mental processes guide her trajectory of acquiring knowledge through external means at the same time that she becomes cognizant of certain powers of insight she possesses inherently through no volition of her own. If the narrative structure deals with her life story from the fetal stage to approximately fifty-five years old, its ultimate aim is to depict her mental prowess to the point where she experiences actual contact with beings from other worlds or other historic periods. This novel, *sui generis* in its composition, depicts a woman who transcends the physical world in terms of an outreach to other dimensions of knowledge, as if that realm were timeless and spaceless, that is, a dematerialized deposit or reservoir filled with ideas that exist in a type of fourth dimension. Women, or for that matter men, are not bound by physical demarcations, especially when these are viewed as merely temporary barriers to a person's potential for learning.

Victuum stands out as a unique work in light of the women's experience it reveals. For one, there is a definite intra-women social structure among the characters, most of which are females. There is a clear distinction made between the types of traditions women and men pass on to their children. Men, for example, involve themselves in relating familial stories, whereas some of the women express interest in matters dealing with unexplained phenomena. The other contrast can be seen in Valentina's father, who takes charge of household affairs while providing for the family; the mother, a housewife, does the household chores but also appears to function within her own realm. The mother concerns herself with issues she considers strictly feminine and passes them on to Valentina, who soon realizes that she has come to form part of a hushed network. The onion skin-like membrane she is born with, which resembles thin veil, becomes the clue to this network. As Valentina matures, she discovers that she possesses innate powers of intuition and foresight, plus she can communicate or make

contact with the dead and foretell future events. Her mother has similar abilities, thus creating a bond between the two as psychics, a fact the father is apparently ignorant about. These channels of communication rely on mental wave lengths and appear to exist only in women, although not all of them. The narrative emphasis is found in this mother-daughter relationship, due in great part to their abilities of insight. The novel does not aim to demonstrate that all women fit into this category, but it does imply that it is mainly women who do.

The female network in the novel exists as a means of exchanging information, impressions, and sometimes warnings. Its function is like an avenue through which events are dealt with almost in a clandestine manner, symbolically implying that society in general –perhaps male dominated– does not permit total development. Therefore, Valentina and her mother resort to separate means by which to express themselves about matters that are otherwise scorned by society. The novel, then, becomes a response to the urge to operate in this fashion, even if doing so is deviating from the norm. Valentina's world involves a clear separation between the physical and the mental, illustrative of a basic conflict she experiences. Reaffirmed by the novel's structure, also divided into two parts, Valentina's life is characterized by these pulls. The first part of the novel is an extensive account of her personal development from birth to young adulthood, occupying almost three-fourths of the entire book. The second part provides a quick overview of her adult years, approximately thirty years packed into one-fourth of the book. The first part presents her physical maturation process and the second her mental capabilities; the latter stage involves a search to become a whole person and somehow rid herself of the schizophrenic divisions.

Although the action in the novel bogs down in superfluous descriptions and innumerable humdrum occurrences, what emerges is the figure of a woman in the process of experiencing her surroundings. The narrative stresses the telling of a life story as it develops instead of presenting it from an omniscient point of view. The first-person narrator, Valentina, reproduces the action as she lives it, much like a camera would. This technique offers the possibility for the female narrator to divulge all that is seen and felt through her senses as she unravels events. The literary technique is designated by the use of quotation marks throughout the entire narration, that is, the action is completely dependent on Valentina as she perceives, thinks, or feels it. In this way, the narration becomes the protagonist herself as she relates her own story.

The issue of the fictive voice becomes even more complex when we attempt to reconcile the story of a psychic woman with that of the psyche of a woman. Here, various levels converge into what the author terms a "classical biographical novel," certainly a *sui generis* narrative that attempts to accomplish a number of objectives.

For one, it aims to recount a real woman's life story after having conducted a series of interviews à la Carlos Castañeda. Then it tries to take the shape of a novel through the intercourse of fiction and fact, which is somewhat confusing because the empirical author (Diana López) assumes a semi-fictitious name (Isabella Ríos) at the same time that the main character (Valentina Ballesteros) supposedly represents a real person through another name. Cervantes would clearly have enjoyed these narrative disguises that obscure the real source of the story. Then again, we should perhaps ask if all of this is necessary. The complex makeup of the work reveals more about what it took to write it than it does about the nature of the story itself, except for the fact that the writer went to many painstaking efforts to juggle her various activities as compiler, transcriber, witness, actress, and, of course, novelist. Fortunately, the final outcome helps to situate the reader within the action and imagine it first-hand within Valentina's mind.

As strange as it might sound, the novel almost lacks a plot in the traditional sense because while it presents actions and events in a chronological order they seem to lead nowhere. The only thread is Valentina herself, who in the end reaches a new height in psychic experience. The ultimate concern of the work revolves around Valentina's mental prowess: her physical development becomes secondary. For example, much of the first part deals with her coming to grips with her psychic insight by overcoming her fear of contact with another world. Of humble origins, she at first feels overwhelmed by her dreams and visions of people and things. She envisions family tragedies, specifically the deaths of relatives, and at no time does she seek to change the outcome. She passively permits the inevitable to occur in its proper time. Neither does she assume the role of informant because these experiences are nothing but indications of her future inclinations. Few events stand out in the first part of the novel, except when the fetus manifests itself as a conscience:

My only regret is that I will begin life again. For as I sip nutrients from the soft warmth of my mother's breast, the knowledge I have gathered over centuries, epochs, will slip back into the sleeping silence of my conscience, and as my tiresome, limp fingers fondle the outer sustenance, it will be decades before they'll possess the strength to pull from the depths of my brain the knowledge of yesteryears.¹⁴

The significance of the excerpt lies in its suggestion of reincarnation, which implies that women perhaps represent the links in the cycle of life. In the novel, Valentina embodies a link of knowledge. But she speaks with people others have known only through books. From this point, especially in the second part of the novel, her mental trips become more frequent and, in fact, uncontainable. Because of the novel's ambiguity, it is not completely clear whether her visions are dreams or actual phenomena she sees, which further baffles

the reader who tries to distinguish between the strata of reality. One of her first key contacts with a being from outside her immediate realm is with a warrior of God named Ulyseus (bringing to mind Ulysses), who expounds in the unbounded limits of the brain and guides her in a journey into the past. This could mean that the present and future can only be known by ascertaining the past. Her first encounter becomes an affirmation of life's cyclical nature in that a person's history marks a trajectory in the form of both physical and mental travels. As the cited quotation indicates, the person reaches mental maturity and in a sense, returns to a permanent deposit of knowledge which is only mental. By this, the narrator Valentina implies that there exists a permanent present in the form of an eternal wealth of knowledge. To judge from the veil she was born with, she feels she has been chosen for the sake of knowledge.

Within a short span of time, Valentina's encounters increase, ranging from Medusa (who tries to vindicate herself for her evil reputation) to Aedauis (concerned with the total man and the fountain of youth) and from Pope Eusebius (who prefers a return to orthodox teachings in order to negate favoritism) to William Wordsworth (whose concept of style in concentrating on an eternal present reflects how *Victuum* is composed). The effect on the protagonist is that all of these encounters expand her concept of self; she now views herself as part of a long established continuum, which becomes a metaphor for history. Explained in abstract terms, she realizes that she forms an integral part of sound, the essential element that both announces and defines life. Her points of reference cease to be men or women but instead become the universe or human experience.

Whereas the historical and mythological pictures she comes in contact with allow her to expand her horizons about knowledge as a permanent source, her final encounter with a planetary prince of knowledge named Victuum is the climax of the novel. This seems almost ironic, but most of all it marks the incessant search to surpass what people can offer the individual. As was stated in the early birth scene that "sound am I," the Mongoloid figure for whom the work is named now adds, "A child is not born of the child; a child is born of infinity" (339). Her revelation is crucial for she realizes that she forms part of a cosmic framework instead of having to abide by dependent relationship with her fellow humans. Victuum's influence proceeds to open up her mental construct of the world even more as he altruistically shares information and theories about abstract subjects such as sound, evolution, reincarnation, and time. A quasi philosopher, he assumes the role of mentor –much like Yoda did for Luke in *The Empire Strikes Back*– except that his *Deus et machina* appearance lacks narrative substance. Victuum proposes concepts and theories, but he lacks any concrete knowledge about a system of values or guidelines to live by. His theoretical coldness more closely

resembles computerized behavior, and he emphasizes the limitless potential of the brain, which again reaffirms Valentina's quest for knowledge.

The novel ends with virtually no action aside from the encounter with *Victuum*, giving the impression of an unfinished biography or a story uncertain of which way to turn. The protagonist remains filled with ideas and new notions about the universe but at the same time becomes confused about social issues, particularly miscegenation. Valentina achieves knowledge about abstractions while she loses sight of what this all means to her in concrete terms for her life. Finally, the novel functions on a variety of levels, a characteristic quite common in works written by Chicanas, allowing for various interpretations and a connotative purpose. *Victuum* aptly fits this trend, as if to imply that a woman's world consists of multiple roles and dimensions, or social obligations, quite apart from man's more unitary orientation. This in part explains the uncertainty evidenced in the fictive voice, who becomes exposed to new realms of knowledge yet does not know what to do with them. What clearly emerges is a different sense of history, or "herstory," as a composite picture of past and present. Besides, the protagonist does not only pay heed to physical things, for she gives credence to the metaphysical and the unexplained. Her notion of reality and existence is, in effect, more multifold.

Although our intention here has not been to establish canon on writings by Chicanas, there is no question that they offer new perspectives and nuances to Chicano expression. In both *Come Down from the Mound* and *Victuum* we find innovative approaches to depicting aspects of women's concerns or life experience. By examining the works in terms of the visions they present and the emotions they articulate, we can achieve a more holistic view of social complexity, breaking the monopoly that has been claimed by one sex. In the two novels analyzed, the authors propose the breaking of barriers, in one case political—aside from undermining *machista* traits—and in the other mental. These two novelists share the objective of portraying women in action as well as scrutinizing certain institutions and traditions. Their contributions lie in the focus and point of view on which they ground their story and with which they examine subjects in order to seek another synthesis, for their sake, in society.

NOTES

¹ This special issue is Year 7, Book 1 (September 1973), with Estela Portillo Trambley as contributing editor: it helped establish a sort of norm for subsequent efforts on Chicanas.

² The phrase expresses the author's thesis in an article of the same title which appeared in a special issue on the Chicanas in *De Colores* entitled "La Cosecha," 3: 3 (1977): 31-37.

³ Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1979: 178).

⁴ Eliana Rivero, "Escritura chicana: la mujer: *La Palabra* 2: 2 (Fall 1980): 2-9. Despite its brevity, this article represents a seminal study for its polemic and comprehensive nature. Page references will follow immediately after the quotes cited.

⁵ See Margarita B. Melville, *Twice a Minority: Mexican-American Women* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1980), which contains a series of studies on a diverse cross-section of topics on the Chicana.

⁶ The list may be summarized as follows: one review on Berta Ornelas's novel, one review and one article on Isabella Ríos' work, one interview on Estela Portillo Trambley with no in-depth studies on her forthcoming novel (this does not include the various articles on her dramatic pieces), and one brief critical assessment of Gina Valdes's writing. Surprisingly this scarcity has now become a real issue to resolve, even among Chicana critics.

⁷ See Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Golden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1970).

⁸ Patricia Meyer Spacks makes many worthwhile observations on women's creativity on her book *The Female Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1975).

⁹ These comments appear in Patricia Meyer Spacks' book *The Female Imagination*, 5.

¹⁰ Marcela Trujillo "The Dilemma of the Modern Chicana Artist and Critic," *De Colores* 3: 3 (1977): 38-48.

¹¹ See Tomás Rivera's article "Chicano Literature: The Establishment of Community" in *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970-1979)*, eds. Luis Leal, et al. (Santa Barbara, CA: La Causa Publications, 1982: 9-17).

¹² See Juan Bruce-Novoa's article entitled "The Space of Chicano Literature" *De Colores* 1: 4 (1975): 22-42.

¹³ Berta Ornelas, *Come Down from the Mound* (Phoenix: Miter Publishing Company, 1975). Page references will be given immediately after the cited excerpts.

¹⁴ Isabella Ríos, *Victuum* (Ventura, CA: Diana Etna, 1976). Other quotations will be indicated by their respective page references immediately after the citation.

En torno a la Literatura de la Frontera: ¿convergencia o divergencia?

La literatura de la Frontera Norte (es) *un mito, un error...*
Literatura de la Frontera no es el anecdotario de temas aduanales
o migratorios, sino la expresión de Norte, del vasto Norte...
Carlos Montemayor

No debe extrañar que toda referencia a la frontera suscite cada vez más un sinnúmero de acepciones y significados que se van revalorizando. Si la discusión teórica es aún escasa, y comúnmente orientada hacia un fin ideológico determinado, por lo menos se va formando un corpus crítico que apunta a desentrañar las íntimas relaciones vivenciales poco reconocidas entre el chicano y el mexicano. Dicha discusión ya ha tenido cierta evolución y desarrollo en campos de estudio como la sociología, la política, la economía y la historia, pero ese grado de madurez apenas empezó a notarse en el campo de la crítica literaria en 1981 con el resurgimiento del deseo por encontrar los nexos entre lo mexicano y lo chicano.

La primera muestra concreta de tal tendencia fue tal vez el Primer Festival de Literatura Fronteriza México-Estados Unidos que tuvo lugar en Tijuana el mismo año, acontecimiento que unió a dos grupos que hasta entonces habían sentido la escisión de un pueblo dividido. Curiosamente, el encuentro confirmó varios hechos de gran importancia para los participantes: en primer lugar, que las semejanzas son más palpitantes que las diferencias, y que compartimos una disyunción paralela en ambos lados de la frontera. Para algunos, el descubrimiento fue que somos dos lados de una misma medalla. Admitir la frontera como punto común o lazo unificador es reconocer que formamos parte íntegra de un fenómeno que va más allá de nuestra situación inmediata. Es decir, la condición fronteriza suele asociarse a un hecho histórico y cultural, como en el caso de España donde siempre se ha vuelto a la lucha entre árabes y cristianos. En lo que respecta al contexto mexicano, Luis Leal ha señalado: “Ese concepto de frontera se extendió a México y otros países de América, donde los conquistadores aplicaron contra los indígenas la misma actitud que habían tenido contra los árabes. América se convirtió en la nueva frontera”.¹

En el caso mexicano-chicano del mencionado encuentro fronterizo, lo inquietante fue que obviamente no se sabía quién era el moro y quién el cristiano. Los antiguos esquemas no tuvieron ninguna utilidad, lo cual implicó un nuevo examen de las relaciones socio-culturales entre dos pueblos que habían sido uno solo. Confundiendo el panorama, o tal vez aclarándolo, esto condujo a los participantes a considerar la naturaleza de un dilema nacional, o sea, que el dicho de “como México no hay dos” es verdaderamente una equivocación fenomenológica, porque es cierto que como México no hay dos, sino cuatro o dieciséis. Tanto al chicano como al mexicano se nos han inculcado nuestras diferencias, ignorando con frecuencia los numerosos vínculos culturales que compartimos. La frontera es el sitio donde se juntan dos culturas con diferencias bien marcadas, y a la vez donde más se parecen para posiblemente constituir una sola cultura. En cuanto a la notable dependencia e influencia mutuas, un sociólogo mexicano, Jorge Bustamante, ha llegado a la conclusión de que en efecto se puede hablar en términos de una cierta homogeneidad en una sociedad fronteriza en lo que respecta a lo socioeconómico y lo cultural: “Ambos lados de la frontera parecen más semejantes entre sí, en términos de algunos indicadores de desarrollo social, que la semejanza entre cada zona fronteriza y el resto de su realidad nacional respectiva.”² A esta interacción añade el destacado teórico sobre la frontera como espacio literario, Armando Miguélez:

Por el lado mexicano se dan índices económicos y de bienestar social superiores a la media nacional, y por el lado americano esta región fronteriza con México presenta unos indicadores económico-sociales por debajo de la media nacional. Además, estos indicadores afectan a un grupo de población de la misma extracción nacional, ya que 85.4 por ciento de la población mexicana en los Estados Unidos, vive en la región fronteriza con México y conforma 55.2 por ciento del total de la población de una franja de 25 kilómetros al norte de la frontera. En este sentido, tenemos también una semejanza de origen nacional.³

Mientras que los dos estudiosos optan por subrayar las estrechas relaciones entre los dos lados, otros –como Carlos Monsiváis– describen la frontera con características de alta tensión, como si fuera cruce inevitable de una realidad-pesadilla a un sueño-engaño. Dice: “La frontera es, literalmente, el punto de confluencia entre el desastre económico y la prisa por salir de este hoyo interminable, esta pobreza manejada por caciques y latifundistas y abandono federal.”⁴ Luego traza una visión de resguardo de la mexicanidad que obstaculiza la auto-comprensión a la vez que no permite descifrar el poder seductivo del *American Dream*:

Sorprende ... que a lo largo de la frontera mexicana, definida no como porción de una colectividad nacional sino como la barrera que separa a esa ansiedad migratoria de su meta, persista de modo tan recalcitrante en diversos sectores

fronterizos la necesidad de continuar vinculados a un proyecto de nacionalidad, de mexicanidad como forma de vida, suma de respuestas de la conducta, ideología. Sorprende esa búsqueda de mexicanidad a pesar del *shock* del futuro representado por la contigüidad de mito del *american* (sic) *way* afiliado.⁵

Dentro de las muy diversas concepciones sobre la frontera, cabe hacer hincapié en un hecho fundamental para los objetos de este estudio exploratorio: la frontera a la cual aludimos aquí no es simplemente una línea divisoria o un confín político que contribuya a compaginar dos sistemas, capitalistas en distintas etapas de desarrollo, o sea, va más allá de la mera geografía. El espacio en sí proporciona el elemento estructurador a toda discusión en torno al tema, pero no resulta ser la finalidad misma. Interesa, sobre todo, el dinamismo que se evidencia como punto de contacto donde se enlazan dos culturas al enfrentarse cara a cara los contrastantes niveles de riqueza material, herencia histórica, patrones de conducta social, sistemas culturales, lenguaje, cosmovisión y sus mitos. La frontera, conceptualizada como una especie de *buffer zone* entre dos culturas cuyo centro las distancia (Washington, DC y México, DF.) es también una área de enfrentamiento y conflicto, donde se lleva a cabo una constante compenetración, distinguiéndose cada día más como una tercera cultura y considerada por algunos estudiosos como entidad propia con rasgos distintivos. Los pueblos chicano y mexicano funcionan como la cara del otro sin que el primero sea únicamente la “otra” cara del segundo y viceversa. La relación siempre está presente, sólo que cada pueblo se encuentra en vías distintas de tratar con su circunstancia en un ámbito diferente y bajo condiciones variantes.

El concepto de frontera ha cambiado tanto que ya no connota abismo, rincón lejano o fin del mundo, tal como antes se percibía, sino que en la actualidad implica una forma de dinamismo social donde dos países se unen a la vez que se separan, dando así una nueva conciencia de cercanía; ya que las diferencias algo se borran o por lo menos más se toleran. El gran contraste reside más bien en comparar la visión de la frontera por parte de los pueblos chicano y mexicano para determinar en qué se parecen o dónde existe el punto de bifurcación entre los mismos. Lo que sí se ha examinado, sobre todo en las ciencias sociales, es el concepto que tiene el angloamericano hacia México y su cultura, que toma la línea divisoria como verdadera ruptura entre dos mundos antitéticos: la civilización y la barbarie. Pese a la cercanía, en México también se siente esa distancia existencial. Por ejemplo, llama la atención cómo se manifiesta esa distancia en ciertos casos específicos de la naturaleza que muestra una cualidad simbólica. Nos referimos a los dos nombres que se emplean para denominar el río que sirve de línea fronteriza entre Texas y el norte de México. En los Estados Unidos se le llama Río Grande, nombre dado originalmente por su extensión de casi 2.000 millas y que con el tiempo llegó a representar la separación tajante después de 1848 para dividir al mismo

pueblo mexicano-chicano. Es obvio que la poca profundidad de dicho río desmiente su cualidad de grande, siendo más bien largo, pero es cierto también que ha servido a un fin político y psicológico de división.

Desde un punto de vista norteamericano, el Río Grande califica la extensión de diferencias con el mundo mexicano. En cambio, desde el lado mexicano, llamarle Río Bravo recalca la diferencia de perspectiva, pero con otra visión, la cual denota amenaza, peligro y la necesidad de domarlo. En términos de una divergencia notoria y a la vez simbólica, esto se comprueba por el mero uso de dos nombres para el mismo río. Ciertos términos suelen emplearse con el mismo fin en ambos lados de la frontera, pero también ocurre que hay usos irónicos, como en el caso del título “cortina de tortilla” con el cual se expresa un distanciamiento político entre dos países. Sin embargo, ese rótulo propagandístico también ha tenido un efecto contrario al deseado; se inventó en los Estados Unidos para referirse a una invasión sigilosa por parte de una masiva (in)migración mexicana, mas su caracterización –aunque es fabricación imaginística bastante absurda– sirve para reafirmar lo que se tiene en común en los dos lados de la frontera.

Toda discusión sobre la frontera conlleva una serie de problemas difíciles de resolver con paradigmas o categorías convencionales. Las disquisiciones teóricas apenas emprenden esta labor debido a que cualquier avance en la materia requiere divorciarse de tradicionalismos, purismos o normas preconcebidas que no se ajustan a la realidad del fenómeno estudiado. A pesar de los nuevos acercamientos al asunto o la sensibilidad revalorizadora, la frontera lo sigue siendo para ambos países, y esto de por sí significa un límite periférico que peca de estar lejos de centro. Por ejemplo, el Sudoeste de Estados Unidos, “siempre ha sido visto por los habitantes del este como la frontera donde priva una vida en torno a la cultura del *cowboy*, cuya única ley es la pistola y único auxilio el caballo.”⁶ La falta de comprensión hacia dicha región ha sido sobrecompensada por su respectiva mitificación como una forma de encuadrar lo exótico, llevándose a los extremos en películas y otras formas artísticas el tema de lucha entre *Cowboys and Indians*. Se da a entender que la conquista de la frontera nunca se logró completamente, razón por la cual se imponen las formas externas.

En México el fenómeno tiene un paralelo con lo anterior porque la parte norteña era considerada zona concurrida sólo por aventureros, tribus aisladas, oportunistas o quienes no habían tenido la suerte (o los recursos necesarios) para vivir en una parte más céntrica y codiciada del país. La marginalidad se medía (se mide) según el operante etnocentrismo de la metrópoli. Surgió, entonces, lo siguiente: “la lucha armada entre metrópoli y frontera se convirtió en antagonismo psicológico. Todavía existe en el centro cierto desdén por el norteño y que se manifiesta en condescendiente burla del

‘agringamiento’ del (chicano).⁷ Las actitudes de la sociedad media en ambos lados coinciden en lo que respecta a su propia frontera. En Estados Unidos se ha propagado una ardua campaña para imponer normas en el lenguaje, las costumbres y los valores sociales, mientras que en México se creó la Comisión para la Defensa del Idioma Español como ejemplo de la limpieza que se anhela. En ambos lados, lo popular se resiste a conformarse con los patrones de esa sociedad media, asimilando cualidades en común, como el hibridismo del lenguaje, la adaptación de gustos, cambios en valores ideológicos y costumbres que van en contra del *mainstream* de su país.

El crítico venezolano Arturo Uslar Pietri ha descrito un proceso similar en el desarrollo de una expresión mestiza en Latinoamérica cuando afirma que

...nace mezclada e impura, e impura y mezclada alcanza sus más altas expresiones. No hay en su historia nada que se parezca a la ordenada sucesión de escuelas; las tendencias y las épocas que caracterizan, por ejemplo, a la literatura francesa. En ella nada termina y nada está separado. Todo tiende a superponerse y a fundirse. Lo clásico con lo romántico, lo antiguo con lo moderno, lo popular con lo refinado, lo tradicional con lo mágico, lo tradicional con lo exótico. Su curso es como el de un río, que acumula y arrastra aguas, troncos, cuerpos y hojas de infinitas procedencias. Es aluvial.⁸

En el contexto de la frontera norteamericana-mexicana, así es como se ha creado una cultura relativamente bicultural y algo bilingüe

Los problemas en torno a la literatura de frontera reflejan en forma fiel esta interacción de factores que están dialécticamente en pugna y cuyo dinamismo contribuye a su carácter original. Aunque los más tradicionalistas no la quieran aceptar, la literatura fronteriza existe y siempre ha existido, pese a su escasa promoción como tal hasta hace poco. Su reciente presencia en la crítica permite matizar con mayor precisión algo que en realidad es antiguo; sólo el enfoque es distinto con el fin de comprender las interrelaciones que existen entre dos países. Toda literatura tiene barreras y fronteras, y es justamente eso lo que le hace cobrar interés por tratarse del espíritu humano que trasciende a otros horizontes, algunos físicos y visibles; otros, psicológicos o mentales e intuitivos. Si algunos son concretos, también los hay imaginarios –ambos abarcando terrenos por descubrir y conocer. A la vez, resulta una forma de autodefinirse, un extremo, reconociendo que dicho calificativo ya expresa un valor de juicio de orden ideológico. Pero, ¿la literatura fronteriza sería un extremo en contraste con qué?

Cuando el escritor mexicano Carlos Montemayor afirma que “la literatura de la frontera norte (es) un *mito, un error*”, y luego opina que la “literatura de la frontera no es el anecdotario de temas aduanales o migratorios, sino la expresión de norte, del vasto norte”,⁹ tal juicio corresponde a una perspectiva de la literatura “oficial”, la cual pontifica sobre lo que es literatura y, sobre todo, literatura buena. Esta es una manera poco sutil

de eliminar de toda consideración mesurada una literatura local, dando a entender que su confección carece de expresión elaborada y compleja. Montemayor sostiene que la literatura no es ni fronteriza, ni sureña, ni femenina, sino literatura, como si ésta fuera una categoría única, optando por encajarla en una abstracción idealista y ajena al medio que produce esa obra literaria. Dentro de la agrupación “literatura”, existen ya reconocidos los diferentes tipos de literatura, y la crítica sobre la expresión fronteriza sólo apela a su inclusión como una categoría más sin desvirtuar ni remplazar a otras. Se busca un campo nuevo en la investigación literaria para mejor apreciar la confluencia como base en la obra de una determinada región. La trampa de desarrollar la lógica de Montemayor hasta sus últimas consecuencias es concluir en que no existe ninguna literatura nacional: ni la mexicana ni la norteamericana, como ejemplos. En la raíz de tal razonamiento está la idea de ignorar toda literatura con rasgos propios de una región –y en este caso una poco cotizada como fondo literario. Volvemos otra vez al problema difícil de valorizaciones tajantes: que la urbe es “mejor” que la sierra o que el bajío es “superior” al desierto. Ahora bien, si no se le puede exigir al escritor incluir coyotes y mezquites en su obra, tampoco se le debe objetar su inclusión, porque lo que importa es la condición humana en lucha con sus contornos o la problemática psicológica del personaje consigo mismo. La afirmación del escritor mexicano insiste en no reconocer el fenómeno fronterizo y llama a su literatura un error, aunque admite la existencia de un “vasto norte”, el cual comprende una metáfora incompleta y vaga, siendo lo mismo que se decía acerca de otros continentes en la época de Colón. Se percibe en su concepto algo débilmente matizado de una realidad social que cada día se impone en el norte de México como en el sur de Estados Unidos.

Además, hay que decirlo sin ambages: el norte para algunos también es sur para otros –y viceversa– cuando se habla de la zona fronteriza. Así es que el arraigado provincialismo de Montemayor, como ejemplo de México, confirma el grado de divergencia que se expresa al referirse a la frontera. Para él, el norte es una región sin límites que se desvanece en un norte sin configuraciones concretas; para otros, ese mismo norte no existe ni importa y, para otros, existe pero no debería existir porque ofende e insulta lo normativo, o sea, lo que ha luchado por mantenerse auténticamente mexicano. Claro, dar la espalda al fenómeno de la frontera es negar un hecho sociohistórico que ha surgido como resultado de los dos países tan contrastables.

La mencionada desvalorización tiene graves implicaciones para la literatura chicana que se encuentra en el “vasto norte”, ya que se podría insinuar que subsiste en un limbo aislado, lejano e insustancial. Lo mismo se aplica al mexicano que se acerca a la frontera, dando a entender que le ocurría lo mismo al cruzar la línea divisoria. En su artículo seminal, “The Mexican in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore” (1969), Francisco A. Ríos

traza esta encrucijada fundamental para el mexicano, sobre todo, la manera en que el personaje se percibe en los dos lados de la frontera. Su transformación depende de los ojos que lo miran y la distancia cultural de esa región determina el grado de austeridad con que se percibe. En la literatura norteamericana, el mexicano ha sido representado por lo general como peón en un ambiente idílico, aprovechando una siesta contra la pared de su jacal, o contra un cacto, y que goza del ocio, de la despreocupación y de su burro. La visión de un noble salvaje cambia en forma radical, según Ríos, en el momento en que se sitúa en el lado norteamericano:

... pierde sus maneras pintorescas e inofensivas y se vuelve siniestro: ahora es orgulloso y de sangre caliente, se ofende fácilmente y es intensamente celoso, bebedor, bravucón; un cuchillero, cruel, promiscuo; se viste llamativo, es un buen bailarín, dependiendo de quién lo juzgue, un 'latin lover' o un 'amante piojoso'.¹⁰

Conceptos estereotipados como los citados delatan el grado de divergencia que se ha encontrado en los campos de la historia, la literatura y el folclor norteamericano, lo cual recalca la distancia cultural que opera hacia México. En cambio, el mexicano que cruza a Estados Unidos, también es menospreciado por sus compatriotas, acusándole de “vendido” o designándole con el rótulo de “pocho”: denuncias abiertas por su supuesto proceso voluntario a la desmexicanización. Aceptar la frontera, para el mexicano, es legitimizar la transición de una cultura a otra y entrar en el juego de la negación. Manuel Gamio, respetada autoridad sobre el fenómeno de la emigración, en *El inmigrante mexicano* (1930), ha dado juicios severos sobre los chicanos, casi llamándoles “vende patrias” y deja entender que han abandonado una especie de altiplano mexicano para descender a precipicios norteños de “Gringolandia”. También se encuentran los casos del ensayismo sensacionalista impregnado de prejuicios chauvinistas, como en el caso de Héctor Martínez en *Yo chicano* (1976), quien escribe:

El chicano, mostrando claramente su repudio por los sistemas políticos y socio-económicos de su origen, emigrado al norte del Bravo, ha de continuar luchando contra todo, incluso contra sus heredadas costumbres. Sus sordos pero primeros enemigos: toda la gama de norteamericanos de origen mexicano, que por ser poseedores de bienes –culturales inclusive, empezando por el idioma inglés– se convierten en sus enconados detractores.¹¹

Esfuerzos como éste, cuando están repletos de falsa documentación premeditada, contribuyen a fomentar y agudizar la posible tensión entre el mexicano y el chicano, la cual es mínima en la frontera.

Si en ambos países se observa incomodidad y resistencia ante lo fronterizo como fenómeno natural, sobre todo porque amenaza el *status quo* de su ser nacional, en

el campo literario se encuentra casi lo mismo. El problema fundamental, para empezar, es que se complica cualquier intento por definir la literatura fronteriza. Los editores de la antología *Naturaleza fronteriza* (1982) se plantean una pregunta clave: “¿Se puede hablar de literatura fronteriza de la misma manera en que se habla de literatura fantástica, social o literatura popular?”¹² Por analogía, si aceptamos la literatura nacional o la regionalista como válidas, ¿por qué no incluir un fenómeno literario con motivos fronterizos? Las distintas interrelaciones de confluencia ya se han tratado en obras como *El Cid*, *Martín Fierro*, *Ulysses*, *Rayuela* y otras. Considérese subgénero o clasificación aparte, o tal vez tendencia, pero no cabe duda de que tiene validez didáctica con la cual poder acercarse a este tipo de literatura, que suele ser relegada al olvido, y que compite con la expresión que se produce en los centros metropolitanos. Esto implica descentralización de la literatura “nacional” porque de nuevo se torna a medir la calidad intrínseca de una obra de acuerdo con su valor literario, sin que tenga que formar parte de las pléyades consagradas que pronuncian lo bueno o lo malo. Así es que se reduce la influencia de una mentalidad modista en la medida en que la obra es valorizada en su contexto, y, reconociendo que es difícil cambiar esas actitudes, la alternativa que queda es crear su propia literatura, tal como lo ha hecho la literatura chicana, sin medir su éxito en relación con los círculos literarios de un *mainstream* que dictaminan el criterio para lo auténtico.

En el centro de la problemática sobre la literatura fronteriza surge el aceptar que por su naturaleza ya implica una mezcla. Es decir, los efectos de la convergencia y la divergencia siempre están presentes y en lucha constante: los resultados se producen mediante un proceso de polarización y reconciliación. En esto reside su vigor y originalidad, ya que da testimonio a su contextura donde los mundos se unen en busca de su propia forma:

La literatura fronteriza, como resultado de ese contacto con la literatura adyacente, ha dado frutos desconocidos en el interior de ambos países. Porque la literatura de la frontera se caracteriza, precisamente, por ser el producto de dos culturas cuya presencia se manifiesta en el estilo (uso del inglés y/o el español), en los temas, en los conflictos y sobre todo a través de la imagen literaria bicultural.¹³

De esta manera la literatura de la frontera pone en tela de juicio el antagonismo que procura la síntesis, dando a conocer la indigestión histórica entre dos culturas. Habría que determinar hasta qué punto y cuándo es fronteriza la literatura y cuándo simplemente sigue siendo mexicana o norteamericana. Temiendo una prematura hipótesis teórica, aceptamos de antemano la paradoja de que una obra puede ser frontera y mexicana a la vez, o fronteriza y norteamericana. La literatura chicana constituye un buen ejemplo de dicho fenómeno porque en su composición intrínseca e ideológica ha incorporado

deliberadamente a su expresión el sentido de frontera en formas muy concretas. Debido a su disposición a una mayor diversidad de estilos de vida, costumbres, lenguaje y problemáticas sociales, el chicano en su literatura muestra un hibridismo estético distintivo, cuyo motor principal es arrollar con lo que le permite incluir en vez de asumir una posición de rechazo. Le interesa ante todo la multiplicidad de posibilidades, los nuevos giros, los matices atrevidos, la amalgama de símbolos y lo heterodoxo con el fin de explorar nuevos espacios literarios. Esta afición por integrar lo otro es debido en parte al afán por enriquecer su condición de desventaja social, pero también corresponde a un factor aún más fundamental: respetar las diferencias sin imponer más barreras que las que ha experimentado el chicano, cuya vida de por sí es una constante frontera interior. Como se le ha caracterizado de extranjero en su propia tierra, inclusive como refugiado, parte de su orientación innata es borrar, disminuir o sintetizar fragmentaciones divisorias. Su tendencia natural, entonces, consiste en conquistar barreras, alterar murallas y superar obstáculos. Damos lo chicano como ilustración, pero más bien es índice de una mentalidad fronteriza por ambos lados, ya que frontera comprende una zona o región sin límites precisos. Es decir, frontera en su sentido vivencial abarca una nueva entidad, una tercera cultura, que va más allá del confín político porque más bien representa una vía hacia la concordia entre dos naciones.

Para el objeto del presente trabajo es aún más útil aclarar ciertos conceptos al respecto por tratarse de una frontera como espacio literario, o sea, un producto creado con lenguaje, imágenes y símbolos. Ese espacio literario, especialmente para los chicanos, es Aztlán, el lugar mítico donde se originaron los aztecas y que ha sido resucitado en el renacimiento literario de los chicanos como *focus* propio de sus antepasados. Como se le ha tachado de ser un pueblo ahistórico, Aztlán sirve para configurar una base mítica, demostrando que no han nacido de la nada, sino que al contrario son descendientes de los primeros mexicanos. La curiosa coincidencia, llamémosle poética, está en el hecho de que Aztlán para los chicanos es aproximadamente lo que hoy se considera zona fronteriza. Y por eso obras como *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974) de Miguel Méndez y *Heart of Aztlán* (1976) de Rudolfo Anaya son significativas en este contexto: apuntan a una infraestructura cultural y mítica que está presente en numerosas obras de chicanos en donde le dan voz a los desarraigados, otorgándoles forma y sentido a la subyugación que han sufrido a través de la historia. En ambas novelas, este mito presenta un eterno retorno a lo primordial y por ende se completa el ciclo de la auto-conciencia. En *Peregrinos de Aztlán* se ha señalado que “la peregrinación ... no es de norte a sur, como lo fue la peregrinación azteca, sino a la inversa, de sur a norte”.¹⁴ El autor deliberadamente ha colocado la mayor parte de los hilos narrativos en ambos lados de la frontera, ofuscando la

especificidad en cuanto al espacio geográfico, lo cual permite que se confundan y se superimongan. El resultado es un ambiente de constante fluctuación, o sea, una frontera borrosa que no siempre tiene demarcaciones definitivas. Aztlán asume la cualidad de un campo de explotación donde lo noble cae víctima ante lo nefasto y también representa el sueño de mejoramiento que termina en desengaño. En esta epopeya de peregrinos en busca del bienestar y la reconciliación consigo mismos, los vemos guiados por el hambre y “desgraciados en el mar sanguinolento del dolor”.¹⁵ La novela, con situar la acción en zona fronteriza, tiene como motivo principal enfocar la problemática de personajes en su condición de vaivén mientras buscan su lugar en el mundo. Lo que sale a relucir es que la frontera no ofrece lo que ellos soñaban, sino que se encuentra en el desierto, sitio ajeno a la contaminación humana. Vale señalar que el autor chicano emplea la frontera como fondo a la vez que es personaje atractivo y también repelente para quien no sabe adaptarse. Subraya, sobre todo, una noción clara: la región no se manifiesta como entidad dividida, sino como algo que tiene dos mitades inseparables que se compaginan y se compenetran. Es una vasta frontera y los personajes se mueven dentro de ella como en un espacio indefinido.

En cambio, en *Heart of Aztlán* no se trata tanto de un eterno retorno como de una concepción mítica subyacente que se llega a conocer cuando se procura. La idea es que Aztlán es una fuerza espiritual que existe en uno mismo y que sólo es cuestión de saber recurrir a ella. Arraigado en el Sudoeste de Estados Unidos, Aztlán figura como espíritu permanente capaz de nutrir a quien le rinde respeto y homenaje. En la novela, el protagonista, Clemente Chávez, sufre una decaída espiritual al mudar a su familia a la gran urbe, habiendo experimentado la marginalidad y la pérdida de valores familiares con la respectiva desintegración. Después de perderse en los vicios y llegar casi al punto del exterminio personal, el mito de Aztlán se le impone y toma conciencia de sus contornos sociales mediante una visión mágica y espiritual. Gracias a un viejo ciego, Crispín, Clemente descubre el lugar originario de su ser cultural y de su gente. Aztlán, el cual resulta ser un depósito secreto de un sincretismo inexplicable entre lo indígena del Sudoeste y lo hispanico. Al tener contacto con dicho mundo espiritual, se encuentra a sí mismo y recobra la fuerza para tomar el lugar de líder entre su gente para guiarlos, de modo paralelo a Moisés, por el camino de la recuperación de su humanidad en contra de un sistema deshumanizante y cosificante. Lo que sobresale de dicha novela es que la frontera, aunque es hecho real tan próximo al lugar donde se desarrolla la historia, nunca aparece como demarcación ni límite, debido a que Aztlán tiene por naturaleza los valores permanentes de lo indígena, el cual no se proscribió por normas políticas. Aztlán es la tierra, mientras que las divisiones fronterizas geográficas son conceptos humanos regidos por determinados intereses.

Las dos novelas chicanas sirven para ilustrar un proceso de gran importancia sobre el tema de convergencia y divergencia, puesto que en ambos casos Aztlán es un mito que llevamos por dentro y que define la unidad interior. Como punto de referencia, hace entender que la convergencia es elemento que está presente y que Aztlán simboliza para el chicano una especie de reencuentro consigo mismo, mientras que la divergencia es el resultado de las fuerzas externas que se sobreponen cuando la disyunción se impone desde el exterior, se puede proceder a examinar los motivos de orden socioeconómico para averiguar dónde se originan y por qué. Lo más seguro es que opera un sinnúmero de factores para separar a los pueblos chicano y mexicano al contraponerlos como si fueran dos agrupaciones totalmente extrañas. La verdad es que en mucho se parecen y ni siquiera la frontera ha podido borrar por completo sus semejanzas, las que en ciertos casos, la frontera agudiza cuanto se parecen. Las razones las ha puesto la literatura a través de imágenes, motivos y símbolos sincretizadores, mas la historia se ha dedicado a explicarlas con mayor precisión, revelando con frecuencia que la imagen controlada de los desposeídos está relacionada a la hegemonía cultural de los centros metropolitanos, como lo son el Distrito Federal y las grandes urbes norteamericanas. Por lo tanto, quedan los olvidados, los de mero abajo y los más marginados en las escalas sociales inferiores, inclusive, infrahumanas. La frontera, entonces, padece de una fama poco gloriosa porque es donde la pobreza cobra vida y se confronta en forma descarnada. La franja fronteriza en ambos lados es recuerdo de la vergüenza nacional por lo poco que se hace para erradicar esa pobreza y también apunta a la necesidad revolucionaria por encontrar otras soluciones.

Lo que más se distingue entre los autores chicanos y mexicanos es la manera cómo representan a la frontera. Los primeros reflejan el haber interiorizado esas divisiones como manera de tratar con su doble realidad y por eso el límite político resulta ser factor más bien arbitrario y poco determinante. Una prueba concreta de lo dicho es el nombre revelador de una revista chicana de los años 70 que lleva por título *Sin Fronteras*, donde se propaga la idea de un pueblo colonizado en los dos lados de la frontera.¹⁶ Para el chicano, la frontera no limita su movilidad y tampoco sirve de ruptura tajante para ejercer lo que considera una vida cultural propia a su herencia. Dispone de múltiples posibilidades: puede retener su mexicanidad intacta, modificarla, combinarla con otras influencias o transformarla en algo totalmente distinto a lo que conocía en México. Es decir, se adapta sin negarse y lo sobrecogedor es que el mexicano fronterizo también repite un ciclo parecido, porque á fin de cuentas la región ya no es ni el centro ni el sur de México. La incomodidad suele surgir por parte de las sociedades medias (la norteamericana y la mexicana) a raíz de que lo fronterizo va en contra de la imagen de sí mismos y es justamente aquí donde se intensifica la divergencia. Las dos culturas medias prefieren que sobresalgan las diferencias, sabiendo que pueden entablar una

campaña eficaz contra lo que no es oficial y así denunciarlo como imitación de mal gusto, o de una historia de poca relevancia. Aunque no se pronuncien como tales, éstos son los razonamientos para atacar lo que en si se va creando como una tercera cultura, cuya habilidad de supervivencia es barajar códigos, valores y lenguajes aparentemente opuestos. Así es que se forja una evolución dinámica que está gestándose en una nueva fuerza cultural, quiérase o no.

Ofrecemos un solo ejemplo del interlingüismo chicano que suele aparecer con regularidad en un ambiente hogareño, mostrando el grado de la convivencia lingüística a la vez que se puede observar la yuxtaposición de dos tradiciones orales que coexisten simultáneamente. Vale advertir que lo siguiente seguramente va a horrorizar a un lector monolingüe, sea el inglés o el español, mientras que una persona bilingüe no sólo comprende todos los códigos aquí presentados sin trastornos mentales, sino que aprovechará con mayor esmero el gusto peculiar de los registros expresivos de ambas lenguas:

- Papa, dinos un bedtime story before we go to bed.
- Sí, papa ... please.
- Well ... *no puedo think of any ahora mismo. Maybe la mama knows algún story*
- No sé, let me think, says mamá. How about la llorona? .
- (..)
- *Well, I could tell you about el bad little kid que se lo tragó la tierra.*
- (...)
- Por qué did it swallow him?
- Because era very bad, y hacía what he darn well pleased. He even used to hit his mama y su daddy, y no hacía anything that they told him.*
- *... no le digas things like that. Next thing you know, les dices how su mama had to whip his hand con un chicote to make up por todas las times that she should have done it y no lo hizo. Yo no quiero for these kids to hear stories tan terrible.*
- Pero, papa ... how could she whip sus hands if the tierra swallowed him.
- *Well, you see, mi hijo ... la tierra didn't swallow him completamente. It left sus hands sticking out and. ... OH NO, YOU DON'T! Por poco you'll sucker me into your tonteras. (...) si no puedes tell them un decent story, mejor don 't tell them nada.*
- *Well, les cantaré "Rock-a-Bye Baby".¹⁷*

Por medio del ejemplo citado se observan las dos corrientes culturales que operan a la misma vez con el lenguaje, las ideas y la tradición de relatar cuentos. Se yuxtaponen la Llorona, algo considerado más mexicano, y esta leyenda se combina con la noción de fantasmas del tipo que es más común entre los niños de Estados Unidos. Las distintas creencias, las cuales tienen procedencias culturales aparte, aquí aparecen con naturalidad y como si fueran casi una sola.

Con el motivo de formular una teoría sobre la frontera y determinar si en efecto existe una diferencia entre los escritores chicanos y mexicanos, sería necesario examinar muchas obras y luego compararlas. En el presente ensayo exploratorio, sólo

nos proponemos plantear ciertos conceptos al respecto para poder provocar diálogo y discusión sobre un tema que suele ignorarse. El tema de la frontera es tal vez el tema de mayor importancia para los pueblos chicano y mexicano en cuanto a la comprensión que ellos quieren tener del otro y por ende, de sí mismos. Los escritores chicanos tratan el tema con gran frecuencia porque ellos reconocen que simbólicamente marcan un punto de división entre lo que consideran ser un mismo pueblo. Además, no perciben una distancia ni física ni espiritual con México, sino que por lo general anhelan retener una gran parte de su mexicanidad y hacerla florecer en el lado norteamericano. Escritores, por ejemplo, como Miguel Méndez, Aristeo Brito, Ron Arias y otros no le confieren cualidad de abismo o de cortina diferenciadora, sino más bien una tenue línea política y económica cuya inconveniencia es signo de la arbitrariedad con que se define la vivencia bicultural. La actitud es una de haber superado a la frontera física a la misma vez que reconocen que forma parte de su psicología y su ser mas no la configuran como obstáculo. La diferencia básica con el autor mexicano es que estos escritores chicanos no la perciben en sí como separación, porque la consideran el punto de contacto con el otro yo cultural.

En México, no obstante, la imagen más común de la frontera, así en la literatura como en periódicos, revistas y otros medios, se define en términos de una verdadera escisión y ruptura, subrayando que la persona tiene que conceder mucho de sí para sobrevivir y adaptarse. La perspectiva es tal que tiene sus dos versiones: la oficial, o sea la del gobierno, y la popular, según como corre la voz del pueblo. La primera tiende a desanimar a la gente para que se acerque a la frontera, ya que la emigración fuera del país es una afrenta a la eficacia gubernamental, es decir, admisión callada de que el gobierno no sabe hacer lo suficiente por su propia gente. La segunda, en cambio, con sus diversas manifestaciones, busca enfocarse en la experiencia misma de cruzar la "línea", lo cual suscita peligro e incluso humillaciones pero, a pesar de todo, se intenta repetidas veces.

En la literatura mexicana, la frontera política se describe en términos de un confín tajante y determinante con el cual se indica que algo termina (lo mexicano) y algo comienza (lo norteamericano). Simboliza un reto y representa una verdadera amenaza donde se juegan la vida y la muerte, debido a que el pase es menos accesible y más controlado. Cruzar la frontera ilegalmente ya implica una decisión premeditada que no se puede comparar con la de los turistas del otro lado que visitan a México por ratos. Es exponerse a una serie de factores desconocidos, aunque el más seguro es el abuso y la explotación. La perspectiva entre ambos lados es una contraposición: los ilegales cruzan para servir y los turistas van a México para ser servidos. Esta diferencia se observa en rasgos generales en la literatura mexicana que trata de la frontera. Un ejemplo clave es el protagonista de *Murieron a mitad del río* de Luis Spota, cuando el personaje se encuentra cruzando el río y reflexiona así:

Aquello ... aquello era ya más que un recuerdo: y sin embargo seguía el Paván la prisa por meter en él y ese pasado de que escapaba, una barrera de agua; la que iba cruzando. Hubiera sido terrible hacer de sus pies sólidas, pasadas (sic), agobiadoras raíces hundidas en la tierra: secas en el asfalto de la ciudad mexicana.¹⁸

El tono trágico que expresa Paván refleja aspectos de un fugitivo que se aleja de su tierra de origen. Es decir, ve su realidad mexicana, la que deja atrás, como algo propio de la desesperanza que prefiere abandonar, optando por exponerse a lo desconocido del lado norteamericano y los peligros que eso representa a su persona. Siente, desde el momento de entrar en el río, una distancia a la vez que califica su escape como una forma de despojarse de su pasado. Huye de su tierra y espera entregarse a una nueva tierra, situación que en la obra ya hace anticipar un fin trágico y de desconsuelo. En esta obra mexicana, la visión que se proporciona de la frontera es la de un pueblo que empieza a morir en el momento en que cruza hacia el norte, confirmando así la divergencia con que se mira desde el sur y lo cual sirve para contrastar con la versión tan distinta de los escritores chicanos.

Para no caer en paradigmas demasiado sencillos, vale repetir que la problemática en torno a la frontera es verdaderamente compleja, con infinitos factores. Se ha intentado plantear conceptos pertinentes a la frontera que son generalizadores en las literaturas chicana y mexicana. Lo patente es que es posible verificar una diferencia de perspectiva con respecto al mismo fenómeno. Los escritores chicanos juzgan e intuyen que los nexos con México van mucho más allá de una sola línea, mientras que al mexicano le resulta una división más definitiva donde la ambivalencia se tambalea. Si el chicano busca romper esa barrera, el mexicano se encuentra con una frontera que asume la característica de un fin del mundo y de un último recurso para la supervivencia. Por un lado le teme pero también se siente atraído por ella. El chicano la toma como puerta por medio de la cual puede mantenerse en contacto con sus orígenes, mientras que el mexicano la ve como camino de perdición. En suma, en los primeros opera un anhelo hacia la convergencia más profunda, o sea, retener e integrarse a su ser histórico-mítico, y en los segundos se expresa la divergencia, ya que la disyunción concreta acecha a su mexicanidad.

NOTES

¹ Luis Leal, "Literatura de frontera", *Tierra adentro*. INBA 27 (julio-septiembre 1981): 36-39.

² Jorge Bustamante, "La interacción social en la frontera México-Estados Unidos: un marco conceptual para la investigación", en *La frontera del norte integración y desarrollo*, Roque González Salazar, comp., México: El Colegio de México, 39.

- ³ Armando Míguez, "La frontera como espacio literario", *Plural* 138 (marzo 1983): 19-23.
- ⁴ Carlos Monsiváis, "Prólogo: de México y los chicanos de México y su cultura fronteriza," *La otra cara de México: el pueblo chicano*, comp. David R Maciel (México: Ediciones "El Caballito", 1977: 3-4).
- ⁵ Carlos Monsiváis, 4.
- ⁶ Luis Leal, 37.
- ⁷ Luis Leal, 38.
- ⁸ Arturo UsIar Pietri, "Lo criollo en la literatura." en *Las Nubes* (Santiago. Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1956: 66-78).
- ⁹ Carlos Montemayor, "La literatura regional en los estudios fronterizos del norte", *Tierra adentro*. INBA. Núm. 27 (julio-septiembre 1981: 33-36).
- ¹⁰ Francisco A. Ríos, "The Mexican in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore," *El Grito 2* (Verano 1969): 14-29.
- ¹¹ Héctor Martínez, *Yo chicano* (México: Costa-Amic, 1976: 10-11).
- ¹² Alurista, et al. *Literatura fronteriza* (San Diego: Maize Press, 1982: 11).
- ¹³ Luis Leal, 38.
- ¹⁴ Leal, L. "In Search of Aztlán". *Denver Quarterly* 16: 3. (Otoño 1981): 16-22.
- ¹⁵ Méndez, M. M. *Peregrinos de Aztlán*. Ediciones Peregrinos: Tucson, 1974: 52.
- ¹⁶ Ver el artículo inédito de Mario T. García, intitulado "La Frontera: The Border as Symbol and Reality in Mexican American Thought", que publicará la revista *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*.
- ¹⁷ Mary Ann Romero y Carlos Romero, *Los Bilingos* (Santa Fe: The Sunstone Press, 1978: 38).
- ¹⁸ Spota, L. *Muriendo a mitad del río* (México: Costa-Amic, 1969: 23).



Trends and Themes in Chicana/o Writings in Postmodern Times

Chicano literature definitely came of age in the 1980s and 1990s. Literary production in these two decades reached a new phase within the theoretical parameters of what Rosaura Sánchez describes in her essay “Postmodernism and Chicano Literature.” Our study explores the literary texts published in the aforementioned decades and focuses on such emergent themes and trends as the explosion of Chicana publications, the new detective novel, and the continued popularity of Mexican immigrant themes.

The Chicano movement’s new crop of writers is composed of men and women with a wide range of interests, some of which are different from the initial movement’s ideologically driven goals of the previous decades. The exigencies of cultural nationalism are currently less overt, and writers can now begin to focus on the individual, or on *la petite histoire*, as well as on the group. Some of our contemporary writers stress understanding the various dimensions of identity in addition to establishing and validating them. These “little stories” or microcosms of life are important because they can be viewed as emblematic of everyday existence and can help us decipher how everyday experiences are internalized by the psyche. When the messianic zeal of the Chicano movement, undeniably evident in the sixties and seventies, subsided or at least became less visible in the eighties, new discursive strategies emerged. Chicano writers in the last two decades have opted to create new themes and blur boundaries instead of targeting the unbridled political passions of the previous decades. The objective seems to be a greater introspection — more vertical than horizontal — into a wide array of manifestations that document Chicano social spheres. The muralistic realism of the sixties and seventies, comprised of broad characterizations, has given way to an examination of slices of life that deal with conflicts generated by complex societal factors. For instance, the early literary strategies of Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa, and Miguel Méndez consisted of structuring epic stories characterized by sweeping cultural significance. These strategies were a type of realistic social perspective bent on reclaiming a sense of historicity. This inclination, to a certain extent, has given way in some authors’ works to a more individualized examination of their personal lives. For example, note the popularity of the autobiographical mode in many of the contemporary Chicano texts. Postmodernism has derailed the search for absolute truth. Contemporary writers,

although greatly conditioned by their Chicano background, are now seeking answers in the personal experience. Whereas for some writers from the 1960s ethnicity figured as an end unto itself in literary production, contemporary writers examine this same ethnicity with regard to its evolving qualities. No longer conceptualized as static and essentialist in nature, ethnicity is appreciated for its inherent diversity and in particular for its hybridity. Ethnicities that are fluid, constantly changing, and eclectic allow for a more dynamic configuration. Ethnicity has consequently shed its exotic cloak — as perceived from the outside — and has become a human trait conditioned by historical and geographic factors. Chicanos no longer perceive of themselves as purely victims of a one-way socialization process, but rather as human beings who are socially constructed via a confluence of interfacing societal processes. In the process, Chicanos have come to properly value their cultural heritage while continuing to insist on their rights as citizens in American society.

The decade of the 1980s, denominated the “Decade of the Hispanic” by the federal government, began with much fanfare and promise. The sudden proliferation of the term “Hispanic” exploded into the national conscience, and a resurgence of political and economic power was eagerly anticipated. The term gained currency and undermined the usage of more ethnically accurate labels, such as “Chicano” and, in some cases, even “Mexican American.” The term “Hispanic” attempted to provide a more generalized sense of an interethnic identity and was meant to satisfy political circles in Washington D.C. Consequently, the ethnic designation of “Hispanic” was adopted by government institutions throughout the nation. Many Chicanos optimistically hoped that the enthusiasm generated by the publicity associated with the Decade of the Hispanic in the media would translate into bona fide social and economic progress. Some even counted on finally achieving the American Dream and assumed that cultural and racial conflicts would be resolved. Needless to say, this dream has not been fully realized. By the end of the 1980s, Chicanos and other Hispanics felt that they had been seduced by a publicity stunt that had only co-optation and assimilation as its objective. The subtext underlying the Decade of the Hispanic was the imperative to blend in and not to manifest too overtly any ethnic qualities. The publicity campaign was designed to instill hope of a better future and to avoid any destabilization of the status quo or questioning of hegemonic society.

The 1980s had started on an upbeat note but soon became marred by an event that Anglo mainstream society considered threatening: massive immigration to the United States due to civil war in Central America. The targeting of immigrants appeared as a new form of institutionalized racism. Furthermore, the illusory economic programs of the Reagan administration mortgaged the future with long-term loans while

ignoring the deficit. The Reagan “trickle down” economic policies favored the upper classes, and the “glass ceiling” at the workplace became entrenched and functioned as an insurmountable barrier against the advancement of upwardly mobile Latinos. What at first seemed a potential breakthrough for Chicanos and other Hispanics soon turned into politics as usual. These events resulted in economic hardship for the working class and impeded social and economic progress for people of color.

The beginning of the 1980s marked a low point in Chicano literary production, a shift in focus and spirit from the many accomplishments achieved in the 1970s when literary experimentation had reached a high point. As evinced in Necochea et al. (1982), Chicano authors in the early eighties seemed uncertain about which direction to turn with their creativity. This low point was characterized by a sense of self-doubt in the Chicano community and by fears that a revolutionary window of opportunity was fast disappearing. The collective *engagé* spirit of the 1970s, oftentimes inspired by Mexican myths and legends, suddenly found itself facing a practical “me-first” generation of the 1980s. The gut-wrenching searches for a collective identity by such figures as Oscar Zeta Acosta, Alurista, and Ricardo Sánchez seemed far removed from the new era of self-absorption. There was a general feeling that since the literary stature of Tomás Rivera, Miguel Méndez, Rudolfo Anaya, Luis Valdez, Rolando Hinojosa, Estela Portillo Trambley, Bernice Zamora, José Montoya, Gary Soto, and others had been secured, what else could the literary movement possibly offer? A search for identity and the construction of myths took on new parameters of inquiry, judging from the works of Richard Rodríguez and Ana Castillo.

The year 1980 marked a turning point in which the literature lost some of its protest edge in favor of a more personalized view. The examination of the intrahistorical took root at this time and had many followers. A perspective from inside out prevailed, and a number of works were produced, especially by Gary Soto, that concentrated on small events from which to extract greater meaning and significance. Suddenly, innuendo, language variants, and even self-history became important in narrating stories, organizing fiction, and constructing poetry. As Francisco A. Lomelí observed, “Whereas technique had been the central point of consideration [in the 1970s], the shift became more one of utilizing technique to unveil a cross-sectional disclosure of multifaceted experiences covering gender, class, [and] psychological and social determinants” (Lomelí 102).

By the mid-1980s, an exciting new group of writers emerged on the Chicano literary scene, changing it forever. This group viewed culture as more a fluid experience than a prescribed form of defining worldview. Prominent in this new group were a sizable number of Chicana writers. The year 1985 marks the date of the rise of what

we term the “Contemporary Chicana Generation.” This group has exerted a great deal of influence since then and promises to continue to do so into the twenty-first century. A new poetics also emerged in 1985 as the result of a desire to experiment with genres that focused on gender egalitarianism and the meaning of culture from a variety of perspectives. The possibility of joining a redefined mainstream appealed to many authors in their quest to discover and gain new readers. Part of this shift in literary taste can be traced to the previous decade, when Chicano writing displayed excesses that became somewhat formulaic and contrived. Writing Chicano works only for Chicanos became a burden to some because the motivation to break boundaries and expand the Chicano presence seemed a loftier goal. This shift in the genre resulted in a new-found interest in Chicano literature, and in particular in Chicana/Latina writings, by established commercial outlets, who now played a central role in dissemination. The feelings of relative isolation and disenfranchisement of the 1970S were not completely erased but were incorporated under the postmodernist rubric of decentralization.

By the mid 1980s, Chicano literature found a wider audience, in large part due to its connection to a European readership (surprisingly enough, less so to a Mexican one). International attention was first captured by Marcienne Rocard’s book, *Les fils du soleil: la minorité mexicaine à travers la littérature des États-Unis* (Sons of the Sun: The Mexican Minority through the Literature of the United States), and Tino Villanueva’s *Chicanos: antología histórica y literaria* (Chicanos: A Historical and Literary Anthology), which both appeared in the 1980s. Furthermore, the first and second International Conference on Chicano Culture and Literature in Gernersheim, Germany (in 1984), and Paris, France (in 1986), played a key role in promoting the general appeal of Chicano literature. Subsequently, other international conferences have taken place in numerous cities, such as Barcelona, Madrid, and Granada (Spain), Taxco (Mexico), Groningen (Holland), and Bordeaux and Marseilles (France). Mainstream U.S. society was no longer the target audience, but ironically, it too began to take notice of these fast-moving literary developments. In addition to the conference proceedings from the first two meetings of the International Conference on Chicano Culture and Literature, the books *Missions in Conflict: Essays on U.S.-Mexican Relations and Chicano Culture* (1986), by Renate von Bardeleben et al., and *European Perspectives on Hispanic Literature of the United States* (1988), by Genevieve Fabré, were particularly instrumental in challenging Chicano provincialism, American canonicity, and U.S. indifference toward change. The result was an expanded readership that raised new theoretical questions and methodologies and a European perspective that was different from what Chicanos had faced within their geographical boundaries. Chicano literature began to take on a more international profile and to communicate with new and unfamiliar ethnic traditions. This dialogue

became a means through which Chicanos could profitably explore differences between ethnic groups while projecting a facet of Americanism that was unknown abroad.

The global arena contributed much toward a better understanding between European and Chicano critics, who learned critical theories and approaches from both sides of the Atlantic. Writers themselves also began to look beyond their respective regions and beyond their Chicano and other American circles. Internationalization, on the one hand, produced greater mainstreaming, but on the other hand it made writers reflect on the basic principles that had previously guided their literary endeavors.

If the 1970s demanded that Chicanas/os re-create themselves for local consumption, the 1980s demanded that they reconfigure themselves and export images to foreign cultures who were less familiar with and knowledgeable about Chicanas/os. Some of the initial international works that shed new light on Chicano literature were Wolfgang Binder's *Partial Autobiographies: Interviews with Twenty Chicano Poets* (1985), Lia Tessarolo Bondolfi's *Dal mito al mito: la cultura di espressione chicana: dal mito originario al mito rigeneratore* (From Myth to Myth: The Culture of Chicano Expression: From Primordial to Regenerative Myth, 1987), Yves-Charles Grandjeat's *Aztlán, terre volée, terre promise: les pérégrinations du peuple chicano* (Aztlán: Stolen Land, Promised Land; The Pilgrimages of the Chicano People, 1989), María Eugenia Gaona's *Antología de la literatura chicana* (Anthology of Chicano Literature, 1986), Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe's *Vous avez dit chicano: anthologie thématique de poésie chicano* (Have You Said Chicano: Thematic Anthology of Chicano Poetry, 1993), Heiner Bus and Ana Castillo's *Recent Chicano Poetry/Neueste Chicano-Lyrik* (1994); and Rosamel Benavides's *Antología de cuentistas chicanas: Estados Unidos de los '60 a los '90* (Anthology of Chicana Short Story Writers: United States from the '60s to the '90s, 1993).

Despite the slow beginning in Chicana/o creative production in the 1980s, this decade later became synonymous with the literature's great successes both commercially and aesthetically speaking. The frontline of such cutting-edge literary production in the 1980s was led by a vanguard of well trained and inspired Chicana writers who came together more by circumstance than design. Their success became so well documented that eventually the 1980s became known as the "Decade of the Chicana." A feminist ethos emerged and inscribed itself in a literary movement that aspired to represent Chicanas' lives in more accurate, complex, and authentic ways. Chicana writers helped produce a movement within a movement and became a definite tour de force because of their originality, verve, sensibility, and determination. The important constellation of Chicana literati who published landmark works in or near 1985 includes Helena María Viramontes (*The Moths and Other Stories*, 1985), Cecile Pineda (*Face*, 1985; *Frieze*, 1987), Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*, 1984), Cherríe Moraga (*Giving Up*

the Ghost, 1986), Denise Chávez (*The Last of the Menu Girls*, 1986), Pat Mora (*Borders*, 1986), Mary Helen Ponce (*Taking Control*, 1987), Laura del Fuego (*Maravilla*, 1989), Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987), and Margarita Cota-Cárdenas (*Puppet*, 1985). Other writers such as Ana Castillo, who had published chapbooks such as *The Invitation* (1979), became a significant voice in Chicana/o writer circles; she eventually gained prominence with her novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters*. Castillo and Sandra Cisneros are two of the most prominent and influential spokespersons within the Chicana/o literary movement today.

Each of the Chicana writers listed above published her first substantial publication in 1985 or shortly thereafter, and each made an indelible impression in the literary world. As a group, their focus on feminist and gender issues spawned a renaissance of literary production. This production focused on the reconceptualization, re-presentation, and recovery of women's voices. Their new aesthetics underscored a woman's worldview. Without a doubt, the convergence of such a high-powered group sparked a new synthesis with respect to how Chicano culture came to define itself. These writers added experiential depth, creative vigor, and international visibility to the literature.

The Decade of the Chicana did not happen by chance but was the result of challenges set originally in 1975, a year denominated as the "International Year of the Woman". Once the literature written by men leveled out in terms of its nationalistic zeal and its grandiose cultural agenda — including the ego-driven one-man "cult shows" of personas and personalities — Chicanas were determined to fill in the gaps with relevant stories and impressions on how they saw and experienced the world, oftentimes framed within a feminocentric folklore. In a real sense, they proposed to re-create or establish significant portions of a Chicana epic, that is, a story that had remained silent, untold, forgotten, ignored, minimized, and even repressed. Their interests included 1) the examination of women as "theoretical subjects"; 2) the cultivation of a wide assortment of literary forms; 3) the incursion into the psyche or what we might term "experiential inwardness"; 4) the portrayal of social elements from a "herstorical" approach; 5) the presentation of texts from a genderized political and cultural perspective; 6) the objective to either challenge, defy, or break traditional boundaries or borders of any kind (including textual and sexual); and 7) the desire to reach others in order to exercise some kind of inspirational influence among subsequent generations.

The writers of the above-mentioned generation, who continued to dominate the literary scene in the 1990s, have become the most important postmodern trendsetters and innovators. Their many contributions to style and to the artful, even daring, blurring of different genres are well recognized. They mix art forms freely to

break down barriers or simply blend divergent forms by contradicting, undermining, or interrogating otherwise “straightjacket” limitations. Their main concerns focus on issues such as maturation, the effects of cultural institutions and social conditioning, the role of family and upbringing, an awareness of sexuality, a sense of otherness, a challenging of conventional literary forms, the passing of generations, and the discovery of an interlingual and intercultural social grouping (Lomelí 104). With respect to identity, Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternback point out that “The question of identity arises as a result of the negation, marginalization, and silencing of Latinas’ history by official discourse, that is, the dominant culture’s version of history”. This talented group indeed set the stage for a new vanguard poetics that will set the tone for decades to come.

Although no single writer served as guru, epicenter, or trailblazer for the Contemporary Chicana Generation, what distinguished this generation from the previous ones was that each genre was well represented, without any one necessarily dominating. The authors usually produced transgeneric works with unique and unconventional compositions. Examples include Ana Castillo (*The Mixquiahuala Letters*), Sandra Cisneros (*The House on Mango Street*), and Norma Cantú (*Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*) in the novel; Helena María Viramontes (*The Moths and Other Stories*) in the short story; Cherríe Moraga (*Giving Up the Ghost*) and Denise Chávez (“Novenas narrativas: ofrendas nuevomexicanas”) in theater; Pat Mora (*Borders*) and Naomi Quiñónez (*Sueño de colibrí / Hummingbird Dream*) in poetry; and Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*) in the creative essay. If gender was their main concern as a social issue, then the discussion of sexuality as intrinsically relevant to identity also was center stage, along with the theoretical question of what metamorphosed genre should be used to accommodate such expression. In fact, in some cases the focus on gender and sexuality highlighted an area that had been previously rebuffed, censored, or repressed. From this vantage point Chicana authors managed to propagate a discourse and a subjectivity that opened up new avenues of expressing and representing women within society in general and with respect to other women, especially other Latinas, in particular. The potential for recovering untold histories of women’s lives became infinite. At the same time, this generation redirected their attention toward overcoming restrictive notions of Chicana/o culture through a feminocentric perspective, especially one shaped by a Chicana viewpoint.

In conjunction with this charismatic group of women writers who changed the direction of Chicana/o literature forever, two important events occurred. First, with its headquarters at the University of Houston, the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project launched an aggressive campaign to reconstruct the literary history

of Hispanics while recovering forgotten texts written prior to 1965. Second, a series of authors who made their mark in the 1970s recaptured some of their luster at the end of the 1980s. In the first category, significant recoveries included *The Squatter and the Don* (1992), originally written by Amparo Ruiz de Burton, but reintroduced by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatriz Pita. In the second category, Gary Soto, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Nash Candelaria, Alejandro Morales, Rolando Hinojosa, Miguel Méndez, Tino Villanueva, Rudolfo Anaya, Alurista, John Rechy, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Juan Felipe Herrera made a comeback with important contributions. Even José Antonio Villarreal, Sabine R. Ulibarrí, and Américo Paredes, whose antecedent works date back to the 1950s and, in Paredes's case, to the 1930s, reappeared with significant new works.

Rolando Hinojosa and Gary Soto remain the most prolific authors and are further solidifying their position as masterful storytellers. Hinojosa, on the one hand, continues to explore a mythic region, Belken County, through a metatext he calls the "Klail City Death Trip Series." His narratives provide an in-depth portrayal—a horizontal and vertical view of history, geography, and culture—of what can easily be surmised to be the southern Texas and northern Mexico regions. *Partners in Crime: A Rafe Buenrostro Mystery* (1985) and *Korean Love Songs from Klail City Death Trip* (1980), for example, continue to explore border issues. His most recent novel, *Ask A Policeman: A Rafe Buenrostro Mystery* (1998) continues the Buenrostro story with greater character profiles in a mythic region that continues to expand. Soto, on the other hand, offers a series of poignant stories about youths in the process of maturation in a series of novels particularly aimed at a young audience (*Summer on Wheels*, 1995; *Buried Onions*, 1997). His prose and poetry takes place in the San Joaquin Valley in California. In this central California setting, the anecdote is magnified to show the human drama of constantly adapting and adjusting to small-town circumstances. Among his best works during this period are *Living up the Street: Narrative Recollections* (1985), *Black Hair* (1985), and *A Summer Life* (1990).

Another talented poet is Jimmy Santiago Baca, whose novel *Martin & Meditations on the South Valley* (1987) narrates a person's physical and spiritual journey through a specific region. The final representative of this group that resurfaced in the late 1980s is Juan Felipe Herrera, who published *Akrilica* in 1989. This work is a collection of highly experimental poetic accounts that mix theater with memoirs, and journalism with plastic arts, thus creating a bilingual potpourri of rhythms and neologisms.

Several important new voices appeared during the 1980s. Arturo Islas, with his *The Rain God: A Desert Tale* (1984) and *Migrant Souls* (1990), introduced new themes and family genealogies. It was the Chicanas, however, who began to achieve greater national recognition. Ana Castillo, with her novels *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986)

and *Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter* (1990), came the closest to becoming a literary leader in this decade. Sandra Cisneros became the guidepost by which we could measure the commercial reception of Chicana literature in mainstream circles. Together, Castillo and Cisneros have generated the most interest and provided the most visibility for Chicana literature during the 1980s and 1990s.

Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* garnered a great deal of fanfare for its highly poetic prose about a young protagonist who feels at odds with her immediate environment, including her family. Her character, Esperanza, goes through a series of adventures and close calls as she crisscrosses the streets of her Chicano neighborhood in a large city. Esperanza relates her stories from the vantage point of an innocent child, and in the process, a distinct community emerges with many of the typical social problems plaguing it: poverty, racism, and the community's negotiations with assimilation. In addition, other issues surface such as the quest for identity, the role of the writer vis-à-vis her responsibility to her Chicano community, and women's oppression in both the barrio and society in general. Cisneros's second major work is *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), an excellent collection of short stories that poignantly capture the lives of women and their predicaments and social trappings in Texan and Mexican surroundings. The poetic prose offers much depth and insight into the experiences of prepubescent girls and young women. The gripping stories burst out with humor and pathos; this strategy allows the reader to explore the character's psyche with great interest and profound respect.

Ana Castillo, in her novel *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (winner of an American Book Awards prize in 1987), displays a flair for experimentation with form and narrative strategies while creating convincing female characters who depend on each other for psychological and moral support. This highly original work, in the form of a multigenre diary, introduces perhaps the most profound character representations of two women who are different yet complement each other. Her later work, *Sapogonia: An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter*, creates a metaphorical construction of a country through which gender relations can be explored. In a later novel, *So Far From God* (1994), she injects elements of magical realism through a family of women who learn to deal with outsiders who are diametrically opposite to them. She continues expanding her brilliant storytelling abilities in her most recent works: *Loverboys: Stories* (1996) and *Peel My Love Like an Onion* (1999). Castillo also expands Chicana themes in other works, such as her poetry collection *My Father Was a Toltec and Selected Poems* (1995). In this slim volume of poems she explores different family situations where patriarchy continues to rule as an institution. Some of the poems included in *My Father Was a Toltec* underscore the Chicana/o heterogeneous racial make up (such as in "We Would Like You to Know"),

whereas others suggest alternative social orders (“In My Country”). Castillo also offers some ground-breaking, provocative, and insightful essays in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1995), in which she effectively deconstructs various forms of colonialism ranging from spirituality to sexuality. She has also edited the anthology *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1996), a collection of provocative essays exploring the meaning of the Virgin of Guadalupe for contemporary Chicanas/os and Latinas/os. The deciding factor that makes Cisneros and Castillo such outstanding authors is their talent for poetically creating strong, difficult-to-forget female characters. Together, they and other Chicana/Latina writers have forged what is considered to be a second Latina/o literary boom. This renaissance is now part of a multicultural forum in which Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, Chicanos, and other Latinos are creating a significant corpus of literary writings.

1. LITERATURE PRODUCED IN THE 1990s

The 1990s have ushered in a new wave of Latina/o writers whose writings are characterized by a greater interethnic cross-fertilization, a Latin Americanization or “tropicalization” in themes, a definite diversity in terms of experiential perspectives, a new poetic prose alongside proselike poetry, and especially an experimentation with forms (such as memoirs, [auto]biography, journals, *testimonios*, and ethnographies), thereby producing a vital unpredictability and a hybrid freshness never before witnessed. In some cases, such as Norma Cantú’s *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995), Sheila Ortiz Taylor’s *Coachella* (1998) and *Imaginary Parents: A Family Autobiography* (1996), Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s *Sor Juana’s Second Dream* (1999), and Pat Mora’s *Agua santa / Holy Water* (1995), *House of Houses* (1997), and *Aunt Carmen’s Book of Practical Saints* (1997), conventional literary forms are challenged, molded, fused, or defied for the sake of creating a literature that makes the insignificant significant. The everyday thus becomes central and manifests itself with a sophisticated apparatus, telling a story that seems deceptively simple. The literature in its most contemporary expression displays a distinct maturity and confidence and delves into new realms of experience. It is a literature reinventing itself beyond the margins.

Chicana/o literature has matured beyond being a one-dimensional social discourse or an essentialist formula of identity-building. Heteroglossia and heterogeneity are common elements that operate as subtexts, regardless of what the constraints of genre might imply. Spurred on partly by postmodern aesthetics (sometimes anti-aesthetics), many Chicano works demonstrate polyphonic qualities whereby the protagonist tends to be uncertain, sometimes splintered, or at least shared by various voices. This decentralization causes the reader to reconsider narrative strategies not as monolithic

constructions but rather as attempts to unveil the complexities of a reality in its fullest frame. Chicana/o writers in the 1990s, perhaps more than ever before, create texts that defy easy classification as literary products. If in the 1970s this blurring of genres or mixture of forms and styles appeared as processes that challenged hegemonic literary production, then the most recent works are more than a sign; rather, they embrace various styles and constructions and suggest that the message exists somewhere between *how* something is told and *what* is told. That explains the authors' flair in constructing the intergeneric overlapping so commonly seen during the decade. Furthermore, the experiential narration or poetic utterance requires free movement from one genre to another, thus avoiding becoming a slave to any one form. The result is significant because authors now blend form and subject more than ever before by avoiding restrictive notions of literature. Chicanas/os, consequently, appear more and more as writers who crisscross, even conflate, the gamut of human environments as they explore otherness, often paradoxical, shifting identities and varying notions of diversity. A good example is Graciela Limón's *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994), which combines testimonio with the more typical immigration novel by presenting the trajectory of a woman's hardships and obstacles vis-à-vis patriarchy and cultural values that perpetuate it.

Numerous examples confirm that, literarily speaking, Chicanas/os are prepared for the twenty-first century. Some of the transitional writings by Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Helena María Viramontes serve as points of continuity as they continue to produce important works. New writers, nevertheless, have emerged. A significant number of authors abound in this new postmodern era; among them are Luis J. Rodríguez, *Always Running: La Vida Loca; Gang Days in L.A.* (1994); Rubén Martínez, *The Other Side: Notes From the New L.A., Mexico City, and Beyond* (1992); Norma Cantú, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera* (1995); Benjamín Alire Sáenz, *Dark and Perfect Angels* (1995), *Carry Me Like Water* (1995), and *The House of Forgetting* (1997); Dagoberto Gilb, *The Magic of Blood* (1993) and *The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuña* (1994); Graciela Limón, *In Search of Bernabé* (1993), *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994), and *Song of the Hummingbird* (1996); Maricela Norte in her numerous poetry readings (unpublished); Sylvia López-Medina, *Cantora* (1993) and *Siguiriya* (1997); Louie García-Robinson, *The Devil, Delfina Varela, and the Used Chevy* (1993); Luis Urrea, *Across the Wire: Life and Hard Times on the Mexican Border* (1993); Yxta Maya Murray, *Locas* (1997); Demetria Martínez, *Mother Tongue* (1994); Alfredo Véa, Jr., *La maravilla* (1993) and *The Silver Cloud Café* (1996); Manuel Ramos, *The Ballad of Rocky Ruiz* (1993) and *The Ballad of Gato Guerrero* (1994); Montserrat Fontes, *First Confession* (1991) and *Dreams of the Centaur* (1996); Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, *Paletitas de guayaba* (1991); Michele Serros, *Chicana Falsa and Other Stories of*

Death, Identity, and Oxnard (1993); and Juan Estevan Arellano, *Inocencia ni pica ni escarda pero siempre se come el mejor elote* (1992). Some authors, such as Miguel Encinias, in *Two Lives for Oñate* (1997), continue the line of historical chronicles originally developed by Nash Candelaria in the 1980s. Francisco Jiménez, on the other hand, revisits the migrant experience in *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (1997), a topic originally popularized by Tomás Rivera.

The most recent group of writers exemplifies tremendous versatility and talent in that they do not subscribe to one literary agenda or trend. Their themes explore new areas of socialization and human predicaments. Multivalence and the exploration of new realms seem to be at the core of their inventiveness, their playfulness. “Hard-core” topics, for example, have now been expanded and are dominated by women characters, as for example in *Locas* (1997) by Yxta Maya Murray. This novel poignantly shows another side of an experience in the urban barrios. Chicanas/os are more and more perceived as complex beings with multiple identities. Among the many literary manifestations in the 1990s, two major trends in Chicana/o literary production have emerged, the detective novel and the Mexican immigrant novel.

2. THE DETECTIVE NOVEL

Until recently, the detective/mystery novel had been virtually nonexistent in Chicana/o literature. However, within the past several years a modest yet vigorous boom has set off what may well be the beginning of the Raza/Aztlán detective tradition or the formation of the Chicana/o detective persona. In the process, Raza writers have shaped and reshaped the detective/mystery genre for specific cultural, political, and social purposes to comment on issues of class, gender, race, and sexual orientation or preference. These writers are producing new literary models that may be viewed as forms of social criticism and cultural representation. Moreover, these writers are modifying the genre by transforming the detective protagonist from white and middle- or upper-class, as in the classical tradition introduced by Edgar Allan Poe and honed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, to Raza working-class personas.

Detective/mystery writers Rudolfo Anaya, Lucha Corpi, Rolando Hinojosa, Michael Nava, and Manuel Ramos are notably changing the detective fiction formula as they create first-person narratives to investigate the issues mentioned above in relation to cultural and criminal environments. This significant change has been noted, for example, by Juan Bruce-Novoa, who proposes in “Who’s Killing Whom in Belken County: Rolando Hinojosa’s Narrative Production” (1987) that Hinojosa’s work can be read as an extended detective novel, characterized by murders and crimes in the lives of southern Texans. He further offers that Hinojosa’s “Klail City Death Trip”

series, including *Partners in Crime*, manifests characteristics of the detective novel: the disappearance of people, lost ancestry, facts and incidents, and a search for justice.

Some Chicano writers such as Rudy Apodaca and Max Martínez, however, do not create Chicano detectives but rather have white male personas as protagonists. Apodaca's *The Waxen Image* (1977) is described in its jacket blurb as the first mystery-suspense novel by a Chicano writer. The protagonist is an advertising executive named Ross Blair, who lives in San Francisco and travels to New Mexico after he receives a mysterious telephone call from his former wife to tell him that their daughter is missing. Antonio Márquez refers to *The Waxen Image* as a potboiler filled with "cardboard characterizations that match the tourists' view of New Mexico" (Marquez 1989, 255-65).

In Max Martínez's *White Leg* (1996), a novel compared to the hard-core novels by Jim Thompson and James M. Cain, the central character, Gil Blue, a small-time criminal, is pursued relentlessly and tenaciously by the FBI, the Texas Rangers and the local police, who want him dead. Even his boss, who practically owns the small town of White Leg, Texas, wants him dead. In both novels, the authors develop a number of secondary Chicano characters: *curanderas* (folk healers), farmworkers and service workers, for example.

The increasing body of detective / mystery novels, including those of Apodaca and Martínez, forms a microcosm of the Chicano world into which the readers are drawn and shown an aspect of life and thought. These novels not only reflect the oral tradition and the custom of storytelling found in Chicano/Mexicano folklore but also share an emphasis on signs, symbols, behaviors, and manners. These characteristics distinguish the Raza detective/mystery novel from other novels in the genre. Moreover, these qualities are usually communicated by the narrators, often the protagonists, who express their attitudes, sensibilities, sense of community, and personal values. Frequently, the protagonists behave in ways that demonstrate a strong sense of identity with and close connections to their communities; these attachments help bring about successful conclusions to their investigations and also help create order out of chaos in their surroundings. For instance, Manuel Ramos's protagonist, Luis Móntez, and Lucha Corpi's Gloria Damasco persist in restoring their sense of justice and honor in their communities when these ideals are violated, regardless of time spent or dangers encountered. The two characters, Móntez and Damasco, painstakingly solve murders that occurred twenty years before, during the Chicano Movement, to bring order to their communities.

Another distinguishing attribute of the Raza detective/mystery novel is that the protagonist can be as brash as the hard-boiled detective, but unlike the hard-boiled gumshoe, the Chicano protagonist takes time to nurture personal and family

relationships or to be involved in romantic relations. For example, in Michael Nava's mystery series, his protagonist, Henry Ríos, is involved in a long term relationship with his lover, who is dying of AIDS. Anaya's Sonny Baca, in *Rio Grande Fall* (1996) has a year-long relationship that might eventually lead to marriage. In addition, Baca has a strong friendship with Don Eliseo and his *compañeros* Doña Chona and Don Toto, the elderly keepers of the Rio Grande Valley traditions that go back to the seventeenth century. Sonny, at ease with the old people, respects Don Eliseo and his knowledge. In Ramos's series, Luis Móntez is also respectful toward his elderly father and his old ways, even though at times his father is cantankerous and difficult. And he respects his lover's grandfather, an old man who tells long, rambling stories about his family and Pancho Villa. Anaya's and Ramos's tough detectives show respect and care for the elders in their communities. Even more unlike the classic hard-boiled personas, Raza detectives are "complex, multitalented, and possessed of a social consciousness" and they are interested in the social and political milieu because of connections to their communities. Nava's character, Henry Ríos, gives the reader an insight into his private life and his compassion for those who suffer because of their sexual orientations. In *Golden Boy* (1988) Ríos, shocked by the physical appearance of his friend dying of AIDS, agrees to defend a young gay man who is charged with murder. Ríos does so out of friendship and compassion for his dying friend. Because Ríos is openly homosexual and has written a document on gay rights, he is often called on for help. Similarly, Corpi's Gloria Damasco and Ramos's Luis Móntez become involved in the Chicano Movement because they seek to bring about changes in the social and political conditions of La Raza.

Although the texts tend to focus more on plot than on character development, Raza detectives are more than "cardboard" characters. Anaya's and Ramos's detectives have personal lives, family histories, strong connections to their communities, interesting careers, and a well-developed social and political consciousness. Readers are privy to the private thoughts and actions that make the protagonists appear as fully developed persons, whereas the rest of the characters are much less developed.

Cityscapes are another characteristic of Chicano novels. Except for *White Leg*, *The Waxen Image*, and *Partners in Crime*, the novels take place in cities such as Albuquerque, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The protagonists are quite familiar with and comfortable in their urban surroundings; cityscapes are well integrated into the plots and form atmospheres that help shape the protagonists. Often the descriptions of cities and portraits of the characters from the barrios and the streets draw as much attention as the criminal activities. For example, in *The Death of Friends* (1996), Michael Nava describes his neighborhood and other parts of Los Angeles during and after an especially devastating earthquake.

A characteristic that Raza detective novels share with other novels in the genre is the presentation of city police and detectives as incompetent officials who have difficulty in solving crimes and the “superior” knowledge of the nonprofessional detective. The Raza detectives, in the Sherlock Holmes tradition, pay close attention to details. Details of ordinary everyday life are what give significance or importance to motives, landscapes, and characters and help develop social and political meanings. For example, in *The Ballad of Gato Guerrero* (1994), Ramos describes his protagonist’s encounter with a homeless and mentally unstable young man who shouts racial slurs at him. Ramos, in detailing this incident, comments on the social conditions of the homeless and on race relations. In *Cactus Blood* (1995) Corpi describes and discusses the serious medical condition of the murder suspect, caused by pesticide contamination as a teenager. Corpi’s exact details of the cause and effect of the contamination dramatize the victimization of the farmworkers and offer a social critique of these conditions.

Another characteristic of the Raza mystery is the difference in world view. Unlike the hard-boiled or classic detectives, who represent solitary existential perspectives, Raza detectives represent a community view. As stated before, the Raza persona is community-oriented, with a personal history that includes religious values. In *Rio Grande Fall*, Anaya’s detective is given spirituality and religious values; in addition, Anaya provides Sonny Baca with a spirit animal, a coyote, who guides and protects him. In *Cactus Blood*, not only can Corpi’s curandera read Gloria Damasco’s spirit, but she can also assist the body and spirit to be in balance. Ramos’s protagonist possesses a worldview suggesting some hope of improvement for the poor people who live in the barrios, although he is critical of corrupted white power structures. And as stated, Corpi’s protagonist Gloria Damasco’s worldview is critical of an agricultural industry that uses dangerous pesticides and herbicides with blatant disregard for the farmworkers and their health.

Another attribute of Chicano detective fiction is that writers do not stress physical violence as a major characteristic and keep its action and description to a minimum. In texts where writers follow the hard-boiled tradition, the protagonists are inductive, they follow their instincts and react instinctively. Yet another distinctive characteristic of the Chicano detective novel is that the detective is always conscious of racism and social injustice, and many texts examine the issues of class, race, gender, and sexual preference. An illuminating book written by Stephen F. Soitos, *The Blues Detective* (1996), cites W. E. B. Du Bois as suggesting that racism forces African Americans to view themselves as second-class citizens first and then as Americans, thereby creating a double consciousness. The Raza detective also manifests this double consciousness and uses this awareness to better grasp the criminal mentality.

This double consciousness is expressed through repeated references to music, dance, food, and religion, which make Raza detective fiction culture-specific. Furthermore, the use of these referents helps define the uniqueness of Chicano culture. For example, *curandería* (folk medicine), still very much a part of the culture, expresses a worldview anchored in spiritual awareness and a connection to the natural environment. One of Anaya's characters in *Rio Grande Fall* is a young curandera who uses her powers of divination to help Sonny Baca fight the evil forces of the Raven, Baca's nemesis. Anaya's use of *curandería* is an attempt to recognize its significance in Raza cultural identity and survival. As references to these iconographies reoccur from novel to novel, the concept of a Raza detective fiction is reinforced.

The new Raza detective fiction is transforming the traditional detective formula for social, political, and cultural objectives. Chicano writers use their work to comment on issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. This new detective fiction is further defined by cultural manifestations, often expressed by working-class detectives. Cultural identity, one of the major themes that marks the texts, frequently is associated with double consciousness, a distinctive worldview, and community values; these characteristics strongly emphasize positive aspects of Chicana/o identity. As Chicana/o detective fiction writers continue to explore and transform the traditional detective formula, the Raza detective promises to become a vigorous agent for social and cultural change.

3. THE MEXICAN IMMIGRANT NOVEL

Historical memory reminds us that Mexican immigration to the United States is not new and that it has served as subject matter for artistic expression for a century and a half. The Mexican immigrant has been traveling to the United States since 1848, when Mexico's northern provinces were lost in the Mexican-American War of 1846—1848. Mexican immigration as thematic material surfaced in *corridos* (Mexican ballads), film, theater, and other artistic cultural expressions. In the 1990s a significant number of novels have appeared in which the principal theme is Mexican immigration. In this section, we examine the prolific production of Chicana/o novels evidencing this theme in the nineties.

As stated earlier, the immigrant as protagonist in Mexican American literary works dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Ballads or corridos such as "El corrido de Kansas," "Los enganchados," "Corrido de Pensilvania," and many others have been sung throughout the history of Chicanos in the United States. Many folk songs present the immigrant odyssey from the perspective of the immigrants themselves. The corrido has the longest tradition of immigrant representation but, as David Maciel and María Rosa García-Acevedo have pointed out in their studies on

the representation of the Mexican immigrant in films, the movie industry also has had a long history of immigrant representation (Maciel and Garcia Acevedo, 1998: 149-202). Recently such films as *Contrabando humano* (Human Contraband), *Memorias de un mojado* (The Memoirs of a Wetback), *Mojado power* (Wetback power), *Jaula de oro* (Golden Cage), *Ni de aquí ni de allá* (Neither from Here Nor from There), *Frontera* (Borderlands), *Maldita miseria* (Damned Poverty), *El vagón de la muerte* (The Boxcar of Death), and *El jardín del Edén* (The Garden of Eden) are all recent examples of the popularity of the immigrant theme in Mexican films.

In a similar vein, the Chicana/o narrative has included the immigrant theme within its plot. A paradigmatic novel about Mexican immigration first appeared in 1926 bearing the title *Las aventuras de Don Chipote o cuando los pericos mamen* (The Adventures of Don Chipote or When Parrots Suckle their Young). The novel was written in Spanish by a Mexican national. In 1959 the first contemporary Chicano novel appeared: *Pocho*, by José Antonio Villarreal. The novel's plot begins with what has become the starting point for many Chicano novels: the history of the immigrant experience of the first generation, the settlement history of the second generation, and sometimes the assimilation process of the third generation. Other novels that follow this structure are *Barrio Boy*, *Chicano*, *Macho!*, *Trini*, *Peregrinos de Aztlán*, *Rain of Gold*, and many others.

In the nineties the Chicana/o narrative continues to reproduce the paradigmatic immigrant history. The basic structure of current immigration-oriented novels consists of recounting the journey from Mexico undertaken by the immigrant, his/her integration into North American society, and the assimilation of generations descended from the original immigrant. Within this group of novels we can include *The Dark Side of the Dream*, by Alejandro Grattan-Domínguez, a Chicano-Irish writer. As the title indicates, this novel has a negative view of the immigrant experience in which the American dream is more of a nightmare for Mexican nationals. Ofelia Dumas Lachtman's novel *The Girl from Playa Blanca* (1995) is directed toward a young audience. The narrative traces the experiences of a young girl who travels from Mexico to the United States in search of her father. Demetria Martínez offers us an interesting variation in her novel *Mother Tongue*, in which the immigrant coming to the United States is from El Salvador rather than Mexico. Martínez's novel depicts the love relationship between a war-scarred Salvadoreño and a Chicana. Graciela Limón's work deviates from the typical immigrant novel in that her main protagonist in her Mexican immigrant saga, *The Memories of Ana Calderón* (1994), is a woman. Likewise, Pat Mora, in her novel *House of Houses* (1997), features a woman protagonist who traces the family tree back to Mexico and Spain and tells of subsequent immigration to the U.S. Southwest.

In a second group of novels with Mexican immigrant themes, the immigrant is a secondary character who nevertheless plays an important role within the narrative plot. Of particular interest are those novels produced by Chicana writers such as Helena María Viramontes, who wrote the novel *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1995). The novel features Perfecto Flores as a Mexican immigrant who joins Estrella's family, who are migrant workers in the fields of California. Estrella is a young adolescent girl and is the main protagonist in the novel.

Norma Cantú introduced the immigrant theme through various characters, not just a single immigrant. The Texas-Mexico border towns of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo and the crossing of the characters to and from Mexico are integral to the plots of her vignettes.

A most innovative novel by Tina Juárez, *Call No Man Master*, is structured as an historical novel, with the action taking place in the nineteenth century during Mexico's War of Independence (1810-1812) and up to the 1830s. The novel is set in Guanajuato, Mexico, and features a brave woman-soldier protagonist, Carmen Rangel, who has joined the rebel soldiers of the priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. When she is captured by the Spanish army, she escapes to San Antonio, Texas, where she takes up residence. The novel ends before the Texas-Mexico war in 1836 and before the battle at the Alamo takes place.

In the last four decades we have witnessed in the United States a particular sense of crisis in relation to Mexican immigration. We agree with historian David Maciel and political scientist María Rosa García-Acevedo, who wrote in a recent article, "The Celluloid Immigrant: The Narrative Films of Mexican Immigration" (1998: 149), that

Mexican undocumented emigration to the United States is the single most complex and difficult issue currently facing these two countries. The controversy concerning Mexican undocumented workers in the United States includes economic, political, legal, social, cultural, and even moral considerations. Mexican migration has, in fact, become one of the salient political issues of the 1990s. The question has intensified in the political discourse of both countries and has received considerable attention from the academic community, policy makers, and the printed and mass media.

Paradoxically even though one cannot deny the hostility against Mexican immigrants on the part of the Anglo population, there does exist a love/hate relationship or one of repulsion and attraction. It goes without saying that despite the official line promulgated by the United States against immigration, this country needs immigrants, and particularly the Mexican immigrant. Agribusiness as well as the service industry needs these workers. Therein lies the perennial call to renew the discredited Bracero

Program of the 1942-64 era. As numerous studies have demonstrated, both the U.S. economy and the Mexican economy need Mexican immigrants to continue trekking along the historical migratory routes to El Norte. As long as Mexican workers continue to migrate legally or illegally to the United States, some Chicano literary production will continue to focus on this important phenomenon, and we will continue to read about the adventures, the sorrows, the heroism, the deaths, and triumphs of Mexican immigrants.

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New Mexico Lost in the Far West: Creating an Autochthonous Culture

New Mexico is one of the first regions to categorically defy the social homogenization agenda of Anglo America after the latter's conquest in the mid nineteenth century. Frankly, it was automatically incorporated into the American Union—although in a limited status as a territory for sixty-four years until 1912 when it became a state—mainly because it was north of the established political line separating it from Mexico, that is, above the Río Grande. Had this not been the case, there is no reason to believe that New Mexico would have continued as part of Mexico, for its distinctive social-cultural makeup and unique history — intimately tied to a long-standing world of Spanish colonization — to a degree, had subsumed its Native American counterparts. In other words, New Mexico by the nineteenth century was as colonial or as colonized as any part in Mexico, only to experience yet another definitive conquest. Consequently, it suffered many growing pains of cultural adjustment once it became a part of the United States; at the same time, the United States did not know exactly what to make of such a deeply entrenched mestizo region that possessed a character of its own. New Mexico, after all, represented the most established social-cultural entity in the era of the conquest wars which accounted for the longest permanent settlements, both indigenous and Hispanic. Conquering it completely was to become a difficult enterprise given the vast differences of its population with the new eastern settlers.

In this way, New Mexico has developed into one of the few truly tricultural states — perhaps most evident only since 1950. It had been early in the colonial period that New Mexico became accustomed to constant negotiations between Native American peoples and those of Hispanic descent, but the incursion of Anglo American peoples simply meant that the ante in negotiations went up. The omnipresence of the Native American pueblos dotting the Río Grande valley for centuries influenced the subsequent evolution of the area in all facets of life, most importantly, in its accentuation of a sense of place and belonging through its life cycles, customs, cuisine, architecture and identity. The Hispanic presence did much to coalesce what already existed while introducing a new language, a relative unification through worship of saints, a pastoral economy, and a strong concept of self. Anglo Americans, on the other hand, introduced competitive economies, systems of entrepreneurship, new massive technologies such

as the train, another language, and a substantially different ethos. Although the three cultures have not entirely blended naturally, nor peacefully, the interaction through time has probably created closer ties between the three cultural entities here than anywhere else, thus producing a unique hybrid culture. Each group has maintained some of its own spatial domains (i.e. communities such as *placitas*, reservations or even ‘nations’, enclaves, barrios, or other urban sections and/or rural locations, etc.), but their intersections have been noteworthy in that each borrows liberally from the other, oftentimes blurring differences of indistinction. For that reason, Native Americans are frequently confused for Hispanics, and vice versa, or Hispanics are perceived as Anglo Americans, and the other way around. The described situation has of course not always been quite that way.

Although completely landlocked, New Mexico has been ironically portrayed as the farthest comer of the Western frontier. As one of the *provincias internas* when it belonged to Mexico, it was known to be part of an indefinite borderlands termed “el vasto norte”. As early as 1610 Captain Gaspar Pérez de Villagr  made numerous references to its remoteness in his *Historia de la Nueva M xico* speaking as if on the edge of the earth. For 200 years thereafter most chroniclers who visited the region expressed their regret about the province’s acute out-of-the-way location. In fact, two predominant themes persist in the writings of the Colonial Period: the burden of isolation and sacrifice, and the harsh, ascetic life of the Native American populace and the Hispanic pioneers. One of the first Anglo explorers, mountain man Zebulon Montgomery Pike, wrote in his journal in 1807 after surveying the region that given its rustication New Mexico resembled a sort of Siberia (Pike 134). Outsiders have consistently underscored the image of a place they have to go through, a kind of no-man’s land or *terra incognita*, a way station on route to other promising horizons, that is, a place supposedly not inviting enough to stay—despite the seductive “manito”¹ hospitality. Although a debatable point, it is arguably for these reasons that New Mexico has remained as the most Native American and Hispanic state in the Union.

Under the colonial powers of the Spanish crown (1598-1821) and the short-lived Mexican rule (1821-1848), the province received minimal economic and administrative attention and support. Distances from Mexico City exacerbated the feasibility of effectively maintaining close ties and thus the region became viewed more as a liability because its limited mineral wealth and resources — early folkloric propagations of the mythic Quivira and its gold holdings proved to be misleading and false — did not compensate for the funding required to keep an isolated province afloat. Unable to live up to its earlier image, New Mexico fell back into oblivion. Relegated to the status of a mere appendage of Mexico, far removed from the central government’s concerns, and hanging on much like a loose tooth, it suffered its share of estrangement

and marginality. As a result, a resolute and strong-willed identity flourished among Nuevomexicanos who saw themselves as a distinct social unit quite apart from Mexico and later, even more so, quite different from Anglo America. The historian and archivist Fray Angélico Chávez adds:

From the start, the Hispanic colony of New Mexico, for reasons of geography and the circumstances of the times, had little connection with New Spain, which was much later to evolve into present Mexico. Nor had she anything to do with the later thrust into Texas, Arizona, and California. This New Mexican enclave developed, or degenerated in some ways, if you will, in almost complete isolation from Spain and the rest of Spanish America, yet proudly (if rather pathetically) 'Spanish' in its self-identification. This was due to the people who established the culture, the pastoral character of the region, the almost complete lack of education as well as cultural separation from the rest of the civilized world for over two centuries. (Chávez 245)

The end result was one of relative autonomy vis-à-vis outside influences. While cultural identity has been shaped essentially by factors common in northern Mexico, local factors assumed greater importance. A nationalistic or regional outlook has predominated in the manifestation of what it means to be Nuevomexicano: some claim that the *chilero* cultural cycle dominates their lifestyle and predetermines their view of time and culinary tastes; others stress the linguistic variants and phonetically distinguishable enclaves to highlight the unique cultural reservoir of a thriving Hispanic sector that has survived since the sixteenth century (i.e., *coyote* to signify a person of mixed blood between Mexican and Anglo and *cusco* with the connotations of stingy); religious worship and iconography have taken on features all unto themselves (i.e., the Santuario de Chimayó as a religious center of pilgrimage, the Penitentes as a traditional ad hoc religious institution, and the production of religious imagery and carvings); a deeply entrenched attitude of respect and love for the land partly fueled by Native American attitudes and Hispanic pastoral views; and an architecture, sometimes called Santa Fe-Pueblo, which accentuates Spanish building techniques and Native American pragmatism to offer harmonious spatial representations between nature and humankind (Lomelí 1988: 71).

Since time immemorial, New Mexico has been both cursed and blessed by its own isolation and marginality, frequently appearing as a frontier lost in time in the middle of nowhere. Native Americans counted on such isolation to defend their pueblos but it also kept them at a precarious condition of survival. This same remoteness later haunted Diego De Vargas and other early Spanish settlers, creating a natural cocoon for the subsequent development of New Mexico as a cultural aggregate. As Doris Meyer observes:

Like an island cut off from colonial centers of learning, cast adrift for another hundred years by a viceregal Spanish government that sent officials to govern on a rotating basis, the Hispanic settlers of northern New Mexico created a unique culture of both Spanish and Indian stock that occupied its own living space, near to but separate from the Pueblo peoples of the upper Rio Grande Valley. (113)

But the harshness of life continued to represent the greatest deterrent against renewed interest in the region, especially after the glory days of conquistadores when the unknown terrains became colonized and thus offered no new challenges for conquest. The Anglo American intrusion in mid nineteenth century shattered the previous dominance of the Hispanic-Mexican peoples, breaking down in the process the relative insularity of the past social order. An even more hybrid culture developed, oftentimes composed of three languages side by side — certainly not always harmoniously.

New Mexico seems always to have been a propitious area for producing written accounts, either literary and formal, fanciful or official documents. The early colonial works stemmed from adventures and the colonization enterprise by roaming Spaniards and Mexicans. An outstanding feature of the writings embraced a meticulous curiosity and an obsession with describing in detailed accounts what had unfolded before the eyes of the beholder. Written accounts oftentimes crossed genres and indulge in fanciful flights of the imagination. Likewise, the narrative or poetic voice captured the ‘New World’ from a European point of view, assimilating happenings with a freshness of awe and disbelief. More often than not, this eurocentric eye revealed more about itself than about the subject it portended to capture, encasing in the trappings of alterity images of what it encountered and ‘discovered’: peoples, places, landscapes, flora, and fauna. Europe thereby realized and reevaluated its own differences upon contact with the New World; it could no longer uphold monolithic systems of values and beliefs or concepts of existence and behavior. In much the same way, the subsequent contact with Anglo America centuries later opened Hispanic-Mexican peoples to other forms of being and the potential for unlimited human expression. In the meantime, much of the Renaissance ideal of humanistic perfection permeated the mythological allusions in order to construct the epic work *Historia de la Nueva México* (1610) by Villagr . Once colonization became less tenuous, and a degree of stability was attained by 1730, some of the writings acquired a more personal tone. Such is the case of eighteenth — century poet Miguel de Quintana, who adamantly defended his right to poetically explore semi-mystical, or ‘illuminated’ subjects. In other words, the colonization became internalized in contrast to works before him that dealt with epic qualities of cultures in clash.

After the initial stages of glorifying an imperial apparatus in heroic terms, publishing literary endeavors did not remain a priority. Diaries, administrative accounts,

travel reports, memoirs, and chronicles appear sporadically, but it soon became obvious that the faraway province demanded more assistance and attention than it could give in return to the governing agencies in Mexico City. Literary expression continued without institutional sanctions or printing possibilities and, thus, oral tradition turned into the principal means of recreative imaginative expression. Oftentimes a daring troubadour only needed a willing audience. Oral literature was already deeply rooted among the Native American and Hispanic populace as a means of entertaining themselves and of reflecting on transcendental — or immediate — meaning through the passage of time. By way of transmitting events or capturing situations in memorable forms of linguistic artistry, a collective catharsis was usually achieved in as much as oral tradition permits self-affirmation between speaker and audience by helping to define common ground for both. Indian lore seemed filled with ritual, mythological anecdotes, fantastic cosmogonic explanations, timeless characters, petro glyphs, ephemeral sand paintings of various designs, and repeated motifs of nature. Likewise, the Spanish introduced symbolic hierarchies of saints and virgins, moralistic tales and stories, the ideological angle of siding with the common person, fantastic biblical explanations of mysterious phenomena, mythological characters from a Golden Age, and a rich history of written literature. Both folklores proved complex in nature with their respective systems of logic and beliefs, and particular worldview. Through time and interaction, elements of one transformed over to the other with certain modifications. The two traditions often fused sufficiently to appeal to both audiences, becoming at times almost indistinguishable. In that way, the coyote represents a Native American as well as Hispanic symbol of mischief, transmutations, and mixed identities. Such evolution of folkloric figures appears in important collections like Juan Rael's *Cuentos españoles de Colorado y de Nuevo México* (1957) and Rudolfo A. Anaya's and José Griego y Maestas's *Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest* (1980). Here we find a penchant for animal characters and stories which possibly derive from either tradition. The elements of humor might be more appropriately Hispanic in origin, but the strong sense of place and culture seems to correspond more to an indigenous worldview. Either book would appear to be the tip of the iceberg of a mass of compiled documents on folklore from Spain and Mexico; however, upon close scrutiny, they soon reveal some subtle and other overt differences, pertaining to a mestizo ambiance.

The years between 1848 and 1912, called the Territorial Period, consisted of further relegation for the region, except that in this case it was by eastern-oriented Anglo peoples, especially politicians, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders.² If before the problem had been a matter of distance and economics for Spanish and Mexican authorities, the Anglo settlers' politics of difference made it difficult for the interlopers to cope with

native New Mexicans for cultural, racial, linguistic and religious reasons. The cultural differences among the respective groups at first was simply too great and easterners' prejudices too entrenched to entertain the idea of a mixed society. It would take time to work out a viable framework of coexistence.

Along with the transitional stages of adjustment, the cultures found themselves at odds on a number of social issues, values, and world view. While some of the people were able to mutually accommodate the other, much friction emerged at different times during the Territorial Period, oftentimes laced by crucial political questions pertaining to key resources, including land grants or *mercedes*, water rights and the access to *acequias*, and unwritten legal notions concerning territoriality, even as it relates to homeland. Anglos discovered a new breed of people with whom they had never had previous contact: on the one hand, Hispanics as mestizos were not regular Europeans; and, on the other hand, the Native American people were less nomadic than in other parts of the country — and thus deeply rooted in their area. To the new settlers from the East, New Mexico stood out as a real anomaly, even an oddity which seemed unclassifiable. No standards among Anglo Americans existed at the time by which to understand such an admixture of cultures and races.

Once the American conquest became official in 1848, factors such as those discussed above directly contributed to the prolonged process of maintaining New Mexico a territory until it was determined that the native inhabitants had become sufficiently "Americanized". Virtually all criteria for statehood were met in the early stages of the Territorial Period, but it has become undeniable that racial and cultural discourse impacted politics and socialization to a high degree. During this lengthy "trial period," an influx of Anglo settlers was encouraged to change the image and perception of the region before it could be incorporated in 1912 as the 47th state: first, a vigorous campaign was initiated to drum up support for the domination, instruction in and the commercial use of the English language; second, a balance was sought between Catholicism and Protestantism by allowing the introduction of new faiths and their respective places of worship; third, a low-key but effective crusade was forged to dichotomize identities among the native peoples by creating a wedge between Native Americans and Hispanic-Mexicans by resorting to the divide-and-conquer model; and the latter two groups were subjected to a sudden romanticization of their cultural practices, plus their cultural artifacts were catapulted, through exotization and mythification, and exaltation of a 'glorious' Spanish past, into greater acceptance by a wider Anglo American populace. As a result, one finds that Hispanic peoples who originally referred to themselves as **mexicanos** or **nuevomexicanos** opted more and more in the last part of the nineteenth century for calling themselves "Spanish Americans" in their dealings

with the Anglo, thus underscoring their more European side. It became fashionable--sometimes almost 'necessary'--to highlight, even exaggerate, the Hispanic conqueror lineage and to downgrade or minimize the Native American influence. Therefore, a new accommodationist identity was fabricated out of convenience and compliance.

New Mexico's distinctiveness has been greatly misunderstood, even by its own residents. Its unique blend in which various worlds met and interfaced added to its mystery --which some prefer to call mystique. Its insular qualities as a cultural amalgamation apart from the rest of the nation served to conjure up the image of a fantasyland where time has stood still; this image fit only in a sphere of glorification, thereby propelling the state's self-promotional industry to call it "The Land of Enchantment." The inflated romantic description as such placed it in a magical, almost unreal plane, especially when compared to other more mundane chamber-of-commerce labels, for example, "The Garden State," "1,000 Lakes State," and "The Golden State." The label of "The Land of Enchantment" operated as a subtle misnomer to describe the people more than the geography: by implication, the supernatural ambiance was accorded idealization in order to avoid the harsh realities related to a region that had been in contention for so many centuries, including serious conflicts in dealing with land holdings, mining rights, and other property entitlement issues. Such maneuverings facilitated an Anglo American takeover by altering the standards: first, they legalized more recent transactions in the nineteenth century with Anglo laws by relegating--even overriding--previously set Spanish and Mexican legal agreements to a second order. In the process, Native Americans and Hispanics are inserted into a mythic plane as decorative cultural fixtures, each with its unique and separate identity, thus circumventing the *mestizaje* phenomenon that was in effect. Once that was accomplished, the Anglo American sector succeeded in defining a framework of domination in which native inhabitants were considered links with a long-lost and somewhat obsolete past. New rules of assimilation were in order for the long established peoples of the region who were made to feel as if marginality was self-created, self-imposed, or simply a part of the self-fulfilling prophecy of cultural decline.

New Mexicans are greatly moved by a strong sense of place and a cultural legacy that defy the recent immigrant syndrome. In some cases they trace their heritage back ten to fifteen generations with relative ease — and that is only on the Hispanic-Mexican side of the family. Their world view is one formed and conditioned by the resilience of the Native American and the determination of the Hispanic-Mexican. Although they resist an open identification with the Indian — for example, reluctantly admitting racial mixing — they are cognizant of the continuity they represent with respect to their indigenous and immigrant ancestors. While the Spanish heritage receives most of

the fanfare and recognition officially, the Native American element oftentimes makes its presence felt unofficially as the predominant factor. Images of conquistadores and other colonizing features are popular in this (multi)culture's attempt to propagate a self-concept of fantasy fulfillment by siding with the one labelled by history as the victor. Underneath that fantasy veneer lie the numerous underpinnings of a non-European social unit with its coherent system of motifs and symbols. In other words, cultural syncretism has been so pervasive — certainly the rule rather than the exception — that isolating and exalting one cultural influence over the other destroys the whole. A mutual appropriation occurred of what the other had to offer. In spite of the claims of some racially purist Hispanophiles, who posit the existence of two or three separate and independent societies, much contact did in fact take place on an everyday basis in the frontier and thereafter. A dialectics of interaction was inevitable and at the same time helped create a new breed, despite the general ideology on the part of nineteenth-century Anglo America to divorce itself from Native America.

New Mexico's literary tradition is a direct reflection of the delineated social-cultural makeup and evolution, including the Anglo American element which by the end of the Territorial Period overpowered the others and attempted to establish itself as the official voice of the region. In large part, Native American expression remains an integral part of oral tradition until well into the twentieth century when writers with that perspective (i.e. Leslie Silko, Scott Momaday, and others) emerged as a literary force. The hegemony of the Anglo American literary circles since the nineteenth century was relatively well documented through such figures as Willa Cather, Erna Fergusson, Charles Lummis, Frank Waters, Mary Austin, and others. The Hispanic-Mexican presence in the nineteenth century, however, was deemed an obstacle to undermine, mould, and transform, especially in terms of uprooting its foundation in order to alter its very essence. Although perceived by the new settlers as inferior and culturally degenerative, there is no doubt that it was also viewed as a threat and as something that had to be monitored and controlled. Negotiations of friction between the various factions persisted, causing some of the Hispanic-Mexican expression to become clandestine — or at least perceived as such. The existent abyss between English and Spanish, and their corresponding communities, seemed to promote a fundamental parting of the ways between the two mentioned cultural venues, separating even more into segregated lots while the Native American was virtually erased from the scene of cultural interactions, except to figure as an exotic element to compensate for past persecution and genocide. Shifts of power and influence created ripples throughout the Río Grande Valley as Anglo Americans settled into the region, slowly replacing or displacing the previous structures of decision-making and authority. As a consequence, the face of New Mexico was altered

dramatically within a few years, but Hispanic-Mexican peoples did not disappear into the woodwork. Quite the contrary, they made various efforts to re-emerge as power brokers in politics, economics, and indeed creative literary expression.

The issue of coexistence became an increasingly problematic one after mid-nineteenth century while new structural changes took place in New Mexican society. The relatively sudden adjustment from being Spanish subjects, Mexican nationals and second-class Americans between 1821 and 1848 did not sit well with many Nuevomexicanos who had been accustomed to dictating the conditions of their sovereignty. Officially, Anglo Americans were accepted as the victors of the Mexican-American War in which the former's cultural baggage of social biases and racial complexes situated the latter group in a distinct disadvantage in terms of legal equity and access to resources. The long continuous development of oral literary tradition, including the numerous attempts to institute the printed word (i.e. Father Antonio José Martínez's printing press in 1834) after 1848 became points of contention for the conquerors for they had assumed barbarism and backwardness among the Hispanic peoples. As a result, these efforts either went underground and simply existed parallel to and separate from similar Anglo American attempts to utilize printing presses as leverages for disseminating information that spoke to newly established hegemony in the region.

At this same time, literary expression experienced an upswing as tends to occur during historical happenings of epic proportions, including wars and cultural clashes from encounters with diverse groups of people. New ideas were being imported from the various independence movements in Mexico and other countries, causing the dwellers as far as the northern frontier to anticipate and prepare for fundamental changes. Oral literature in New Mexico, which had always made itself manifest through the constant interactions between peoples, continued to thrive as a viable force of inspiration and creativity through the imaginative usage of language. The stigmatization of "folklore versus elite lore" did not exist at the time because both realms complemented each other and were considered important and relevant to frontier life. The oral tradition in Spanish perhaps reached its peak in the nineteenth century in quantitative and qualitative terms because thematics greatly diversified and circulation expanded multifold through the printing press, particularly newspapers after the 1890s but especially after 1879 when the railroad facilitated communication. Conversely, by the early twentieth century in the 1920s, this popular tradition progressively declined in written

Form – certainly the oral component continued strong – for the following reasons: the English language altered its content and style by privileging more northern European models; a fairly high degree of assimilation had occurred as it became known as an activity of *viejitos* in their efforts to maintain continuity with a distant past; the

logistics of collecting material and publishing it seemed insurmountable; oral tradition was becoming further fragmented and forgotten with time. Despite this apparent decline, a strong oral tradition still remains as the principal watershed from which much of the contemporary Chicano writings originate in the state. Rudolfo A. Anaya, in his *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) and *The Legend of the Llorona* (1984), stands out as one of the central promoters of such a popular source. By tapping into the rich reservoir of delightful stories, anecdotes, and characters, oral tradition still captivates the imagination while keeping alive a spirit of a timeless dimension, fantasy, legend, and the unknown. It is also a well regarded medium to preserve dramatic events for posterity, for example, through *inditas* (songs or poems that narrate the capture of women by Indians as the central motif), *alabados* (religious chants), *pastorelas* (shepherd plays), *canciones* (songs), *cuentos* (short stories), and *corridos* (ballads), which are popular forms of highlighting something worth reproducing and remembering for diverse circumstances and purposes.

Although oral tradition has left an obvious stamp on Hispanic expression, not all literary production is grounded within a folkloric framework. Numerous poetic samples display a fairly sophisticated metrics which require carefully planned rhetorical registers that are generally more difficult to produce spontaneously or through the mechanism of improvisation. The sonnet is but one example, as well as versifications promoted by Latin American Modernism such as *alejandrinos*, or the fourteen syllable verse with a regularized rhyme. The *décima* in New Mexico, clearly the most popular poetic form of the region and closely affiliated with popular literature due to its rhyme scheme, nevertheless provides a flexible form by which to experiment with different modes. An anonymous poem titled “Décima curiosa” from 1899 offers an added twist by demonstrating that a second reading can also be done from bottom to top:

Te adoro con frenesí
Y di que miento si digo
Solamente soy tu amigo
Cual lo eres tú para mí
No quiero bromas así
Con mi ternura y afán,
El temor del qué dirán
No pone valla a mi amor
Si dicen que con ardor
Mintiendo mis labios van.
(*La Voz del Pueblo*, July 1, 1899)

Experimentation here ends up as the central objective of the poem, aside from the affection expressed which on other occasions is the physical layout or the use of acrostics or double linguistic puns.³ Contrary to popular view, the quaint is not always what

motivates this poetry for it deals with serious subjects of historical significance, political concerns, and indeed many instances of love, a mode typical of Romanticism.

Manifesting thematic breadth, ranging from amorous sentiments to political diatribes, from commemorations of deaths or heroic deeds to humoristic renditions, and from social conflict to subjective observations, Nuevomexicano literature in New Mexico flourished from the beginnings of the Territorial Period, developing into a modest Renaissance between 1890 and 1910. A sizeable nucleus of authors came together in northern New Mexico during this time and Las Vegas in particular became the epicenter of literary activity: Manuel C. de Baca, Eusebio Chacón, Higinio V. Gonzales, Manuel M. Salazar, Jesús María H. Alarid, Eleuterio Baca, José Escobar, Porfirio Gonzales, and many more. Such a congregation created a literary force constituting what we might consider a movement that preceded the well known Chicano Renaissance of the 1960s, and in fact predates any other literary movement of minorities, including the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

Literally thousands of poems, plays (especially *coloquios*) and narratives of varying lengths were published by local authors and an almost equal number were reproduced in newspapers from such varied places as Mexico, Spain, Argentina, France, Honduras, Nicaragua, England, Russia, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and others. Interest was high in reading world authors, a fact that definitely stimulated local creativity by providing models to emulate and thus become connected to the trends of their time. Bookstores were founded at a steady rate and supplied a wide readership with an assortment of books never before found in the territory. Printing presses, responsible also for producing newspapers, immediately reaped the benefits of this insatiable readership, especially noticeable after 1879 when the coming of the railroad produced an economic boom in this northeastern city. For instance, between 1879 and 1900, 283 newspapers were launched in the state of New Mexico and of these 44 correspond to the city of Las Vegas alone (Stratton 25). Of the 44 total, 16 were bilingual newspapers and 13 were Spanish — language newspapers (Stratton 24).

The vehicle of journalism played a central role in promoting local writings as well as serving to expose the local readership to world literature, a forum for debating ideas, and the sharpening of an ethnic discourse.⁴ Once the proper editorial apparatus was instituted to enhance a forum of information exchange, cross— cultural dialogue, the open contention of issues, and the encouragement of creative literature, including the longer genres, like the novel, also appeared, oftentimes in serial form. This alone serves as concrete proof of Nuevomexicanos' recourse to the written word as they recognized that the survival of their community and culture depended on it. The stakes in the power structures now dictated new strategies and a renewed sophistication by

which marketability and image became key toward promoting cultural politics vis-à-vis an expanding Anglo American society. To meet such demands, Nuevomexicanos entered the arena of competition with the newspaper playing the central role: in other words, it was both a medium and an end. The newspaper, as the pulse of a community's self-perception, performed the function of presenting a consciousness by which to define who Nuevomexicanos were, what they wanted and where they were going--crucial issues in dealing with an encroaching social sector that, though outnumbered, claimed entitlements to what Nuevomexicano had enjoyed in the past.

Complacency and simple nostalgia, consequently, were now being challenged in order to deal with the new face of a changing society. The newspaper helped prepare Nuevomexicanos for the rigors of the twentieth century when the sharing of power and influence were inevitable, but they also preferred to induce the conditions of coexistence to their favor.

If poetry captures the moods, sentiments, and inspiration of the nineteenth century, the longer narratives like the novel tended to metaphorically reflect the turmoil, social stratas and political issues of the time.⁵ For example, Manuel M. Salazar's yet unpublished manuscript, "La historia de un caminante o sea Gervasio y Aurora" (1881), consists of a romantic story with picaresque elements which seas the world through a rose-colored glass. However, other narrative texts such as the historical novel or chronicle titled *Historia de Vicente Silva y sus cuarenta bandidos, sus crímenes y retribuciones* (1896) by Manuel M. C. de Baca and Porfirio Gonzales' *Historia de un cautivo* (1898) offer, first, a portrait of a society in disarray and, second, one in which old colonial themes of captivity re-emerge within an ambience of transition. But it is Eusebio Chacón who is generally regarded as the first Hispanic novelist in the state with his two novellas, *El hijo de la tempestad* and *Tras la tormenta la calma* from 1892, which present a society in dissolution with the threats of unbridled violence and a morally laced story about honor and respectable behavior.⁶ From these works, we find that rich and colorful oral accounts have fueled a written tradition in the form of longer narratives.

A unique proliferation of Nuevomexicano authors, writings and readers came forth in record numbers during the Las Vegas Renaissance. To accommodate this productive period, many social and literary societies (or *sociedades*) were formed to meet the demand within the city and its surroundings. Their multifold objectives, according to Anselmo F. Arellano, included "to investigate and debate questions and subjects of social, literary and moral character" ("The Rise of Mutual Aid Societies..."), that is, they sought to complement what the newspapers were doing in the written domain. One of the members of the *Sociedad Hispano--Americana* in 1892 summarized in succinct terms

the impact societies had on the people when he states: “Societies are like the seedling of the most progressive ideas. (...) What would humanity be without the existence of these societies? Without them we would be living in the middle ages” (*La Voz del Pueblo*, no date). Representing the cultivation of highly developed rhetorical and critical skills, these literary societies multiplied and effected some influence in almost every town and city in the region. In 1892 two *sociedades* existed in Las Vegas and six others were later created that same year, which caused a columnist to comment on the local state of affairs: “cuando en un futuro lejano se haga la historia sobre la vida cultural de Las Vegas, se tendrá que afirmar que 1892 es el año de las sociedades literarias y de ayuda mutua” (*La Voz del Pueblo*, April 9, 1892; when in the faroff future the history about the cultural life of Las Vegas is written, they will have to assert that 1892 is the year of the literary societies and those of mutual aid).

The nineteenth century closed with a literary movement obviously making itself manifest in full force. No one leader stood out nor did anyone in particular direct it. No one was considered the poet laureate who might dominate the scene; it was both a popular and middle class event. The movement became a happening totally apart and separate from Anglo literary interests and circles; this phenomenon can be interpreted as a show of cultural strength by a conquered people despite their situation. This massive manifestation also contributed to the cultivation of cosmopolitan and international tastes for literature on the part of Nuevomexicanos developing their regional, linguistic, ethnic and literary ethos. The upsurge can best be described as the rudiment of literary sophistication, a sort of laboratory for critical thinking, and a medium for establishing intellectual autonomy through the arts. Nuevomexicanos were then making a concerted attempt to retain an essential part of its creative identity that it considered non-negotiable with the onslaught of new Anglo settlers. Despite finding themselves more and more as second-class citizens, Nuevomexicanos insisted they were not a defeated lot because their pride seemed a price worthwhile fighting for. They did not suggest secession from the rest of the country, instead, they wished to be acknowledged as a legitimate voice within the United States, a voice rooted in their region and in local tradition.

The nineteenth century deserves a close examination to unveil with greater precision how Nuevomexicanos contributed toward the making of an autochthonous culture. For example, they incorporated Native American features into their daily lives to create a mestizo region in subtle and overt ways, plus they withstood the domination of Anglo America by negotiating some concessions without rendering themselves helpless. The main feature is that they maintained some autonomy in their voices and words in order to be taken seriously as a viable cultural power with which to reckon.

Above all, they cultivated an oral and written expression on a continuous and steady basis to develop authority and presence in their intellectual ingenuity as is evinced in the literature. The textual artifacts themselves in many cases are lost because the paper decomposed or the archival methods were primitive, but it is undeniable that Nuevomexicanos in the nineteenth century sought ways to flourish through newspapers and, ultimately, through a rich oral tradition, including texts of lasting value. New Mexico can best be characterized, not as a lost frontier after all, but rather as a thriving cultural enclave that now offers evidence, through fragments or previously unearthed documents, of a past ready to be discovered again.

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NOTES

¹ 'Manito,' short for 'hermanito,' meaning 'brother,' is a term commonly used in Spanish to describe someone from New Mexico, suggesting a hospitable person.

² Luis Leal describes a comparable period lasting until 1910, calling it the Transitional Period, which applies to all the American Southwest. See "Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective." *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 1: 1 (Spring 1973): 32-44.

³ An example is Manuel M. Salazar's "Acróstico a Celina B. Clouthier" in which the first letter of each verse spells out the protagonist's name:

C ándida criatura de mirar ardiente
E n ese tu ser mi vista fijando,

L ibremente digo, tu tez contemplando
I nmaculada eres, graciosa y decente.

N adie tu hermosura puede remedar
A dorada ninfa de gloria colmada,
B elleza y virtud tienes combinada
C entro de delicias te pueden llamar.

L a sola mirada de tu vista pura
O prime las fuerzas de la enemistad,
U nese contigo la sacra verdad
T omando en ti forma de humana criatura.

H onor y riquezas disfrutas hoy día
I nocente y linda déjanie exclamar,
E res tú la sola que no tienes par
R efulgente aurora de la vida mía.

See Anselmo F. Arellano's *Los pobladores nuevo mexicanos y su poesía, 1889-1950* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications, 1976).

⁴ For further explanation, see Gabriel Meléndez's fine study *So All Is Not Lost: The Poetics of Print in Nuevomexicano Communities, 1834-1958* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

⁵ A good example might be Jesús María H. Alarid's "El idioma" deals with the controversy over English as the national language in 1889:

Hermoso idioma español
¿Qué te quieren proscribir?
Yo creo que no hay razón
Que tú dejes de existir.

Afino yo que el inglés
Como idioma nacional
No(s) es de sumo interés
Que lo aprendamos (a) hablar
Pues se debe de enseñar
Como patriotas amantes
Y no quedar ignorantes
Mas, no por eso dejar
Que el idioma de Cervantes
Se deje de practicar.

See Anselmo F. Arellano, *Los pobladores nuevo mexicanos y su poesía, 1889-1950* (Albuquerque: Pajarito Publications, 1976: 37).

Translation: (Beautiful Spanish language why do they want to ban you? I believe there is no reason that you should cease to exist. I affirm that English as a national language is of essential interest that we learn to speak it. After all, it should be taught and as ardent patriots not remain ignorant of it. Rather, in so doing neither should we cease to practice the language of Cervantes).

⁶ See Francisco A. Lomeli's study "Eusebio Chacón: An Early Pioneer of the New Mexican Novel." *Pasó Por Aquí: Critical Essays on the New Mexican Literary Tradition. 1542-1988*. (Ed.) E. Gonzales-Berry. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989: 149-166).

The Chicano Reinvention of America:¹ Is Cultural Essentialism Dead? Or, Breaking the Gridlock on Poetics of Indifference

People dance to rhythm and beat, not to drums or saxophone.
Tito Puente

Now I know men are different and that all life is divided
and that only in division is there true health. (...)
There's an increasing passion to make men conform to pattern.
Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man*

The Mexican influence on American culture is an irrefutable fact in virtue of its long-standing presence and its distinctive features rooted in what became the American Southwest. The United States' subsumption of fifty percent of Mexico's political boundaries in 1848 as a result of the Mexican-American War should not be trivialized for it established a context of mutual interaction and a long history of conflict. Neither should today's twenty-two million people of Mexican background be minimized as potential contributors. After all, by the year 2030 Chicanos are projected to increase to approximately forty million. Although identifying specific cultural remnants generally leads to the shrugging of shoulders and blank looks, the problem does not reside in the paucity of Mexican elements, rather, in recognizing that they are Mexican in origin. The obvious would be toponymy and spatial demarcations (i.e. rivers, cities or mountains) but those become historical landmarks devoid of much substance unless other social practices and rituals are still alive. Mexican culture, however, never became like Latin, as if static only in religious and intellectual circles. It developed and flourished as distinctively 'mestizo', retaining numerous features imported from Spain while adapting and modifying them through Indianization to local tastes and nuances – consequently creating unique forms. The political and economic battle might have been won by Spaniards, but the cultural front became overwhelmed by a gradual indigenous reconquest over time. Whereas grazing cattle and other domesticated animals in Spain was a means of subsistence, in Mexico the 'hacienda' socio-economic system turned more into a total way of life, partly due to the infusion of corn and beans with the

European wheat-based culture. Also, Spaniards had given much lip-service to 'pureza de sangre' (blood cleansing) in attempting to curtail racial miscegenation yet inbreeding with Jews and Moors had already set the stage for the uncontrollable or inevitable interbreeding with Indians.

The idea of borrowing and intermixing evolved into common staples of Mexican cultural life – something which did not sit too well with Protestants in the early eighteenth centuries who ventured into Mexico's 'vasto norte' (vast north). Anglo settlers initially experienced shock and dismay at the degree of cultural hybridization among Mexicans, regarding Native American foods, customs and racial makeup as mongoloid and therefore unacceptable. In their eyes, Mexicans were a race of 'degenerated', 'contaminated', or 'colorized' Spaniards. In addition, they could not begin to conceptualize how Spaniards and Indians might have merged into a new social breed, lacking the proper genetic paradigms in their past to understand such intermingling. Anglo-American settlers departed from the premise of cultural essentialism whereas Mexicans have always defied it. Symbolically, 1848 marks the time when peoples of Mexican descent, or Chicanos, officially became a conquered people under Anglo-American rule while facing two alternatives: either move to Mexico or assimilate. Neither was readily viable. Dualities in Mexican 'mestizo' culture had been too entrenched and rooted in their psyche, customs, and social practices. One thing was to adapt conditionally to Anglo laws and economic sanctions, including fundamental changes toward disempowerment but quite the other was to deny or negotiate out of weakness that being Mexican was equivalent to a handicap or a form of social malignancy.

The Mexican background in American culture continues to be stigmatized as backward, racially inferior, religiously primitive, psychologically fatalistic, and socially deviant. Viewed as a barrier or obstacle in the nineteenth century, the Mexican or Chicano has taken on a portrayal as an intruder or recent immigrant in the twentieth century. Past contributions by Hispanic ancestors and indigenous forbearers have been respectively forgotten and/or overlooked, and later conveniently appropriated (consider the notions of a Wild West – wild for whom? – and the recastings in Western films of Mexican social types like the 'vaquero' as if they were originally Anglo when called a cowboy). In fact, the cowboy vs. Indian paradigm represents an exaggerated distortion of hegemony created for the benefit of Anglo-America. For the Mexican it is inaccurate because s/he constitutes both the cowboy and Indian. No wonder second-class citizenship became the norm for the Chicano masses, unless they formed part of the previous elite. Consequently, our Mexicanness hung like an albatross or a cross we had to bear in a foreign culture that considered Chicanos strangers in their own land. Chicano ancestors' long-standing imprint on agriculture (systems of irrigation),

architecture (usage of adobe as insulation or the Santa Fe Pueblo and Mission styles), culinary tastes (chile con carne), language (all terminology related to 'vaquero' or cowboy culture such as rodeo, lasso, dollywalter), music (country, in particular), dress (cowboy attire), industrialization (i.e. railroads and mining) – all did not seem to count nor matter. Historical and anthropological amnesia took over like a plague, causing Anglo-Americans to reinvent themselves – and their colonization in what had been predominantly a Mexican milieu. Suddenly, biographies of important Anglo civil and business figures emerged like mushrooms, usually displacing Chicano leaders and thereby projecting a new image of a 'benevolent' Anglo-American stronghold.

However, Chicanos did not perceive such events passively nor did they simply coalesce or disappear into the woodwork. The nineteenth century is characterized by a state of historical turmoil with numerous skirmishes and unofficial manifestations of protest, especially against being subjected to yet another empire. A number of significant nineteenth century social bandits like Joaquín Murrieta in California and Elfege Baca in New Mexico raised serious questions about the treatment their people were receiving by Anglos while singling out the state of social dissolution. Others, such as the *Gorras Blancas* (White Caps, a secret vigilante group from northern New Mexico) questioned the self-righteousness and heavy-handedness of American rule, including the arbitrary acts of landgrabbing in the name of Manifest Destiny and the misuse of laws. In sum, if being Chicano was not often a crime, it was definitely a liability. Much of American history, however, rarely reflects these points of contention, opting instead toward a depiction of a peaceful and 'necessary' transition of coexistence as if it were inevitable and for the greatest good. Historians and textbooks have generally smoothed out points of past conflicts as if a politics of difference were mutually settled and agreed upon, ignoring scars as scars and injustice as injustice. Curiously, Chicanos do not figure in the American psychic framework of guilt like African-Americans or Native Americans: a vague notion of our presence might persist only like a fuzzy memory. Chicanos, however, have a clear view of living out an existence of cultural difference with respect to Anglo-America's east-coast oriented politics of exclusion. This precarious situation has caused an internal exile of self-censorship, doubt, cultural repression or ambivalence, mixed allegiances, fractionalized identities and identifiers (Spanish-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Hispanic, Chicanos), a degree of social schizophrenia and cultural-historical amnesia.

Subjected to a systematic application of politics of (in)difference, Chicanos in the twentieth century have endured numerous reminders of being unwelcomed. States, such as New Mexico, with a high concentration of Mexican background people, for example, struggled to achieve statehood until 1912 even though the

population requirement exceeded other states like Arizona and Colorado. The bylaws of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo from 1848 to protect the Spanish language as a viable tool of education were either circumvented or ignored, creating instead segregated schools as stark reminders to Chicanos that they did not form a priority of the cultural mainstream. Two prime examples stand out in which protection under the law was inequitable and oftentimes arbitrarily executed: the repatriation of thousands of Mexicans and Chicanos during the Great Depression of the nineteen thirties to soften the available workforce, and the persecution of urban youth in Los Angeles in the nineteen forties for wearing zoot suits. Perhaps the most ignominious example, however, is the policy in some regions of denying an honorable burial to Chicanos as casualties from World War II and the Korean Conflict. Equality was not even attainable after death. The first half of the twentieth century, then, is characterized by a one-way process of interaction in which Chicanos had to assimilate into American society while struggling to retain aspects of their Mexicanness. Previous landowners either intermarried or dwindled down to an insignificant power base; barrioization splintered communities into marginalized pockets of poverty; a modest middle-class adopted the dominant discourse or turned into a buffer zone; the English language became even more prevailing; and the working masses found a stratified society of limited mobility replete with illusion and expectations but forthcoming only in small dosages. By the nineteen sixties, many Chicanos sensed living in a limbo of estrangement with distant memories of Mexico as the walls of opportunity began to close. Ostracized from mainstream America, their principal contributions were measured in terms of their labor, that is, in invisible ways to support and maintain the standard of living of a socio-economic, political and cultural system that had relegated them to a subservient class.

The nineteen fifties, regarded as a time of consensus and conformity, is exemplified by an inflated sense of confidence through a degree of cultural stability or purported homogeneity, including the illusion of achieving the ultimate American dream. Unanimity with the cultural mission seemed to be in place, as if the last block of Manifest Destiny was finally laid to rest; an historical apotheosis suggested that the last frontiers were conquered (welcome Alaska and Hawaii). Everything worked like a machine: Economic prosperity was in the upswing, material gains were visibly distributed, institutional efficacy was finally tuned, patriotism was cast like a wide net, and an ideological consciousness of cultural faith dictated the parameters of conduct and creativity. Any deviations from the norm were either scorned or appropriately marginalized as simple anomalies to be accommodated within the confines of a democratic system. Their value or significance were not considered, only their right to

be. If voices outside the Anglo-American mainstream were to exist, they were to share a common space of relegation, as long as they remained on the sidelines. Happiness was feigned to color in a celluloid optimism, white smiles were painted on Weber's Bread billboards, TV families such as "Leave It To Beaver" worried about such transcendental matters as ways to get a cat down from a tree, and "Lassie" pronounced or better yet whistled a rural wholesomeness that only Midwestern melancholy could express. Meanwhile Joe McCarthy effected public political witchhunts against leftist or liberal sympathizers as a means to purify discontent, diverting their intentions into a 'no-win' moral arena and thereby eliminating any possible prisoners. However, film and literature offered numerous examples of a façade whose cosmetic perfection began to crack. Marilyn Monroe challenged a Puritan sense of sensuality, Elvis Presley defied cultural segregation by blending diverse black and white rhythms into rock-n-roll, the Beat Generation denounced the establishment with a renewed sense of zany anarchism, and ethnic groups began to rumble. The basic foundations of a seemingly secure America started to resemble a mild California earthquake, suggesting that something was either out of whack or emerging from beneath its veneer.

This backdrop of good old days made time stop, much like the film about a Martian invasion called *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. But, the United States was also becoming a transformed nation in which its many parts were becoming more vocal than its whole. Past accommodation and acquiescence were not valued in the same light. The boundaries and tenets of institutionalized racism became targets of challenging the status quo as business as usual. Sitting in the front of the bus became a rallying cry for Blacks; yet for Chicanos it became an issue of just getting *on* the bus. It no longer sufficed to be perceived as an 'immigrant' welcomed by the American cornucopia – something Chicanos in particular had a direct hand in creating through their labor. A deep realization also set in of identifying roots and a heritage grounded in the United States. Subtle changes became manifested by injecting Mexican features into the American experience. For example, Ritchie Valens introduced a spicy rock-n-roll version of a popular Mexican song ("La Bamba") while daringly retaining the same lyrics in Spanish, thus proving Tito Puente's point that "People dance to rhythm and beat, not drums and saxophone" (Fernández 45). Curiously, Nat King Cole also incurred in popularizing entire songs in his accented Spanish or with Spanish phrases. In literature, José Antonio Villarreal in *Pocho* (1959) expanded the realm of what an American is within the exclusive American literary canon. The depiction provides one family's story about the problems in adjusting to a new culture. *Pocho*, then, achieves an important function: it puts the Chicano in an American literary map that otherwise had resisted such a portrayal through past stereotypes and caricatures.

The nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies initiated an onslaught of shifts and fundamental changes. The term 'Chicano' gained prominence as it attempted to resolve and synthesize past confusions into a cogent and practical reference of a Mexican within the United States. No wonder Octavio Paz asserts: "To give a name to a community is not to invent it, but to recognize it" (16). Chicanos subsequently launched an acute search for their cultural past and from that manifested a new sense of belonging, such as Alurista's rediscovery of Aztlán as a relevant myth of origins and a homeland. Articulations became more vocal while demanding a proper place within the spectrum of multiculturalism. Even Richard Rodríguez has stated: "Adios to the Melting Pot: 'I pledge allegiance to diversity'" (1985: 76). A concerted affirmation of ethnos predominated through the venue of cultural nationalism, thereby remolding Chicano identity as something quite apart from what had been popularized as an invisible minority or a sleeping giant. Mexico was also reinvented as an idealized refuge of a silent solitude, a symbolic encounter with a lost mother or father. Chicanos consequently sought to come to terms with their own circumstance as a disenfranchised people by empowering themselves through a mission, a destiny, and a broad-based social agenda. This permitted a close examination and an analysis of present conditions and an effort to vindicate a problematic past. Analogous to Blacks and Native Americans, a strident assessment of civil rights was actively pursued in order to effect labor laws, educational practices, social habits or political traditions in order to reshape the heterotopian potential of a nation whose discourse of promises, opportunities and egalitarianism had gone awry and proportionately inequitable. The programmatic restructuring of regional and national priorities further contributed to bursting the bubble of Anglo-America's hegemony, reminding us all that Chicanos, like other minorities, have played a key role in the creation of a nation essentially composed of diverse backgrounds, much like a chef salad instead of alchemy. The principal distinction lies in that Anglo-America came to Chicanos instead of the other way around. In fact, imagining the Southwest United States (originally Mexico's northern frontier) without its Chicano influence would be like imagining France without Roman contact or Spain without a Moorish presence or Mexico without its indigenous past. Inconceivable.

A Chicano presence, then, has served to reconfigure American culture from its traditional origins, supposedly attributed to the melting pot theory, which, for too long, consisted only of a one-way road of assimilation into an Anglo mould. Besides, the previous north-eastern coast axis of global influence is slowly moving into a south-westward focus. Chicanos now claim a role as catalyst and procreator of a cultural character markedly distinguishable from other Eurocentric influences, partly shaking the historical ramparts of a country that continues to basically view itself as either

black or white. Contributing to what Carlos Cortés calls a Diversity Revolution (1-2), Chicanos, along with other Latinos, have provided credence to what Jesse Jackson labels a Rainbow Coalition composed of all sorts of peoples of color. As a consequence, American society is now rediscovering its multi-hued transcultural makeup which it used to either overlook or suppress. Similar to Alex Haley's *Roots*, some groups are now re-discovering their ethnicity as a framework with which to understand possible interconnections with the past. Thanks in part to Chicanos, America is currently expanding and reidentifying its own self-image and considering elements of an undisclosed heritage of *mélange*. Although blandness is out and new flavorings and seasonings are in, Chicanos are impacting various areas beyond the obvious gastronomical domain. No wonder the taco, burrito, chile, and nachos are now considered in some circles as American as the hotdog and hamburger. Fusion and syncretism are taking hold more than ever, and Americans are less concerned about freely indulging in them. Although sometimes still problematic, inter-racial marriages are increasing on a national basis, signalling future developments in what might be termed a 'new mestizaje' or cross-breeding, which until recently quietly discouraged for it violated staying within your own kind.

For example, places like Los Angeles, termed a 'crazy incubator' or a type of Postmodern *Blade Runner*, is where the various racial groups of youth are involved in a dramatically unprecedented cultural melting process which is producing a bold new admixture of styles, language, and world views. No wonder the famous Chicano artist named Gronk observed: "Borders don't apply now. L.A. (Los Angeles) is everywhere" (13). Visible changes are developing at a pace and rhythm never before witnessed:

Over the years, L.A.'s mix has only evolved into a much more complex jumble as immigration patterns shift and swell, as blurred neighborhood boundaries subdivide or change hands. However, Los Angeles ... is still a segregated city, despite such 'border towns' as Culver City, Echo Park or Carson and the disparate bodies that inhabit them, blending and sharing their cultural trappings and identifiers. These continuous neighborhoods inspire intercultural dialogue. And those living at the fringes have ... found it necessary to learn something about adaptation. Dealing not in dualities but in pluralities, survival in this city requires a cultural dexterity heretofore unimagined. (George 16)

Chicanos are progressively undermining an Anglo sense of cultural essentialism which has been maintained through a long-standing monolithic iconography and its corresponding political plan of control. In fact, even Chicanos are becoming more tolerant in their usage of self-referential labels, seeing themselves as part of a larger inter-Hispanic or multi-minority consociation. 'Ethnic cleansing' as it used to be practiced in the United States now appears clearly outdated and generally obsolete, as a residual effect of past homogenization programs (with the exception of the Ku

Klux Klan, the religious right, and other forms of backlash). In fact, multiculturalism or better yet transculturalism is taking on a new significance as they assume more mainstream roles. Currently in vogue is a desire to experience greater flexibility in lifestyle and politics, unexaggerated culturalism or a pluralistic selectivity, eclecticism in terms of tastes, greater compliance in difference – not as a source of separation but rather as a vicarious means to communicate with someone quite different from yourself. Even the politically correct trends of the right are finding their ardent counterparts in the left. Although much of American culture still manifests itself through opposites, there seems to be a tendency toward bridging the gap and concentrating more on common points of contact. This accomplishes two objectives: it reduces the fear of otherness and tends to instill an attitude of acceptance of the other in oneself. In a real sense, a process of mutual cultural translations is occurring in order to address the full scope of the complexities of multiculturalism. No person is an island and past strictures of indifference are becoming battlegrounds, much like invisible walls that have to be torn down.

Ethnic enclaves still persist and provincial views continue to populate the landscape of American culture. Nonetheless, convergence and confluence on a daily scale are noticeably visible or not always verbalized. Richard Rodríguez observes:

Mexicans have slipped America a darker beer, a cuisine of *tú*. Mexicans have invaded American privacy to babysit or to watch the dying or to wash lipstick off the cocktail glasses. Mexicans have forced Southwestern Americans to speak Spanish whenever they want their eggs fried or their roses pruned. Mexicans have overwhelmed the Church – eleven o'clock masses in most Valley towns are Spanish masses. By force of numbers, Mexicans have taken over grammar-school classrooms. The Southwest is besotted with the culture of *tú*. (1992: 72).

Americans are beginning to overall defy unwritten restrictions of where to live and who to live next to. Meanwhile, minorities are making inroads into a recombinant mainstream society at the same time that the latter begins to acknowledge their influence. Even franchises such as Taco Bell have become barometers of the general acceptance of diluted forms of Mexican food for popular consumption. The rest of the nation is undergoing what the rest of the Southwest has enjoyed for decades: the seasoning ingredients of spicy foods and other palate-enriching flavors. For example, recently the traditional hamburger in New Mexico and Texas has undergone a radical transformation with the inclusion of either green chile or 'jalapeños'; or chicken has also been enhanced with new spices and the fumes of mesquite charcoals. According to the American Spice Trade Association, chile powder consumption in the last twenty years has jumped from seventy million pounds to two hundred million (Raver C3). These statistics only allude

to chile powder, so the figures would increase astronomically if we take into account all products derived from fresh or canned chiles. More and more, foods, customs (i.e. 'quinceañeras' or a rite of passage for young women who become fifteen years old) and social practices (a revival of Día de los Muertos or Day of the Dead) are interfacing within the confines of a process of Latinoization, even tropicalization, where 'horchata' (a thirst-quenching rice water) and coke appear side by side, or 'cumbia' and 'salsa' are juxtaposed to jazz (note how the Funky Aztecs mix Latin music with reggae dub-style in their single "Salsa *con* Soul Food"; George 16), or 'ranchera' beats merge with rock-n-roll, or echoes of indigenous elements are combined with African rhythms and punk, or country music coexists with 'corridos' (ballads), or the synthesizer blends in with mariachi music and vice versa, or black rap is accompanied by Hispanic rap lyrics, or Spanish and English seduce each other into interlingual modes, or graffiti turns into art, or murals become "walls with tongues" (Sorell 148), or Chicano films close the gap between commercial and artistic works. Differences are blurred, genres are mixed, styles are fused, forms are combined, borders are made fluid, colors are blended, images are encoded, sounds are integrated, and influences intermingle or flip-flop. A polyphonic, multi-formed, and decentered Postmodern breeding ground of multiple functionalities emerges in the form of a can of words and concepts, be they visual, auditory, plastic or linguistic. For that reason, Chicanos present the Virgen de Guadalupe with a mini-skirt in the Mexican magazine *Fem*, concoct new images such as José Antonio Burciaga's "Last Supper" which is populated by César Chávez, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Che Guevara, creatively metaphorize a people's struggle as in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta, mock superficial patriotism in *Hay plesha lichans tu di flac* by Saúl Sánchez, or challenge conventionalisms in titles like *Rebozos of love/ we have woven/ sudor de pueblo/on our back* by Juan Felipe Herrera.

An important corollary to these creative ventures to recapture a literary past is currently being conducted through a team effort called Recovery of the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. Through a network of research teams, an infrastructure is being cemented to develop strategies and concrete results in specifically identifying early texts, cataloguing and revising them, then rewriting the historical framework and later disseminating works and authors that have remained outside of the annals of American literary criticism. This is called canon reconstruction or revisionism while filling in voids of a past generally relegated into oblivion. The importance of such a project is the unearthing process, particularly in highlighting the unacknowledged fact that Hispanics (e.g. Spaniards, Mexicans, Cubans and Puerto Ricans) before the twentieth century account for a larger mass of written documents than any American minority, including African-Americans. The sheer volume is mind-boggling if we take

into consideration early chronicles, diaries, testimonies, *relaciones*, *memoriales* scattered poems and plays, including writings in newspapers, and of course monographs. Consequently, the American literary establishment is now redrawing new paradigms and standards, for example, by reevaluating if Villagr a's 1610 epic poem, *Historia de la Nueva M xico*, should be studied as the 'first American epic poem' even though it was originally written in Spanish.

Chicanos then are actively involved in reshaping America from the ground up and from the inside out through a series of pluralities and other avenues of bridging differences, such as the integration of bicultural images, the exploration of bisensitivity as a viable focus of aesthetics and a range of chromatic combinations, or sounds and beats or flavors and seasonings or subjects (i.e. immigration from the west) that have not formed a common staple of American expression and cultural life. Thanks to Chicano influence, art is becoming more daring, striking, and vocal in its representation by injecting passion and narrative substance and chromatic flair to flippant canvases or murals. As examples, consider Carlos Almaraz's oniric absolutism, Gronk's gothic surrealism, Carmen Lomas Garza's quotidian primitivism, Frank Romero's urban earthiness, and Amado Maurilio Pe a's stylized neoindigenism. In music, the Spanish language, tropical beats and rhythms, and the 'canci n norte a' (a fast beat, popular northern Mexican song) are experiencing a definite revival. The Chicano rap singer named Kid Frost, the zesty 'ranchera' style of Little Joe y la Familia, the romantic ballads of Freddie Fender, and the newly found melancholy of Linda Ronstadt all offer a synthesizing variety of meta-ethnic musicality without sacrificing authenticity. Chicano literature is also challenging American essentialism by inserting native voices into a literary landscape that had basically fixed the Anglo-American experience as the standard. Luis Valdez, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Rudolfo Anaya, Helena Mar a Viramontes, Cherr e Moraga, and Gary Soto are breaking barriers and offering new vistas of human experience and perspective, consequently expanding the conventional wisdom of canonicity. Through riveting testimonials and engaging personal portrayals, they contribute freshness, pathos, vitality, clinical incisiveness and intense poetic passion. Above all, they explore hidden shadows of human experience through myth or demythifications and the insertion of topics pertinent to Chicanos that comment on American life.

As decolonization takes its course in Postmodern times, there is now ample evidence of Chicanos' assertive will to leave an imprint in American Culture. Whereas it used to be more subtle or negotiated from a position of less cultural clout, principally due to institutionalized practices, biases, and stigmas, Chicanos now sense the timing to let their imagination and creativity roam by intersecting plurality in two worlds. If

Anglo-American and Mexican vestiges previously conveyed a gridlock of conflict and dilemmas, the relationship is becoming one of intimacy, coexistence, mutuality, and of course intermingling – this is not to be confused with naive harmony –, producing a dissolution of differences or what Carlos Fuentes calls Mexamerica. For this simple reason, old theories and purist approaches, especially imported ones, don't quite stay apace with evolving social reality. The new dynamics defy neat formulas and high-brow rhetorical jargon filled with mental aerobics. What matters most is to measure what is being produced, what is occurring, and how it opens new grounds for experiential knowledge or vicarious enlightenment with in an interdisciplinary focus of multi-colored components. Theory must emerge from this phenomenon, instead of the other way around. Chicanos, in their own way, contribute in this vein through the arts and letters, sociological circumstances and anthropological makeup, creating in part a New Age patois of hybridization or what Lynell George calls 'verbal mulattoes' (George 16). A new faith in a changing America, of which Chicanos are a significant part, is such that Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* would not recognize what the United States is today. The cultural revolution is making a turn into unexplored horizons, reimagining, rethinking, and reinventing America in the process.

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NOTES

¹ Here I utilize the term 'America' for reasons of sound even though I recognize it should be 'United States'. It is a misnomer commonly repeated abroad as well as from within.

Internal Exile in the Chicano Novel: Structure & Paradigms

Much of Chicano literature has portrayed culture as a dynamic process of conflict between the evils of assimilation and the means of resistance. The struggle is conceptualized as one in which inequities are intimated, described and denounced. What emerges – although at times subtly and other times overtly – is a strong sense of not appropriately belonging within a society that sets unqualified conditions to their inclusion. Therefore, When Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales wrote in *I Am Joaquín* (1976) “My fathers / have lost the economic battle and won/ the struggle of cultural survival,”¹ these words hit a tender chord in Chicano historical sensibility and articulated, perhaps for the first time, their irresolvable conflict which characterizes Chicano literature. Some writers have felt compelled, even obsessed, or simply propelled to carry forth that line of reasoning and consciousness. Part of the motivating force deals with overcoming the general perception that Chicanos do not form an integral component of American society because of their frequent label as outsiders, recent immigrants or “not typical Americans.”

Even the most superficial perusal of the history of the United States demonstrates the common plight of immigrant groups in this regard: retaining an ethnic identity yet somehow belonging to American society. Given that options such as absorption into mainstream society or adoption of makeshift values are limited and not always attractive, Chicano writers seek unique geo-poetic representations of the relationship with their social milieu. This study will examine the issue of internal exile in three novels, each possessing a distinct twist on how the author sees and reacts to the experience of exile. The works with which to expand this concept are as follows: *Victuum* (1976) by Isabella Ríos, *Pelón Drops Out* (1979) by Celso A. de Casas, and *Puppet* (1985) by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas.

The theme of internal exile is not only a literary phenomenon. The lack of general acceptance, or minimal acceptability, of Chicano literature within the current body of American literary circles reflects how Chicanos are viewed in their society. Their social marginality transfers over so as to consider them less-than-authentic American writers. Consequently, many Chicano writers feel compelled to choose an independent and autonomous – some would emphasize unattached–posture toward the act of

creating literature. In other words, the concern of identity emerges as a central question: being part of a larger congregation or becoming an entity unto oneself. Each author resolves the issue in a personal fashion that corresponds with the intent of the novel. For example, José A. Villarreal in *Pocho* (1959) grapples with the idea of being a new and different type of “American” of Mexican descent by accentuating his individuality and resisting all labels that infringe on his quest for personal identity. In *City of Night* (1963), by John Rechy, the protagonist operates within the confines of a reduced group of individuals whose homosexuality is represented as illegitimate from the perspective of an intolerant society. Tomás Rivera, in “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” (1971), allows to unfold an internal exile that oscillates between madness and affirmation while creating a renewed sense of existential purpose. Miguel Méndez’ *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974) depicts uprooted characters in a pilgrimage searching for a place (Aztlán) to which they can belong; the degree to which they are exploited determines their social worth. In another example, Ron Arias, in *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975), presents a dying old man whose only possibility of successfully defying death is through the imagination and dreams; he becomes an exile of life—literally and figuratively. Finally, Alejandro Morales, in *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975), proposes a route of escape from a denigrating and decadent barrio by learning to decipher the elements of oppression and the limits of real or imagined walls.

The Chicano novel constantly emphasizes inner and outer space, the individual’s place in society, and problems related to ethnicity and culture. Exile, then, is rarely horizontal, but rather vertical, oftentimes represented as a form of existential ascent into the self. In some cases, the condition is prefigured by the simple option to utilize Spanish as the mode of communication; thus, language in itself encompasses the prism through which a world view of culture is filtered. This language choice favoring Spanish can be understood as a form of self-exile and defiance within a country so intolerant toward other languages. Some Chicano writers consciously follow this trend because of the relevance they see in developing works from their own cultural slant. A sense of nonconformity is transformed into authentic registers of expression that highlight Chicano qualities.

The theme of exile is indeed one of the most perplexing topics of the twentieth century. By general definition, it implies geographical movement or ostracism from one country to another for socio-political, religious or economic reasons. However, exile can be expanded to take on psychological and moral values. Literature of exile tempers much of this perspective, although a clear distinction is posited by Rafael Conte in *Narraciones de la España desterrada* (1970) when he states: “La literatura del exilio será ... un fenómeno individual, nunca colectivo, aunque sí masivo.”² Another author, Heinrich

Mann, in *Exile Literature, 1933-1945* (1968), observes that “Emigration ... is the voice of a people which has grown silent.”³ With the advent of numerous situations dictating the need to mobilize from one area to another, exile literature has consequently become a more commonplace phenomenon in this century. As John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell have noted in *Exile: The Writer's Experience*, “Much of twentieth-century literature, especially from the European continent has been written in exile.”⁴ It has also acquired new modes of expression, giving depth to the whole notion of exile.

Paul Llie is one of the principal figures to expand the general notion of exile by distinguishing between internal exile and that which is a mere change in physical space. His conceptualizations in *Literatura y exilio interior* (1980) apply well to the Chicano writers' state of mind and the psycho-moral sense of alienation.⁵ The European and Chicano experiences quickly diverge at this point: whereas the former tends to be guided by what Paul Tabori terms a type of *puer aeternus*, a perpetual adolescence or virus of longing for homeland,⁶ the latter suffers a process of disenchantment with the infatuating elements of North American materialism. Clearly, the motives and conceptualization of internal exile are quite distinct.

If on the one hand Chicanos nostalgically try to salvage images and customs of Mexican culture in a North American environment, they soon discover that their isolation is not self-imposed, but greatly enhanced by a society that essentially, and tragically, rejects them. Long-term residency (in some cases seventeen or eighteen generations found in New Mexico and southern Colorado) is often still not sufficient to be acknowledged as full-fledged American by Anglo society. More recent immigrants come to realize that their ethnic background becomes a cross to bear for as long as they wish to carry it. The passageway is usually one of cultural co-optation as the ultimate alternative in order to facilitate total assimilation. Until they “cross over,” the most viable integration is at best a relative or marginal one, enabling them to pass through the filtering process of social acceptability. Chicanos have reacted and responded to this Catch-22 predicament by partially separating themselves with the intent of participating only on their own terms. This consciousness assumes a distinct expression of some form of rebellion because Chicanos recognize that the only real option is total surrender of all that one is and would like to become.

Many paradigms exist to describe the Chicano experience of dealing with the problems related to integration and rejection. The political model of an “internal colony,” as proposed by Rodolfo Acuña in *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (1972),⁷ is perhaps one of the most appropriate with which to begin to define the dialectical relationship between Chicanos and Anglo society. The hyphenated identity and labels related to Mexican Americans still remain as a central

issue to comprehending their role and place within the United States. Although the “internal colony” model might be regarded as unjustifiable in purely economic terms, the symbolic intent of that model applies in diffused cultural terms due to encirclement factors. Chicano culture exists, participates and evolves by juggling elements of two cultures, while recognizing that the more Mexican side is subjected to greater pressures of enduring. Other paradigms of total assimilation or complete resistance to partially assimilating are becoming obsolete. Chicanos seem to adapt but in their town terms. Therefore, exile in the Chicano sense should not be confused with being a refugee as if getting away from something. An exile suggests seeking something and in the Chicano situation it is imperative to keep in mind that the American Southwest is still generally regarded by the Mexican populace as a place that was Mexico. Emigration, then, is viewed more within the confines of migration, since the geographical displacement is neither drastic nor unfamiliar. Realization of internal exile occurs when the Mexican or Chicano is made to feel as a “foreigner in his native land,” as David J. Weber mentions.⁸

In an important study, *Exiles at Home: A Story of Literature in Nineteenth Century America*, Daniel Marder claims that isolation and alienation are the greatest contributors to such a state: “The isolated individual is outside of society while the alienated is hostile as well as outside.”⁹ Internal exile marks a process of seeking a center, or one’s own space, while existing in the periphery. This paradox corresponds well to the dilemma depicted in the Chicano novel. Particularly acute is the admission of not belonging to any one country, linguistically, psychologically and ideologically. A cultural dislodgment emerges, thus forcing the person to find refuge from within from which a world view is subsequently structured. As a result, a highly subjective and experiential perspective becomes the vantage point, or, according to Luis Farré, “Aislarse equivale a trascender para valorizar y juzgar.”¹⁰ Furthermore, exile and existentialism are not synonymous because the experience of exile could be considered symptomatic of the existential mode of perception.¹¹ Most notably, exile deals more with a spiritual posture or point of view than a state based on material means. The exile of which we speak encompasses an internal dialogue, a way integrating what the person regards as significant. Exile provides a mechanism or system of values in order to cope with an external world.

In the Chicano novel, both a sense of separation and turbulence pervades, but usually for very different reasons. In assessing the genre as a whole, it becomes evident that Chicano writers view their relationship with society as one filled with apprehension and devoid of trust. A strong sense of distance between the individual and the milieu predominates and writers respond with their own fictional creations to exercise free-will. For example, in *Victuum* (1976) by Isabella Ríos, the protagonist, Valentina Ballesteros, sees her life as quite apart from others. In the form of a *Bildungsroman*, the work traces

a woman's life story from the fetal stage to a mature and aging woman. A female sense of the world emanates throughout the narrative and the text functions as if it were the person: all action is filtered through the eyes and ears of the main character. Discourse is entirely subjective as a direct reflection of her psyche. A witness of every detail, the first-person narrator appropriately defines all experience from her perspective. The life-long trajectory extends from a preconscious level to a supra-conscious state, consisting of an inner space that is prescribed by psychic phenomena. A persistent emphasis on an internal posture has the protagonist looking out from within, suggesting that she receives stimuli for which she was preconditioned. In this sense the narrator becomes the creator of her own order and of everything that the reader experiences in the text.

Victuum operates as a personally encoded work. On the one hand, folkloric tradition dictates that an onion skin-like membrane at birth will endow her with a highly developed sixth sense or innate powers to experience meta-reality. But, her psychic abilities will also allow her to transcend the physical world through visions and dreams of both future and past. Space and time for her only exist as integral parts of her introspection. In the opening scene, the self-description as a fetus meditating on the philosophical note of "sound am I"¹² denotes a strong tendency to associate herself with a fourth-dimension, captured only through intuition. She does not identify with any one specific social group because her ultimate motive, a quest for knowledge, is not sanctioned by society. On the contrary, she has suffered persecution and doubts—even about her sanity. Inherited from her mother, her powers provide her with a sense of female continuity and a secret she must keep to herself. This supernatural connection with her mother establishes a conflict with her society which ostracizes Valentina. Dispelling stigmas and innuendoes, she succumbs to intuition and indulges in a series of extra-sensory experiences through vision and dreams, and coming in contact with a number of historical, mythological, fictitious and fantastic figures. If earlier limited by boundaries and demarcations, at the end she totally defies them through a near magical journey into the realm of thought and ideas that manifest themselves in a metaphysical state. Her final encounter with *Victuum*, an extraterrestrial being, marks a mystical step into a universe of ideas, thus culminating in infinity and true liberation. To Valentina, ultimate reality is experience gained through intuition in order to connect with meta-reality. Only then is she able to supersede the limitations set by a physical world. Although trapped by the mundane, her real motivation consists in acquiring enlightenment and knowledge about other horizons. Her internal exile is further augmented by having to keep her visions a secret, so her option is to live a double life. Subjected to social circumventions, Valentina seeks out the liberating effects of imagination and knowledge with which to formulate a new world view. By creating her

own time, space and personages, she displays an affinity for renovating her social order in order to become an integral part of it. In a real sense, she constructs her own world to replace the one in which she lives.

In a second work, *Pelón Drops Out*¹³ (1979) by Celso A. de Casas, the process of separation and exile is humorously treated in a tongue-in-cheek parody of *The Teachings of Don Juan* by Carlos Castañeda. The protagonist, Pelón Palomares, whose first name literally means “bald-headed,” embodies someone lacking street-smartness or common sense. The down-and-out qualities in his character suggest that he is out of tune with his surroundings. Thus, it comes naturally to him to drop-out from society. Not quite synchronized with his milieu, he withdraws and seeks out an apprenticeship into the world of “working warriors,” actually cement masonry. His two mentors, Gerónimo Vidrios and Santos Trig(u)ño, lead Pelón in a rite of passage designed to release him from “the spell of the cesos (sic) de caca” (28). The magical journey into another dimension offers him the opportunity to overcome institutional conditioning and thus satisfy a spiritual inquiry into the self. Although his means are quite distinct, he parallels what Valentina in *Victuum* upheld as primordial: the acquisition of power through knowledge. Described as suffering from the curse of the *tapado*, or stuffed with useless matter, he knows his recourse is to break away from learned molds and bid a fundamental transformation at the hands of his philosophical but cynical mentors.

The internal structure of the novel is dictated by an ardent search to find a place where Pelón might achieve self-actualization through either dreams or visions. A form of utopia where the identity is fully reconciled, it consists of a “... fifth world where reality (is) beyond dimensions, above time, wider than infinity of heavens” (29). Significantly, this trip must maintain a cult or secretive quality in order to achieve the desired results. Partly fueled by gut-humor and visceral descriptions, the protagonist dedicates most of his time to following instructions on how to reach a pure spiritual state. The ascending stages of purification are induced by the use of magical substances, such as concoctions called *chilepuro*, sacred *verdolagas*, *tolondrones pa' los preguntones*, and magic *mocos*. Obviously a slapstick comedy a la Cheech and Chong, and a spoof on cult drugs, Pelón's serious search seems camouflaged by these giddy underpinnings and frivolous methods. This is only a smoke-screen to the profound expression of isolation. The magical trips become metaphorical representations of his response to his internal exile, while at the same time a search for another level of reality. The protagonist's challenge to overcome fear in the form of the *cu-cui*, or the bogeyman, is analogous to the more serious and sublime methodology in *The Teachings of Don Juan*. As one of his mentors states, “Fear is nothing more than memory.” (99) Therefore, it is imperative he

come to understand his Indian part, his Chicano consciousness and his freedom from ignorance. To accomplish his end, he desires contact with a magical land through a fantasy dream. As one Indian told Pelón, “We only know that this land is a place where we can be ourselves, where we can live on our terms, and survive on the basis of our ability to deal with the land” (108). The central idea, although decorated with humor and madness, clearly points to locating such a place, that is, another realm of existence where the individual may become more complete.

Pelón Drops Out appeals to other forms of logic and perspective. This allows for the theme to be more palatable to the reader without having to account for ideological overtones. Nonetheless, one of the repeated ideas is to escape prison by entering the imagination. Pelón’s sense of dropping out, therefore, is a reminder to seek more authentic forms beyond societal conditioning. The model of mystical salvation quickly gives way to a politically and socially motivated concern.

The novel’s humor might be taken as mockery of the search-for-identity theme so commonly found in Chicano literature, but the joke should rest on the medium, not the message. The insistent play-on-words functions as a cathartic instrument; however, the search for a place like Aztlán is indeed a serious proposal. Dropping out in this case implies a rejection of the social milieu that standardizes people into ridding them of their atavistic origins. The novel, then, satirizes cultural innocence of the sort that does not establish Chicano reality as its true basis. In sum, Pelón opts toward a self-contained perception of the world underscored by language and naturalist symbols (i.e. a sense of place) in order to make contact with his origins. By implication, Chicanos need to remove their cultural blinders to see things as they are or as they wish them to be.

In a very recent novel, *Puppet*¹⁴ by Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, the protagonist Petra Leyva unfolds a most fascinating process: she writes a novel—the one we read—which represents her burgeoning from a previous state of inaction, passivity and internal exile. She has in a sense been separated from her true self or alienated from what she is capable of being. In the novel she becomes an instrument to protest the tragic and suspicious death of a young pachuco named Tony López, commonly known as Puppet. The leitmotif “¿No lo vites en las news?”, while referring to the media coverage of that death, turns into a constant ring in the protagonist’s conscience. No longer able to continue her self-deception and fatalistic fear, she now feels compelled to act on Puppet’s behalf. Thus, she assumes the role of a double spokesperson: she speaks for Tony López and herself, both representing an analogous form of death. With a newly acquired sense of purpose and awareness, she is better equipped to conquer her illusions and fairy tales. It is both significant and ironic that Petra Leyva begins to live thanks to Puppet’s death. In other words, she initiates a noticeable withdrawal from her

internal exile and abnegation at the same time that Puppet enters Nirvana. A symbiotic relationship exists between the two as they go in opposite directions.

The novel represents the story of how a harsh social reality imposes itself on a woman accustomed to indulge in romantic divagations and daydreams. The crudeness of violence against the pachuco youth forces the protagonist to break out of her shell of mental and social paralysis. Puppet's death at the hands of police stirs in her a series of doubts and leads her to consider arbitrary and/or racial violence. More importantly, Puppet's name suggests manipulation on both a social and personal level.

Furthermore, this may be understood as a sharp reminder to certain marginalized youth of the drastic measures society may take to rid itself of undesirables. But, Petra interprets his death differently: she gains inner strength and direction in her otherwise useless life by vindicating the young man and denouncing the tragedy as a socially premeditated act. The constant ringing of the telephone throughout the novel, while breaking the narrative in abrupt fashion, operates as a Brechtian element to rattle the reader's suspension of disbelief. The telephone becomes one more motif on how and why the protagonist needs to break away from her internal exile, a state comprised of solitude, alienation and inertia. Although this may seem as a self-inflicted condition, we discover that it is also attributed to a society's relegation of her—something which before she had not realized. The telephone, as a symbol of communication, here becomes a repeated attempt to make contact with other people. Thus, Petra is better prepared to look outside of herself as part of a network for change. The externalization from her own encirclement now figures as a force to reckon with, principally due to her renewed vigor of purpose. Petra's prolonged internal exile, then, teaches her a vital lesson of resorting to her inner strength in order to refocus her attitude on life. By overcoming her own personal absurdity and impotence, she soon discovers the redeeming quality of acquiring a social commitment on someone else's behalf.

The novel operates much in the manner of a closed circuit constantly being interrupted. The language, as the line of communication, is an attempt to break a long-held silence on the part of the protagonist. It represents a breaking out of doldrums and a slap on the face for those whose conscience is dormant. In that context, the final scene reveals an act of communion between at least three persons (Petra, her husband and Puppet), a trinity of reviewed solidarity to vindicate the young man's death. Their voices, joined as three telephone party lines, for a collective chorus that challenges the reader with the final assertion: "¿qué esperas?" Petra manages effectively to shed her previous defeatism by overcoming her demoralized state. The ultimate lesson for her is that the individual needs to act upon society in order to shape it into the image of oneself or of those who are deemed voiceless.

These examples illustrate how Chicano writers offer diverse and innovative approaches to the concept of internal exile. In *Victuum*, *Pelón Drops Out and Puppet*, a particularly keen awareness of such a condition permeates the narrative. A separation from society is clearly in evidence, even if the causes are not always examined or laid out. As metaphors of a world view, each offers a self-contained message with certain constants of not belonging to the social order described. An insular perspective usually emerges to delineate the person's reclusion, oftentimes within his/her own mind frame. As a general rule, the protagonists do not advocate a utopian point of view per se, although they hint at finding a sanctuary of free thinking and self-actualization. In each case, they experience a drift or estrangement with their respective environment, forcing them to fabricate or imagine an alternative existence which opposes their own. Their story, as a paradigm of the free spirit, only represents the anecdotal form of their intuition to exercise creativity and authentication. For instance, in *Victuum* Valentina defies space and time by substituting them with another universal order that consists of a continuum of ideas, knowledge and infinity. In spite of his charades, Pelón in *Pelón Drops Out* aspires to coming in contact with a place where he might become what he thinks he is. Petra, in *Puppet*, is successful in regaining part of her lost conscience, thus overpowering her own dehumanization as well as that of the young victim. The three novels underscore the importance of imagination to overcome internal exile. A psyche-moral view of the individual's role in society is consequently purported, not as a mystical union with a divine being, but rather, as a purging effect to reach a higher order of realization. Since the protagonists do not necessarily *belong* or *fit* in their immediate locus, they fantasize and invent their own space while ridding themselves of the "foreigners in their native land" stigma. They become creators and inhabitants of their inventions. In conclusion, each text, as a fictitious artifice, offers a double commentary: first, on the entrapments of internal exile as a social experience; and, second, on the predicaments involved with formulating the groundwork for a new nation. This could very well be Aztlán.

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NOTES

¹ Gonzales, Rodolfo "Corky". *I am Joaquín* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972: 6). The original copyright was in 1967 by the author and the Crusade for Justice in Denver, Colorado.

² Conte, R. *Narraciones de la España desterrada* (Barcelona: EDHASA, 1970: 14).

³ See *Exile Literature, 1933-1945* (Bad Godesberg: Inter Nations, 1968: 18).

⁴ See Spalek, J. M. and R. F. Bell, eds. *Exile: The Writer's Experience* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1982: xi). They also add that some of the highest quality literature has been produced by writers found in that condition, such as Thomas Mann, Nelly Sachs, Ramón Sender, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Rafael Alberti, Witold Gombrowicz, Czesław Miłosz, Vladimir Nabokov, and E.M. Cioran. To this list many Latin Americans, among some of the most noteworthy, could be added, such as Mario Benedetti, Julio Cortázar, Ramón Amaya Amador, and others.

⁵ Although this author approaches our concept of internal exile, it should be noted that his primary concern is to examine the various forms of exile evident in Spain under the Franco regime between 1939 and 1975. One of the principal differences with his positions and precepts involves a relative legitimacy on the part of Spaniards and others to recognize an "exile" literature related to the Spanish experience. His observations appear more obvious because of the recognized "two Spanish literatures," perhaps also termed official and unofficial.

⁶ For further discussion on these pertinent points, see Paul Tabori's *The Anatomy of Exile: A Semantic and Historical Study* (London: George P. Harrap, 1972: 32-56).

⁷ As an historian he advances a number of arguments for his thesis based in part on original interpretations and Third World politics. The book was published in San Francisco by Canfield Press in 1972. Another useful work that supports Acuña's central idea is Carey McWilliams' seminal study, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Lippincott: n.p., 1949).

⁸ The idea forms the central thesis of David J. Weber's *Foreigners in Their Native Land* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1973).

⁹ Daniel Marder, *Exiles at Home: A Story of Literature in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: University Press of America, 1984: 6).

¹⁰ See Luis Farré's *Aislamiento y Comunicación: enfoques psicológico, filosófico y teológico* (Buenos Aires: Editorial y Librería La Aurora, S.R.L., 1970: 5).

¹¹ Spalek, J. M. and R. F. Bell (Eds.) *Exile: The Writer's Experience* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1982: 87).

¹² Isabella Ríos, *Victuum* (Ventura, California: Diana-Etna, Inc., 1976) 1. It is worth noting that the work was copyrighted in 1975 which competes with Berta Ornela's *Come Down From the Mound* as the first novel by a Chicana writer after the literary renaissance of 1965.

¹³ It was originally published by Tonatiuh International at Berkeley, California, in 1979. All pagination comes from this edition.

¹⁴ Published by Relámpago Books Press (Austin, Texas) in 1985.



Remapping the Post-Barrio¹: Beyond Turf and Graffiti

The graffiti stayed and every new generation just put
their *placa* over the old. (Luis J. Rodríguez)

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of
survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present'
for which there seems to be no proper name other than
the current and controversial shiftiness of the
prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism,
postfeminism. (Homi K. Bhabha)

It is becoming more and more intriguing in Chicano literature, even fashionable – perhaps partly exotic – to offer hard-core barrio depictions when until only recently such portrayals provoked a range of attitudes from mythification or distortion to repugnance or simply utter suppression. Barrioization,² understood as a transformation of urban space contrary to gentrification, however, is acquiring a renewed significance for it now reveals as much about general American society as it does about Chicanos. Although the barrio served urban Chicanos as an implicit expression of nationhood during the height of the Movement period (1965-1975), it no longer embodies an exclusively Chicano space; neither is it perceived to be the dirty little secret we either avoided or succumbed to. In the 1990s a series of emerging voices from Los Angeles have given this topic new life and meaning, somewhat within the tradition of Piri Thomas' *Down these Mean Streets*, including Rubén Martínez's *The Other Side: Fault Lines, Guerrilla Saints and the True Heart of Rock 'n' Roll* (1992), Luis J. Rodríguez's *Always Running; La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.* (1993), and Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1997). This study proposes to examine the latter two texts that deal with the subject of representing a barrio ambience by showing how such works transcend such a locale at the same time that they create a meta-barrio framed within contemporary narrative strategies.

Early Movement poetry first dealt with the subject as a way of suggesting Chicano exploitation and marginality while also serving to characterize a distinctive

social niche where Chicanos managed to resourcefully create a community out of a losing proposition. Succinctly stated, the barrio was our salvation from extinction but also our worse friend due to the prevalent poverty, vices, trappings, and dangers it presented. By the 1970s, it essentially comprised, in a metonymic way, the state of affairs of our disadvantaged lot. Poets such as Alurista (*Floriscanto en Aztlán*, 1971), Ricardo Sánchez (*Canto y grito mi liberación (y lloro desmadres...)*, 1971), José Montoya (“El Louie”, 1970), J.L. Navarro (“To A Dead Lowrider”, 1970), and Raúl Salinas (“A Trip Through the Mind Jail”, 1971) provided insights into the varying dimensions and conflictive makeup of such a place and its inhabitants, thus reminding us of the disenfranchised political backdrop that configured Chicanos socially, politically and economically. Moreover, discussions about the barrio have traditionally produced polarized viewpoints in light of its polemical, problematic, divisive, and explosive nature. The more recent depictions confirm one fact: the topic still remains far from being contrived or over-written; it is in fact now acquiring new registers and a more objective appreciation.

Although the messianic stage of the Chicano Movement through the 1970s spoke often of injustices and inequalities, Chicanos themselves were not prepared to face the barrio in its fullest ramifications. Negative portrayals were seen as hitting too close to home by further damaging the last refuge of our existence, particularly where we had managed to overcome great odds but also achieved some notion of community marginalized within a segregated society that quietly wished the barrio to disappear along with its inhabitants.³ Therefore, the barrio was the only place we could claim as our own, that is, our last frontier or dead-end street because there was nowhere else to go except down the path of assimilation. For all its conflictive and paradoxical qualities, the barrio was in fact *us*, unless we happened to live in some rural island. The barrio, the only Chicano turf of entitlement, was not meant to be shared with anyone outside of the inner-group, but rather, something to hang on to as a vestige of an unfruitful past. It has consistently come to be understood as the embodiment of our alienated cultural state at the same time that it serves to remind us of our disenfranchised past and our obstacles to overcome such a condition. The barrio, then, has been perceived as both a dumping ground of unwanted human beings as well as the only place where we could construct and salvage a sense of community.

In 1975 Alejandro Morales in *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* challenged common knowledge and radically broke the mold of romanticizing this social milieu. His portrayal of a hard-core barrio as a cesspool of unbridled violence and cannibalistic forces shattered a sense of security, turning our attention toward a place in dire need of structural and fundamental changes. Morales felt compelled to take his manuscript to Mexico because no Chicano publisher dared to publish such an apocalyptic view of

the barrio.⁴ He, then, is the first Chicano writer to propose a post-barrio construct that would later serve in the 1990s as a foundational point of reference. What he describes in graphic detail back then would not be exactly 'soft-core' by contemporary standards but certainly less in magnitude by comparison in terms of today's pure violence of drugs, hallucinogenic substances, and familial dysfunctionalities, raising the ante to encompass a tragic realm of technological brute force which includes car-jackings, rampant weaponry, turf warfare, gangbanging, unquenched sexuality, drug trafficking, including other addictions and illicit enterprises. The stakes are higher and the consequences quicker.

Morales' text effectively delved into a subject matter that was to become an obsession in certain quarters, perhaps reaching a cathartic frenzy in 1979 with Luis Valdez's play *Zoot-Suit* in Los Angeles. The barrio experience became Chicanos' benchmark by which to judge their inclusion or exclusion in American society. More and more attention became focused on the various elements of barrio space, such as the cryptic scribbling of graffiti on ephemeral walls throughout parts of Los Angeles. Public art in the form of murals proliferated during the 1970s and definitions of physical demarcations also became intensified. Tagging at times even overshadowed graffiti, but the latter has persisted as a unique style with which to make a statement about representation. One example from East Los Angeles found in 1996 which simply says "Starting Kaos" encapsulates a sentiment filled with unclear nuances and ambiguities. Does it suggest a proposal or wishful thinking, a critical assessment of barrio reality, an expression of irreverence, a political affirmation, a reachable goal, a seminal message, or simply an objective observation? The answer probably lies somewhere in the eyes of the beholder as part of a larger meta-text in which a manifest protest might be deemed latent. Chaz Bojórquez, a graffiti practitioner, tag artist and muralist from Los Angeles, perhaps summed it best by suggesting that such unconventional artistic expression attempts to create its own voice by appropriating the space owned by what is perceived as a hegemonic proprietor. When he asks "What is graffiti?" he adds: "when you describe the ills of society, you also describe the reasons why modern graffiti exists."⁵ Gap between literary expression and graffiti is closing and even intersecting. If graffiti can be considered a configuration on walls without tongues, the more recent works by Martínez, Rodríguez and Murray are the tongues themselves as they speak a truth that has now gone beyond the barrio itself by collapsing referent and text into one, thus confronting new strategies in representing Chicanos and Chicanas in Postmodern times.

Rubén Martínez, in *The Other Side: Fault Lines, Guerrilla Saints and the True Heart of Rock 'n' Roll*, is largely responsible for interrogating spatial relativity and what is meant by 'the other side' when alluding to transnational borders and

configurations of culture across geographical and identity boundaries. To Martínez, Los Angeles (California), as an epicenter of various spaces, turns into a social incubator of miscegenation and styles which directly feed off that which is imported from Latin America, and vice versa. The result becomes a conflation of North and South, suggesting that Los Angeles as a cultural center of centers is scattered everywhere because every cultural path or experience converges within this city. This Postmodern notion of cityhood indeed challenges the traditional concept of metropolis while it also expands the notion of barrios themselves. No wonder Martínez declares: “History is on fast forward/ it’s the age of synthesis.” (136) Both space and time here become effectively nullified by breaking borders and blurring differences while fusing various worlds (i.e. new world/old world; Latino/non-Latino; here/there; imported/exported; I or we/other) into one. According to Martínez, the barrio has metamorphosed into a polyformed simultaneity of human living; the main difference is found in its tonality, modality, and intensity.

Luis J. Rodríguez’s *Always Running: La Vida Loca; Gang Days in L.A.*, couched more in the tradition of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Manchild in the Promised Land*, offers the uplifting story of a *bato loco*’s search for meaning, respect, and his own space within and later on beyond the barrio. This Phoenix-out-of-ashes self-referential narrative presents self-exploration but, above all, it constitutes a book of counsel for his son not to follow in his footsteps, thus hoping to avoid the same mistakes. In a cycle of meandering fortunes and constant shifts in attitude, “Chin” Luis Rodríguez eventually overcomes and transcends ‘*La vida loca*’ (the crazy life), a gang lifestyle on a collision course of self-destruction where the barrio swallows its prey and spits them out like discarded utensils. As an autobiographical *testimonio* or memoir, this transgeneric work unfolds with chapters of fluctuating sentiments: from agony and hopelessness to moments of regrouping, from rejection to temporary expressions of accomplishment, and from lapses of addiction to a sense of resurrection. The barrio dweller struggles against insurmountable obstacles while trying to overcome the tentacles of the barrio, generally viewed as an imposing equalizer in the midst of a discriminating social environment that targets a young Chicano for his failure of not fitting into the ‘norm’. As the narrator states, “I had fallen through the chasm between two languages. The Spanish had been beaten out of me in the early years of school – and I didn’t learn English very well either” (219). The text oscillates between an autobiographical account and a chronicle of a locus, thus showing the shackling effects – and centripetal force – of a place as well as the ghettoized psyche of an individual. The tension between both gives the narration suspense, verve, and dimension while suggesting that the barrio can be understood as a subjective entity where conditioning determines fate.

Much of the motivation in *Always Running* derives from Chin's sense of being labeled and targeted as an outlaw, not merely for his acts of violence but regrettably for being a Chicano in a society that stigmatizes differences stemming from color, race, cultural origins or lifestyles while magnifying his non-accommodationist stance. His picaresque qualities are multifold in that he spends most of his time running away from himself, a contradiction perhaps but nonetheless a requirement for exploring his paradoxes as well as the contradictions of his social environment. Stuck between two worlds, he feels chastised mainly by Anglo society, becoming a latent social bandit in the process. Chin's story is particularly compelling for the lurid details of operating underground, retelling his close calls with death, love, and educational institutions, and somehow surviving the treacherous life of a gangster consisting of extreme poverty, language barriers, police persecution, epidemic racism, junkies, an irrelevant education, social class divisions, and rival gangs. Like a cat with nine lives, this marginalized protagonist rebounds with incredible resiliency and tenacity while demonstrating how to brave the pressures of the barrio and mainstream society. His constant motion, a leitmotif in the narrative, becomes his best tool for survival because stagnation would turn him into an easy target from others' wrath.

Rodríguez recreates a highly charged environment of suspense and deep pathos, insisting that "We never stopped crossing borders" (19). Ostracized by what he calls "alien authority", he discovers a temporary refuge in gangs, called clubs or *clicas*, where the members attempt to create an insular group within society, that is, something out of nothing. After witnessing much gratuitous violence, he begins to conceptualize cross-barrio connections as a way of finding common values and objectives, intimating a meta-barrio. To find such a place, one gang member, Sergio, expresses an altruism that starts a new means to redefining the barrio when he stated: "The first step is removing the shackles on our minds" (185). At this very point in the text, space becomes a manifestation of internalized experience in contrast to a mere exterior. If the protagonist sensed a mission before going to jail, his articulations had been fuzzy, but from this point forward, he even views himself as a cultural warrior, a kind of mediator by which to christen turf and graffiti, that is, a kind of localized homeland and language. He initiates a process by which to transcend not only his barrio, but any place that sets barriers and restrains a free spirit. Suddenly, Chin turns into a catalyst for other gang members to reflect on the 'real enemy', sadly recognizing that the immediacy of their differences or struggles had obfuscated their political sensibilities in a house of mirrors. He then attempts to turn their alienation into a tool of discovery and action: "It's important that Chicanos feel this is their school too. It's about time we became part of America" (212).

Symbolically, Luis' friend, Chente, points out that his barrio called Las Lomas does not merit a dot in the globe, a revelation that startled our protagonist into considering new paradigms. As Chente observes, "The *vatos* defend a land which doesn't even belong to them. All the death –for what?" (236). Consequently, Chin feels moved to seek other battles, passing by the symbolic place called Cemetery Resurrection along the way, answering a friend: "For some time now, I've been working my way out of that useless existence. Now I've found something to live for, bigger than you and me, bigger than Lomas and Sangra. You don't want me" (245). The text *Always Running* becomes a manifesto of self-liberation, a discovery of wisdom, and an exemplary autobiography that appeals to inner strength. It shows a Chicano path of knowledge and a model by which to understand barrio dynamics for the sake of those who wish to survive it. In other words, self-reflection leads to a new consciousness about who they are, where they fit in society and what they have to do to escape their entrapped existence. Self-representation, then, allows them to overcome their immediate circumstance by taking into consideration how they can live beyond their barrio.

Another novel steeped in inner-city social codes of blunt harshness, in-your-face toughness, and the demand for ethnic respect is Ixta Maya Murray's *Locas*, although its uniqueness lies in uncovering, for the first time, an unknown underworld of *locas* or women gang members who easily rival males. The originality in the perspective is that it gives a voice to a group typically expected to follow, serve males as modern-day *soldaderas*, produce babies, and generally follow subservient roles while supporting the men behind the flanks of an entrenched social hierarchy. Here, however, two female gangsters named Lucía and Cecilia, sometimes living parallel and/or opposing lives, poignantly reveal the twists of fortune coupled with the temptations and trappings of power. The women become initiated in the subculture of a Los Angeles gang called the Lobos, which involves strict obedience as objects of sexual gratification, but they quickly learn the rules of a callous wit to quench their thirst for control until Lucía scratches her way to the top as the leader, simulating and out-doing male gang members. Their story speaks about two approaches for survival at any cost in these mean streets where death and joy coexist as they overcome gender obstacles in the process.

Depicted as restless rebels, even reacting to the patriarchy they uphold, the *locas* are determined to neutralize and significantly alter their traditional gender roles, redefining their purpose and *modus operandi* in order to gain an edge on other gang members, both male and female. Retold in the tradition of memoirs spanning three contemporary periods, 1980-1985, 1985-1990, and 1997, *Locas* carefully avoids any moralization about the rough lifestyle for it renders an insider's view of the reasons for joining gangs. The richly textured text of hard-core cadences and lingo emerges in a direct way through

the voices of Lucía and Cecilia whose first-person stories constitute the narrative while taking turns, thus unfolding two distinct perspectives within the same milieu. The text provides dimension to such an experience by contrasting worldviews and a psychology rarely seen in which these two protagonists reconceptualize their sense of place (turf) and language (graffiti-style) – even if the latter imitates and reproduces male speech.

Lucía as a brazen character, for example, embodies physical toughness with mental grittiness as she aspires to become *the* leader of a gang of women. She trusts no one, clearly taking a stance against the tradition by which men ascribe to women the quality of “sheep” or blind followers who come along only to satisfy men’s whims. In that way, Lucía debunks and defies an entrenched patriarchy by outdoing the men in their social practices, gaining authority over a barrio turf whereby she becomes adept at selling drugs and guns. Her objective is ultimately to avoid the defeated lot of women like her mother:

So you see how it almost was. I was gonna be letting babies suck off me and pretend that having a man’s all I want out of life. But I save myself. I just needed to remember something I forgot. All I had to do is go and take a good look at my broken-down mami. That’s when I knew I’m not gonna be no dirty sheep my whole life. I couldn’t let that happen to me, not ever gonna be like her. Cause that’s some bad dead-end road. (35)

Lucía’s top-dog mentality becomes an obsession to create the most ‘bad-ass’ group of *locas* any gang – male or female – could assemble, thus assuming greater power and influence, even beyond what male leaders had achieved. Her cold, calculating disposition makes her ripe for manipulating weaker members by inflating their self-importance and self-esteem. She also resorts to the element of surprise to impose herself on both men and women by proving she possesses the greatest will to compete with anyone in the struggle for domination. As she states, “But you see I’m tougher and meaner than any one of these sorry boys. Once I got going there wasn’t nothing that could stand in my way” (109). In the end, she set claims to what is required by her turf: “The only thing that matters to me is money and my ladies. But I can play these boy games if I need to. The rules are simple. You got to tag your territory or else it ain’t really yours” (207). Lucía offers young women an alternative to male gangs because she can offer good treatment instead of outright exploitation. Her *clika* or gang of *locas* functions much like a fine tuned machine of camaraderie where intimate interaction among members is encouraged.

In contrast to Lucía, Cecilia loves her brother Manny, the Lobos’ gang leader, to a fault, allowing herself to be a faithful follower and nothing else. She essentially joins gangs to support a male figure, allows herself to become pregnant as her way of realizing

her womanhood, and she eventually resigns herself to cleaning toilets for rich Anglo women. She lacks the comfort zone Lucía has in challenging a man's world, but neither was she satisfied with it. Cecilia, then, turns her back on gangsterism altogether after a lesbian attraction with another gang member dissolves, leaving her practically with no options but to clutch a bible and work a decent job. Feeling an empty existence, she doesn't find refuge in God either whom she believes hides from her: "[...] I pray *Señor, Virgen, no te apartes de mí* but my prayers don't float. They're these heavy stones sinking in the river, not clouds like they should be" (229). Despite this apparent resignation, Cecilia considers her life a dead-end street while pondering the opportunities that could exist for her. She feels incomplete and unrealized, even mournful of the chosen lifestyle for which she now has to pay penance.

Locas by Murray addresses the issue of options, choices, and learning from experiences at the same time that barrio space is perceived from a woman's vantage point. The final outcome entails opposite directions for Lucía and Cecilia: the former turns the barrio into a woman's or *loca's* gang space while the latter becomes a dropout from gangs altogether. Either way, the text positions itself alongside and within women in order to show a lifestyle not readily acknowledged, as if appearing out of the shadows. In that regard, *Locas* fills an important void, or what Rubén Martínez calls "the other side": another segment of Chicana reality rarely viewed or represented.

In sum, both texts, *Always Running* and *Locas*, deal with their respective locale (an intimation of nationhood) and how a hard-core turf conditions the characters and how these characters transform their space. Chin seeks to transcend a type of meta-barrio while Lucía pursues a feminocentric domain, or a feminized space, while Cecilia resigns herself and recants her previous *vida loca* from her barrio existence by seeking an inner peace. These characters' language, a kind of post-graffiti, becomes a metaphor of their circumstance by which they confront authority and hegemony, consequently remapping their immediate relationship with their surroundings. Each, in their own, redirects and reconfigures the respective barrio they have imagined and internalized, thereby overcoming the very thing that had shaped and determined who they were.

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NOTES

¹ The term "post-barrio" is utilized to be more consistent with recent theoretical discourse instead of using the problematic terminology used by Manuel de Jesús Hernández-Gutiérrez (1984). Although there are some points of contact with Guillermo Gómez-Peña's post-barrio (1996), the concept used here is more sociological, psychological and literary in content rather than anthropological and performative. Gómez-Peña's concept corresponds more to a personal view of 'loqueras' couched within a carnivalesque inversion of geo-politics, where ours is a place that exists within the characters as an integral part of their existence.

² For greater expansion on this concept, see Camarillo (1979).

³ This explains in part the general notion that barrios are perceived as war zones where laws are in-existent—much like a jungle. On the other hand, Alfredo Mirandé (1985: 68) points out some of the positive qualities: "[...] the barrio has emerged partly as a result of prejudice and segregation, but there is an element of volunteerism in barrio residence, and a strong sense of community identification prevails. Barrios are literally *colonias*, ethnic enclaves within the territorial boundaries of the United States".

⁴ The more recent translation of Alejandro Morales' landmark work *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1975), entitled *Barrio on the Edge/Caras viejas y vino nuevo* (1998) by Francisco A. Lomelí, rekindles the

interest in hard-core barrio literature by situating the original work in a larger social-historical context – see Lomelí (1998: 1-21). It is also of historical value to weigh the reasons why Tonatiuh Publications in Berkeley, directed by founder and editor Octavio Romano and assisted by Herminio Ríos, rejected such a manuscript. They in part determined that the graphic nature of the novel would further contribute to the barrio's intrinsically negative reputation because their ultimate goal was to present positive, uplifting images and impressions of Chicanos. As a conservative history buff from New Mexico, Erminio Martínez, once remarked: "I don't want my people (Chicanos) associated with barrios because that only connotes decadence, depravity and backwardness. I resent the obsession with a barrio." (Personal letter of the author)

⁵ See Chaz Bojórquez, (2000: 61).

La Frontera México-Norteamericana: el shock del futuro en la cortina de tortilla (Mexamérica, Lamex o Aztlán)

Alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.

Estoy norteada por todas las voces
que me hablan simultáneamente.

*Gloria Anzaldúa. Borderlands/
La frontera*

1. FRONTERA SUI GENERIS: DEFINICIONES, ACLARACIONES Y PROPUESTAS

Hay fronteras y hay fronteras. Además, el concepto que se tiene varía radicalmente de una región a otra, dependiendo en gran parte de la historia y el grado de conflicto que se ha vivido allí. Para algunos, la frontera suele verse en términos de consecuencias naturales, incluso casi lógicas, y como resultado de convenientes acuerdos mutuos. Pero, hay otras fronteras que apenas son demarcaciones divisorias como último recurso de una relación irresoluta e irreconciliable. Lo innegable es que siempre conducen a una inevitable e inherente percepción que abarca un tanto una compleja red de diferencias como de semejanzas. La frontera marca por excelencia la distancia entre la periferia y su centro, ya que este se autodesigna homogéneo, puro y auténtico, y por extensión implica un sentido más estrecho y purista de nacionalidad o identidad cultural. Toda cultura define su centro como sus confines para así situar sus extremos, igual que su sentido de lo normativo.

La frontera ha servido como hito geográfico a la vez que comprende las enmarañadas relaciones de múltiples factores convergentes. Originalmente, sugería una relación íntima con un territorio y sus respectivos límites, representando el limítrofe donde se enfrenta a lo otro (dando origen a) y de donde se desprende la expresión hay moros y cristianos. No obstante, cuando se refiere al ámbito México-norteamericano, dicho asunto se vuelve aun más pantanoso por tratarse de una serie de capas superimpuestas tanto epistemológica como fenomenológicamente hablando: aquí se conjugan el Tercer con el Primer Mundo, dos economías en

disparos etapas de desarrollo, dos culturas de inspiración divergente y dos historias con ejes sustancialmente distintos.

Llama la atención la proliferación de tantas denominaciones en Estados Unidos para el término frontera, justamente como resultado de la experiencia entre dos mundos tan diferentes, donde la contienda ha sido la regla en vez de la excepción. Por ejemplo, se dice “border” para indicar la línea divisoria en sí; “frontier” para aludir a un amplio territorio salvaje por conquistarse, o sea, el vasto norte visto desde México para Anglo-América se convierte en el indomable Wild West; y “borderlands” se refiere a la zona circundante que está en contacto con una amplia área disputable. Los tres términos se desarrollaron dentro de un cuadro antagónico de agudas luchas, mas fue en 1898 cuando el historiador Frederick J. Turner, en “The Frontier in American History,” planteó un concepto reconciliador desde el punto de vista del conquistador triunfante. Para Turner, los Estados Unidos estaban destinados a reinar sobre dicho territorio por su superioridad empresarial y su espíritu renovador (Turner 1950). Su hipótesis de un “apaciguamiento voluntario” violentó la presencia de otros pueblos allí presentes, sobre todo los de origen mexicano y los indígenas, que eran considerables, tratándolos como peones pacíficos en el juego de ajedrez donde las reglas se hicieron posterior a los hechos.

La frontera México-norteamericana conlleva varios significados que no se encuentran típicamente en otros lugares debido a su naturaleza y su carácter particulares. Es, tal vez, la franja geográfica donde han existido la mayor cantidad de diferenciaciones fundamentales entre dos países. Según Carlos Monsiváis, “La frontera es, literalmente, el punto de confluencia entre el desastre económico y la prisa por salir de este hoyo interminable, esta pobreza manejada por caciques y latifundistas y abandono federal” (Monsiváis 1977). También ha funcionado como eje de marginalidad y rechazo, diluyéndose y borrándose como espejismo lejano de algo indefinible. Así, entonces, encierra una metáfora incompleta donde se negocian las nuevas influencias como distintas maneras de ser, abordando lo que resulta como una amenaza de *kitsch* cultural. Lo que se puede afirmar es que sin duda acecha una fácil manifestación hegemónica cultural de lo que se ha cristalizado históricamente a través de factores locales. Por eso, suele verse como lo extraño y lo que está en peligro de convertirse en otra cosa, formando parte de un devenir cultural mixto de inexplicables y oblicuas combinaciones.

Parecido a dos placas tectónicas compenetrables, los dos lados de esta frontera arrastran una larga historia conflictiva a través de sus 3.000 kilómetros de extensión, dividida en gran parte por un río con dos nombres (Río Bravo desde México por el peligro y Río Grande desde Estados Unidos por su longitud) y un

desierto inhóspito que en realidad es más bravo que el río.¹ Esta frontera contiene una división natural, un río, pero sobre todo se percibe como abismo que se ha agudizado por la imposición de carácter político, económico y cultural desde el Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo de 1848, cuando México se vio en la situación desventajosa de ceder la mitad de su territorio, perdiendo tales fuentes de recursos como California y Texas. Obviamente, no nos referimos a una frontera “suave” o “blanda” como Luxemburgo y Bélgica o Estados Unidos y Canadá, donde más bien rigen factores de conveniencia social y casualidad histórica. Una tensión permanente ha persistido aquí.

Sí, hay fronteras y hay frontera, pero como la México-norteamericana no hay dos. Definitivamente es única (singular), inigualada, irrepetible y sin paralelos, o sea, ofrece nuevos esquemas de experiencia humana. Hace pensar en la relación entre moros y cristianos, habiendo pasado por procesos históricos inversos donde las torres de Babel se desmoronan para siempre. A la vez, no siempre se sabe quién es el moro y quién es el cristiano, ya que la gente misma se ha barajado de manera que ha retado los conceptos del mestizaje prototípico de José Vasconcelos en *La Raza Cósmica*.

En este caso, tratase de un tumultuoso *buffer zone* de dos polos caracterizados por una línea divisoria que como una cremallera une dos lados frágiles de una misma tela. Aunque es cierto que dos culturas se enfrentan en y a través de esta franja fronteriza, no cabe duda que un abismo cultural aparentemente las separa como agua y aceite, pero también ocurre lo contrario: en efecto, se evidencia una amalgama de costumbres, una aculturación de creencias, un hibridismo de lenguajes, una adaptación de gustos, una dialéctica y plusvalía de valores ideológicos, un choque brusco y tajante de economías que viran del sobredesarrollo al subdesarrollo, una transformación de los auto-conceptos monolíticos de nacionalidad y cultura, y una constante transculturación movедiza, creando así una revisión como una deconstrucción de los modelos y parámetros culturales convencionales del *mainstream* de su respectivo país.

Reconocemos que la frontera encierra en sí una multitud de elementos diferenciadores, pero limitarnos a esa visión es llegar a medias a la realidad que se desdobra en dicho ámbito. La frontera por excelencia invita y transforma la compenetración, moldea y modifica los supuestos absolutos, desliza y reduce los contrastes, ya que mezcla, incluso la mezcolanza y la impureza, alcanzan sus más diversas expresiones. Para el crítico venezolano Arturo Uslar Pietri:

En ella nada termina y nada está separado. Todo tiende a superponerse y a fundirse. Lo clásico con lo romántico, lo antiguo con lo moderno, lo popular con lo refinado, lo tradicional con lo mágico, lo tradicional con lo exótico. Su curso es como el de un río, que acumula y arrasa aguas, troncos, cuerpos y hojas de infinitas procedencias. Es aluvial. (1956: 69).

En concreto, la frontera aludida sugiere un sinnúmero de conceptualizaciones: como barrera con páas o aridez macabra o lodo engañoso, como precipicio del fin de mundo, como geopolítica de constante transición, como muralla de extremos, como cicatriz rasgada o "herida abierta" (Anzaldúa 3) y en otras ocasiones como llaga de dolor y derrota, como región movediza o devoradora de seres, como depósito de defectos corruptivos, como encrucijada de la esquizofrenia desenfrenada, como espacio propicio al peligro y al ninguneo, como cortina diferenciadoras o telón unificador, como zona de negociaciones psicológicas y de nacionalidad, como franja de interacción cultural, como área desprovista de una identidad propia, como lugar de dualidades mitigadores, como terreno rico en ambigüedades y contradicciones donde lo extraño se vuelve común, como ámbito de polinización e hibridez (García 1989), como ambiente fluctuante de identidades múltiples y una mutabilidad constante, y como fenómeno inclasificable carente de definiciones fáciles de categorizar.

Aquí surge una abierta globalización de sistemas económicos o de poder dispares igual que la caracterización de los mismos, produciendo un delicado balance entre la privación de bienes materiales y un materialismo excesivo, y entre la barbarie y la tecnología. El enfrentamiento de dos mundos no solo produce la divergencia sino la confluencia donde más se convergen y se asimilan los extremos y las desigualdades, llevándonos a considerar la formación real de una posible tercera cultura con características singulares de un mestizaje e hibridez en ambos lados de la frontera. Con razón, Carlos Fuentes ha propuesto el concepto de Mexamérica, igual Alejandro Morales sugiere Lamex, mientras el pueblo chicano ha optado por resucitar Aztlán como imagen mítica del mismo ambiente.

Debido a que del lado norteamericano cuentan más las diferencias, chicanos y otros latinos luchan por el derecho de elegir eclécticamente de todo lo disponible. Ellos de por sí están ya condicionados a incorporar más de lo que rechazan, metamorfoseando objetos igual que hábitos con renovadores giros. Tienen una predisposición a acoplarse adondequiera que vayan, adaptándose en el camino a la vez que cargan su bagaje cultural en forma de ritualizaciones populares. Por esto cuesta comprender la política de Gestapo de la reciente polémica enmienda 187 en California, cuyo propósito ha pretendido negarles servicios básicos de educación y atención médica.

Pese a estos esfuerzos algo inútiles por detener una fuerza cultural inevitable, o sea, un cauce sincrético, el obsoleto esencialismo norteamericano de la sonrisa eterna de los años 50 ha quedado retado y superado para siempre. El Mundo Feliz de un "Lassie" o "Leave it to Beaver" se ha derrumbado, reemplazando lo idílico por realismo social, gracias a la latinoamericanización de la vida norteamericana. Desde esta época empezó a notarse una especie de reconquista sigilosa donde el mundo angloamericano había llegado a su cumbre de

poderío, pero también donde la presencia vitalizante de latinos y otros grupos minoritarios lograron cobrar mayor impacto en la vida cultural de ese país. El crisol más cultural que racial comenzó a asomarse de manera patente y cotidiana más que nunca.

Curiosamente, esto llegó a manifestarse también en el campo de los gustos y un sinnúmero de asuntos intrahistóricos – fenómeno que ha ido aumentándose aceleradamente hasta la actualidad –. De repente, lo desabrido y lo insulso es reemplazado por nuevos sazones, condimentos y sabores. De acuerdo con la American Spice Trade Association, el consumo de chile en polvo en los últimos veinte años ha saltado de setenta millones a doscientos millones (Raver 1992). Dicho cambio es dramático y no corresponde sólo al incremento de latinos; además, la cifra sería astronómica si contáramos todo tipo de picante. Hasta las hamburguesas en algunas regiones en los últimos años han añadido el chile como ingrediente esencial y es consabido que mucha comida mexicana forma una parte básica de la dieta diaria norteamericana, incluyendo salsa y piquitos. Por eso, el taco como el burrito ocupan un lugar central en cualquier mesa de Estados Unidos, siendo comida tan norteamericana como *el meatloaf* y *el pie de manzana*.

Se evidencia cada día más un fascinante proceso de tropicalización, encontrando la horchata a la par del 7-Up, o la cumbia y la mega-salsa yuxtapuestas al jazz, o el reggae con ritmos latinos (escuchar “Salsa con Soul Food” en Funky Aztecs), o la ranchera combinada con el rock, o la música *country* con los corridos, o la música sintetizada con el mariachi, o el rap negro con el rap en español, o el inglés y el español mezclados libremente mediante códigos y modalidades interlingües, o el graffiti transformado en arte, o murales convertidos en “muros de lenguas” (Lomelí 219).

Tales tendencias en estas experiencias interculturales de adaptación y de pluralidades dan constancia a una realidad singular: a que las diferencias se borran o por lo menos se disminuyen, los géneros se mezclan, los estilos se funden, las formas se combinan, las fronteras se confluyen y se cambian, los colores se armonizan, las imágenes se codifican en binarios, los sonidos se integran y las influencias se entretrejen en indefinidas volteretas. Como resultado, tenemos un neo-mestizaje como estilos de vida igual que una inaudita mezcla de mundos y visiones procedentes de un amplio arcoíris de grupos raciales. Según Rubén Martínez en “The Other Side: Notes from the New L. A., Mexico City and Beyond” (Martínez 1992). Los Ángeles va cobrando la fama, más y más, como capital del mundo postmoderno, un tipo de “incubadora loca” donde los préstamos de estilo y gustos entre atrevidos jóvenes ocurren con gran facilidad en cuanto a lenguaje, socialización, estilos de vestir y sentido revolucionario de una sociedad inherentemente mixta. Tal como señala Lynell George: “Al no tratar en dualidades sino pluralidades, la supervivencia en Los Ángeles requiere una destreza y manejo culturales hasta ahora inimaginables” (Lynell 1993).

Como puede apreciarse, la frontera México-norteamericana va mucho más allá de una simple región geográfica al abarcar un cuadro diverso de experiencias contrastantes. Ya no se trata de una arbitraria franja de 40 kilómetros en ambos lados de una línea divisoria, porque también engloba la irrupción de diferencias, las polarizaciones económicas, las subyacentes políticas raciales, los problemas de ajuste en términos de movilización vivencial (por ejemplo, matrimonios, modos de vestir, lenguaje, costumbres, etc.). Dicha mezcla o disolución de diferencias por peyorativas que suenan en un español purista, son ya un hecho antropológico-lingüístico bien conocido en América Latina entre mestizos y “mulatos verbales,”² habiendo contado con una visión pluriforme del mundo.

Para un pueblo como el que nos concierne, lo aquí expuesto es la norma, ya que el ambiente social está fuertemente configurado y constituido, de un amplio sistema de préstamos en doble vía. Su lenguaje, por ejemplo, mixto y repleto de su realidad, creando una tercera lengua entre español e inglés, o los que Salvador Tabiό llamó Spanglish.³ (3). No queda otra alternativa más que inventar un lenguaje que hace juegos malabares con las muchas variantes desde lo más popular hasta lo más estándar. Como señala Gloria Anzaldúa, “We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages”. Ella agrega que no es cuestión de que el español chicano sea correcto o incorrecto sino una lengua viva (Anzaldúa 1987: 55).

El dinamismo de este mundo multifacético fronterizo va dejando paulatinamente unas huellas permanentes en el mundo norteamericano. No cabe duda de que el entorno chicano y latino contribuye a fomentar unos cambios, por sutiles que sean, en la vida norteamericana cotidiana como en algunos artísticos. Por ejemplo, es ya obvio en el campo del arte culinario y la lengua, pero también se encuentra en las artes visuales y plásticas, la arquitectura, como en la literatura. La experiencia de la frontera delata un genio y agudeza en cuanto a una perspectiva experimental para la supervivencia cuando los recursos son limitados. En cierta forma, lo que muchos chicanos experimentan ahora en este ambiente se vivirá después por los demás debido a los muchos factores que se conjugan. La experiencia en la frontera, entonces, permite prever y la vez prepararse para el futuro cuando lo homogéneo o el nacionalismo barato serán obsoletos, o sea, la frontera ofrece una visión futurista para el resto del mundo.

2. LA FRONTERA EN LA LITERATURA CHICANA: MATICES Y VARIACIONES

Tal vez más que ninguna otra expresión literaria en el continente, la literatura chicana aborda lo fronterizo de manera original con matices innovadores. Una señal inmediata de dicha literatura es que a veces se expresa en español, en inglés, o con códigos

interlingües, incluso intercalando variantes populares como caló y regionalismos. Es decir, dispone de una amplia reserva lingüística de muy variadas procedencias y modalidades. Así proporciona examinar con mayor lealtad un mundo subalterno que suele ignorarse o que con frecuencia cae en lo perogrullesco de la indiferencia por verse, equivocadamente, como un tipo de “subcultura”.

Como breve contraste, la literatura mexicana suele hacer caso omiso de tal fenómeno geográfico y social, aunque existen poco ejemplos como *Murieron a mitad del río* de Luis Spota. Aquí la frontera como una brusca ruptura del medio mexicano, calificada como un fin del mundo que recoge tragedias y muertes, agudizando el dolor de los personajes. Es decir, es lugar donde se pelean el aniquilamiento con la negación. Apenas recientemente han surgido obras mexicanas que captan la frontera como lo que es, algo fluido cuya trayectoria serpentea de acuerdo con los personajes que se mueven en ella. Un ejemplo de lo segundo sería. *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel, donde se trata la frontera con naturalidad y un elemento integral a la realidad norteña. Pero, ésta es una excepción dentro de las letras mexicanas.

No toda la literatura chicana, ni siquiera su mayoría, se enfoca en la frontera, pero es a la vez difícil evitar alguna alusión por indirecta o sutil que sea. En algunos casos se protagoniza la migración o el desplazamiento físico, dando a entender un proceso de constantes cambios, lo cual también invita a la incertidumbre como los muchos cambios de piel. Lo que más llama la atención, es que varias obras chicanas se centran tanto en aspectos concretos como intangibles relacionados con la frontera como espacio o experiencia subjetiva, o sea, fronteras culturales, lingüísticas, económicas, sociológicas, políticas como psicológicas y sexuales. Si lo físico pareciera dominar, en realidad podría afirmarse que eso figura tenuemente, ya que interesan sobre todo los efectos de su formación bicultural.

Las dos obras que estructuran un aparente cuadro físico son *Pocho* (1959) de José Antonio Villarreal y “... y no se lo tragó la tierra” (1971) de Tomás Rivera. La primera traza una trayectoria arquetípica de una migración que oscila entre la tradición y lo moderno, pintando así la frontera como un umbral de ritos de pasaje, los cuales apuntan al abandono de los orígenes a la vez que enmarcan la entrega a un mundo ajeno. Si bien se advierte acerca de la mudanza física, también se señalan los peligros de las tentaciones ilusorias de la aculturación a un mundo anglosajón. Presenta las duras lecciones de perder la mexicanidad por medio de una entrega unilateral. En cambio “... y no se lo tragó la tierra” sitúa el espacio como determinante a la libertad de migrantes, figurando la frontera como una cruz de exploración por su condición de trabajador. Pronto el espacio se diluye, interiorizando los efectos a nivel personal y creando una serie de encajonamientos que restringen el movimiento. La frontera aquí aparece como bagaje que al fin de cuentas no ayuda al trabajador en su estado económico, pero luego se convierte en la fuente de su fuerza que le permite recuperar su propia dignidad como ser humano.

Peregrinos de Aztlán (1974) de Miguel Méndez y *El diablo en Texas* (1976) de Aristeo Brito captan un espacio totalizador con límites difusos entre Sonora-Arizona y Texas-Chihuahua, respectivamente, pero se hace hincapié en una búsqueda fundamental entre lo mítico y lo histórico. En ambas se procura la identidad –como tabla de salvación– y la realización colectiva, lo cual conduce a toparse con la ambigüedad y la amnesia. El resultado es que en la primera el ambiente en vez de ser refugio se transforma en tumba y, en vez de encontrar el camino de la recuperación más bien se enfrenta a silencio la negación y la muerte; sólo el mito puede sacarlos de su marasmo. Por otro lado, en la segunda se vive una verdadera fragmentación de un pueblo en ambos lados del río que queda parcelado infinitamente a través del tiempo hasta llegar al punto cero. Ambas obras también son eficaces experimentos con un lenguaje problematizado, cuyos giros y torcimientos encarnan el ambiente natural y social que representan, no tanto como espejos sino como receptáculos de voces desvendadas.

Justo Alarcón, en *Chulifeas fronteras* (1989), ofrece un cuadro agrídulce de dicho ambiente con personajes inolvidables, muchos de ellos revestidos de lo absurdo. Aquí se encuentra la tragicomedia en sus varios extremos, incluyendo la locura y el racismo, pero con insinuaciones de esperanza. Así nos muestra lo bueno, lo malo y lo feo en sus muchos rincones recónditos de una región llena de vitalidad, imaginación y también de amenazas. La frontera figura como personaje de mil caras y máscaras.

Si las anteriores obras enmarcan una dirección de lo exterior hacia lo interior, *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) de Ana Castillo y *Borderlands / La Frontera: The new mestiza* (1987) de Gloria Anzaldúa optan por una dirección opuesta. Su valor testimonial se desprende como óptica vivencial que por ahora ha encontrado su momento oportuno de manifestarse. Se fijan momentáneamente en lo que configura la frontera a nivel espacial y su significado histórico explorando por ejemplo su relación con México, pero aquí cuentan más los valores interiorizados. La reivindicación feminista surge con vigor con el fin de proyectar voces, igual que experiencias poco enunciadas, para así trazar y descubrir los confines de las fronteras impuestas a su condición de mujer. Por lo tanto, consiguen delinear una perspectiva por medio de la cual explicitan las muchas facetas de su biculturismo igual que su liberación mediante el sexo.

The Mixquiahuala Letters y *Borderlands / La Frontera* estructuran una extensa razón de ser como mujeres a la vez que entablan una argumentación en favor de la conciencia feminista. De esta manera, se colocan en una posición ideológica para mejor enfrentarse a la superación tanto de fronteras físicas como metafóricas. Deliberadamente, manejan la idea de negociar su contorno con su mente y cuerpo para así pulir el concepto de sí misma con el propósito que les ha impedido la plena realización como mujeres. Finalmente, contra viento y marea reconstruyen los géneros y el lenguaje convencionales, rompiendo con estructuras discursivas consagradas – por implicación del orden patriarcal – para concederse mayor

libertad en la expresión del mundo interior fluido e incontenible que desean desentrañar. Desdoblándose, crean y articulan una conciencia inversa de la frontera, como si ellas fueran un cuerpo de evidencia de ultrajes, conquistas y usurpaciones.

Tal como se ha demostrado, estas pocas muestras de la literatura chicana presentan variados y enriquecedores ejemplos de la frontera, donde lo físico se coteja con lo psicológico, mítico o espiritual. Es evidente una insistencia por representar demarcaciones exteriores como ámbitos de movimiento, a la vez que barreras interiores adquieren el valor de telarañas invisibles. Esta literatura, por lo tanto, metaforiza las limitaciones como yugos que tienen que quebrantarse o socavarse. El móvil es deshacerse de obstáculos en busca de la realización plena. Para lograr tal estado, indagan en las dos culturas – y sobre todo en la realización entre esas dos – para llegar a una comprensión más cabal de sus dos mitades existenciales. No es una simple cuestión de rechazar u optar por una u otra, sino que interesa más crear armonía de la frágil tensión entre dos vertientes culturales de procedencia tan distinta. ¿Cómo conjugar, cómo unir y cómo compenetrar dos lados opuestos que luchan entre sí para posiblemente encontrar una tercera entidad?

Por eso, mucha de la literatura chicana presenta una lucha por la síntesis al reconocer que sus componentes son múltiples, contradictorios, dialécticos, dialógicos e interculturales. Dicha literatura oscila entre la problemática de búsqueda existencial (como *Rayuela*), una cultural (como *Los pasos perdidos*) y una mítica como *Ulises criollo*) pero además profundiza con cierta lucidez en la fragmentación (*splintering*) como en la escisión de un ser que ha sufrido los achaques de la constante negación a través de la historia norteamericana. El chicano ha aprendido a duras penas a protegerse de la esquizofrenia de las masas como de la masificación de sus valores culturales. Por eso, es posible reafirmar que hay fronteras, pero como la México-norteamericana ninguna.

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NOTAS

¹ Existen, incluso, varias ciudades, por ejemplo, Laredo y Nuevo México, El Paso y Juárez, que han sido desgarradas, ya que originalmente eran una sola, sufriendo así la ruptura y desintegración de manera real como una nueva identidad.

² Dicho término también corresponde a Lynell George (36).

³ Yo prefiero el término menos cargado de connotaciones como "interlingüe" porque representa un simple hecho lingüístico que se presta a captar con flexibilidad la fluidez de los lenguajes que se confluyen, se juxtaponen o se influyen mutuamente

II. Essays on Chicano/a Authors



Tomás Rivera: The Writer as Creator of Community

Most writers modestly admit to consciously contributing to a body of literature and they point to their works as proof. When they are questioned further, however, few are able to explicate the pre-creative motive that moves them beyond the desire “simply to write.” Nor can they adequately define the creative process once triggered. Oftentimes “divine inspiration” or possibly “spiritual indulgence” are posed to describe the steps taken to produce a literary work. In Chicano literature some of the very same reasons fuse with a social purpose to imply being part of a larger scope. Albeit the writer’s private and individual motivation might be well respected, an author such as Tomás Rivera exemplifies someone who not only comes to grip with his own story but recognizes, nonetheless, that his creation advances a purposeful design beyond his person.

It is in this way that Tomás Rivera functions as spokesman and medium for his characters, instead of being an end unto himself. He, much like his writings, gains in stature and significance in direct proportion to his attempts to repay his community—the principal source to which he attributed his creative achievements. Thus, his community, the migrant sector, operated for him as context and *raison d’être*. That community, having been an integral part of what made Tomás Rivera, became the source to spark his imagination and, as a consequence, he gave it its rightful place in literature. His intimate affection for migrants became the drive with which to transform them into a literary community. For the first time a consistent, honest and authentic view of migrant life was rendered from the period of 1945 to 1955. We can illuminate Rivera’s process by focusing on one chapter, “When We Arrive,” from his 1971 Chicano classic “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” (... *And the Earth Did Not Part*).

No other Chicano novelist has so deliberately set out to promote the idea of establishing community in both his literary and critical works. Rivera stands out as the foremost proponent of a specific plan within the field of Chicano literature. His motivation, to place the migrant worker at center stage, is deeply rooted in the concept of creator as being “not messianic but a power of independence and liberation.”¹ His ultimate aim appeals to humanistic values and beckons attention for a powerless lot. The acknowledgment he accords his people is nothing less than appreciation for having taught him to become a more incisive observer of life. He also feels the imprint left by his people’s courage and zeal as having attained heroic qualities in their struggle for

survival. His novel, set within the ideological program of the Chicano movement of the 1960s, then becomes a collection of stories to legitimize his character in order to put them on the literary map of American letters. But, more importantly, he adds to the burgeoning process *concientización* and the trend of self-depiction by Chicanos. When approached on how he perceived his role as a writer, he answered:

During that period (1945-1955) I became very conscious ... about the suffering and ... beauty of these people.... The Chicano Movement was Una fuerza total ya (a complete power already) ... (and) I wanted to document, somehow the strength of those people.... I had been a migrant worker. So I began to see that my role ... would be to document that period of time, but giving it some kind of ... spiritual dimension to the people of that time.... I saw a lot of heroic people and I wanted to capture their feelings.²

Although there are several thematic implications, part of the overriding initiative and genesis of “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” is synthesized in the title itself. If at first it seems that the individual is highlighted, it soon becomes clear that Rivera’s main concern is a collectivity, for he wishes them “not to be swallowed by the earth.” The creative thrust herein concurs well with the spirit of Gerald W. Haslam’s premise in his seminal book, *Forgotten Pages of American Literature* (1970),³ which confirms the omission in American literature of experiences by minority authors. The multifold objectives of the Chicano writer are therefore made manifest in various levels of meaning: internally, within the context from which he was writing the novel. Hermeneutics, sociology and politics merge and become one.

The desire to fill the mentioned void in American letters has sharpened the motivating force for those who experience misrepresentation and/or under-representation. Rivera occupies a distinct place in the vanguard of Chicano literature for his determined advance against this all too apparent “blackout” of his people from American literature. The fact that other writers have agreed or adopted the same view speaks well for his goals. His plan, delineated in his critical work, attests to a committed thinker with a mission whose impact has been recognized. Other writers, such as Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, have extended the original plan into a more expansive project that had far-reaching results in the international arena.

Writers oftentimes do not concern themselves with matters beyond the mechanics of producing fiction. It becomes the reader’s responsibility to extract some statement on society and life, if one is being made. Rivera takes that process as a given while at the same time views it as an abstraction with futile applicability. So, he opts for defying the mystification of the creative process by singularizing experience, using the people he knows best as *materia prima* for his literature. He allows his work to speak for itself: his

characters voice their experiential concerns as he speaks for and through them. His role as creator also becomes one of transmitter since he and his characters share common origins. The writing by the Chicano author clearly functions as an extension of them, directing his efforts to one central theoretical question, Pirandellian in nature, which involves his seeking “life in search of.”⁴ This concept translates into what he terms the “establishment of community.”⁵ To achieve the primary goal, of populating an emerging literature, Rivera has responded with a multifold plan. The migrant workers, who are usually nonentities, here occupy an important status as protagonists. Rivera turns the imaginary paths of the migrant stream into a human search for self-actualization. The action, localized within the crux of modern society, becomes a new form of tragedy in dealing with the eternal problem of a people’s struggle with time and space vis-à-vis great odds.

The disadvantageous relationship these people have in their existence is represented by Rivera as a dynamic situation in order to appeal to the reader’s empathy through vicarious means. More than images are retrieved of downtrodden lives, because the Chicano novelist also addresses the issue of a vacuum in a literary space that has not adequately dealt with them. Not only does the language recreate their circumstance but an entire community becomes manifest through echoes and reverberations of a way of life. Now we encounter the underdogs, “*los the abajo*,” how take the limelight. They reverse the anti-hero status as their story unfolds. As complete beings with heroic tendencies, their depiction includes strengths, frailties, and metaphysical considerations, while at the crossroad of extinction or survival.

The migrant, a real person and group, assumes metaphoric attributes in Rivera’s novel. The depiction strives to demonstrate that the human spirit itself is a migrant; it is a wanderer in search of its own place. The hard facts attest to its being exposed to the denigrating elements of exploitation found in a ruthless world. Thus the author presents the dialectical relationship of a group conditioned by vulnerability and chaos in which the outside world is often ready to prey on this defenseless victim. Simplistic dichotomies, however, are not sought by Rivera because he does not reduce the problem to racial lines. He recognizes that the antecedents of this way of life revolve around economy and popular tradition. Since no group solidarity exists *per se* among these people who serve an economic system, it is also common to find betrayals of kin, according to what José Montoya terms the “they are us” syndrome.⁶ The essential question for the author is how to provide his people with a literary presence, given that they have been generally ignored as procreators of history and as active participants in society. Unlike Steinbeck, as one example, Rivera does not opt for a colorful portrayal of suffering. He does not include a jovial look at habits and speech because their situation is not weighed as a parody but as evil and shame.

Despite the harsh realities of migrant life, Rivera views redeeming qualities in that life. In his article “Chicano Literature: Fiesta of the Living,” he admits to what that experience meant to his writing:

For me the literary experience is one of total communion, an awesome awareness of the ‘other,’ of one’s potential self. I have come to recognize my ‘other’ in Chicano literature, but by this I do not mean to say that I find or reflect or faithfully render the Chicano experience.

To this he adds:

...I would hope that what I write goes further. To claim that my own writing is representative of the Chicano experience is not my intention. Rather, I should like to focus on Chicano writing as a ritual of immortality, of awe in the face of the ‘other’ – a ritual of the living, in a sense, a fiesta of the living.⁷

Literature becomes for him an opportunity to re-experience the original event which inspired the literary work, following Octavio Paz’s assertion that “Every poem (or by extension, literature) we read is a recreation, that is, a ceremonial ritual, a fiesta.”⁸ To come in contact with the “other” can be understood as a viable way of partaking in a collective act or in some form of social ritual.

“Ritual” denotes indulgence or participation in a repeated act or a practice done regularly in a precise manner to meet one’s sense of fitness or belonging.⁹ Chicano literature provides Rivera with most of the ingredients necessary to complete such a process. Literature – through its characters and circumstances – serves as the medium to exercise ritual, thus returning us to a naked view of ourselves. To this he adds: “... we also come to the realization that life is perhaps not simply a relationship between the world, ourselves, and others, but, in addition, the discovery and recollection of the relationship and these things.”¹⁰ To conclude he states that “the act of writing is a personal ritual, a constant means of establishing contact with humanity and with one’s origins. The ritual is simple yet complex.”¹¹

In amplifying the Pirandellian axiom of “life in search of form,” Rivera expounds on the subject further in a key article, “Remembering, Discovery and Volition in the Literary Imaginative Process.” Although part of his purpose entails relating his own motives in producing “... *y no se lo tragó la tierra*”, the main contribution results in confessing the process followed in creating such a Chicano classic. He allows us to penetrate the source of his inspiration, which becomes the story-telling tradition of his people. Contact with that source spawns recollection and memory. Remembering permits the story to emerge out of a compelling necessity to enter into the sacred, also regarded as inner experience:

The past and the future were concretized not as intrahistory which can be learned through study but as inner sensitivity learned through creative and imaginative sensibility. Remembering, each time abetted by imagination, was able to project his inner sensitivity.¹²

Clearly, Rivera intends to “return” to a primordial state of origins, capture his people’s essence, and discover his own sense of social reality and his place in it. The choices he has to make are, in the meantime, conditioned by a particular world view:

I think that everything is imbued with the specific. The more man is placed within his environment, the better he will be understood by all. The more national he is, the more international he will become. It is necessary to transcend that which is typically regional or national. That is to say, the more specific man is shown in his natural and dialectic element, the more his human universality is revealed.¹³

From the subjective emanates the objective; or at least the potential for the objective. Discovery may then lead to preparation, perhaps a meditative state in order to regroup, assess, gain awareness and readiness for action.

Rivera describes the next stage as volition or externalization, an unfolding of the act of will. These stages are indeed evident in “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” in which the young protagonist experiences chaos, confusion, fear, discrimination, and loss of self within the distorted sense of time and space. The boy gathers all the loose memory fragments and brings them together in the closing chapter.

This serves to unite the disjointed narrative strands, coming together into a cohesive whole—an antithesis of the dispersion experienced by migrants. The anonymous protagonist, moved by a deep desire to join the pieces of his people’s lives, gains a sense of consciousness about himself and achieves the same on his people’s behalf. He first grapples with the notion of losing time, specifically a year, and within that framework of ambivalence he demonstrates that the lost year has now become recovered. Significantly, he recaptures it mentally, which is precisely the means by which he retrieves otherwise lost events in migrants’ lives.

Much in the Neo-realist mode, the protagonist’s experiences are filtered through a mind and heart that are culturally, socially, and economically conditioned. He accomplishes his actions through remembering and constant discovery; but, as Rivera points out: “...he goes further. He invents. He invents himself.”¹⁴ The character at the end does not merely reflect on what he sees or hears; instead, he acts and imagines himself being seen by someone else while on top of the tree. He has completed the cycle of coming out of himself in order to become one with others. The idea of “awe” is crucial because he now becomes a totality – which had been in jeopardy – thanks to the people outside of himself. By recreating others, he returns to the source of origin, a

sacred point of departure, with which he defies what Roger Caillois terms a “primordial chaos” in his book *Man and the Sacred*.¹⁵ Thus, the character’s supra-individual psyche is transformed into the group image within the consciousness of a collectivity. The Chicano novelist, in this regard, generates, metaphorically, a sense of the communal, while revering, preserving, and recreating it. He has accomplished that to which he aspires: he transposes an extra-social sector into a literary community in accordance to the logic Carlos Fuentes posits in “The Novel Always Says: The World is Unfinished”:

A novel, André Malraux once said, is the transformation of experience into destiny. We are voices in a chorus that transforms lived life into narrated life and then returns narrative to life, not in order to reflect life, but rather to add something else; not a copy but a new measure of life; to add, with each novel, something new, something more, to life.¹⁶

Rivera through his novel attempts to redirect the fatal destiny of the migrant so that the latter will follow other routes of self-realization.

Community, then, for Rivera is to be understood as a medium and an end, or the point of salvation for both the characters and the writer. To outline his concept, he resorts to Robert Hine’s definition loosely while interjecting some of his own specific concerns:

All definitions of community argue that first of all, community is a place (un lugar), a geographical location where they know people, know that the sun will come out behind a particular place, the formation of clouds; the place may be architectural features, a barrio, all of which express continuity (una continuación de las cosas y así del espíritu). Secondly, community is a set of personal relationships... Rebecca West says that “the community is conversation.” (La comunidad es conversación; la comunidad es platicar). Thirdly, the community is values. The values of the group over the individual. These values say that the whole is more than the sum of each of its parts... (A)s these elements come into play, there is the tensions of individual versus the group. There are the tensions of a family within a community. And within the family itself is the basic building block... The family is also different elements –class, hierarchy, and it is class and hierarchy which make for the strong building power in the community. The ideal community is one which can make all these factors work (valores, conversación, lugar).¹⁷

In sum, Rivera’s critical essays provide the basis for self-examination on questions that pertain to the creative process in the context of Chicano literature. In them we find key element of his *ars poetica* and how he views the writer, the creative act and its responsibility as a social function. Ironically, Rivera published “... y no se lo tragó la tierra,” in the same year (1971) that he initiated inquiries into theoretical problems of fiction. He then proceeded to translate and define his creative urge into some formulae of criticism. From 1971 he became more self-conscious of his writing, feeling perhaps

somewhat uncomfortable with the label of leader in the vanguard of Chicano literature. His novel, however, already exemplified his commitment to and love for his community where form and content appear as extensions of his unfulfilled motives.

Although one critic has termed Rivera's novel as a story whose purpose is to present "el tenebroso mundo del yo,"¹⁸ it seems more accurate to restate it as "el tenebroso mundo del nosotros" in order to emphasize the collective slant above and beyond the individual. As a work it offers much more than what can be digested in only one reading. It is not the modest size of the book but the extreme fragmentation which leads one to believe that much is omitted and left unsaid. The diversity in narrative segments, through vignettes and multiple narrators, contributes to a collage of impressions as bits and pieces of the entire community they represent. Countless allusions and echoes of events—be they past or present—resemble a disjointed aggregate in a human drama composed of Chicano migrants. The haphazard appearance of action and characters is created to reflect a sense of constant movement and instability. Rivera's metaphorization of his people as *campesinos*, or closely attached to farm-worker lifestyle, in 1971 served to accentuate the displacement, dislocation and uprootedness of Chicanos as they saw themselves at the height of the Chicano Movement. The connection between social experience and literature should not be taken lightly at this juncture, but rather as concomitant facets of each other.

Most of the chapters of "... y no se lo tragó la tierra" have been studied as stories, and sometimes as independent short stories. One chapter in particular, "When We Arrive," deviates from the themes of religion, superstition and metaphysics as it concentrates on a group's almost accidental finding of self. This chapter illustrates the author's theories and attitude toward his own literature in an attempt to create community as a necessary device for survival and solidarity. It is here where Rivera best illustrates how community comes about in a literary text by following a formula from denial to actualization. Community, then, becomes a response to a vacuum in literature as well as a refuge for self-portrayal.

The story (or chapter) "When We Arrive," the penultimate narrative in the novel, performs a pivotal function in validating the overall collective bent of the work. In contrast to some of the chapters and vignettes that are individually oriented, this one highlights the young protagonist's people, which in the final chapter becomes the central thrust in terms of embracing everyone as one body. Positioning this particular story here serves as a prelude—maybe even a final reminder—of the urgency to seek form within the strength for communal survival. "When We Arrive" is permeated with bitter irony: the act of coming together as one people, which is accomplished by the protagonist in the last chapter in this work, is not symbolic nor abstract but real. If togetherness in the story "Under the House" is literary, in "When We Arrive" it appears

as a concrete experience of involuntarily being compressed into the minimum amount of space possible. The Chicano novelist is masterfully at work in his search of shape “live “ into form, that is, he strives for “...a life which not only exists but also wants to be (*ser* and *estar*). *El ser* is life, *el estar* is the form.”¹⁹

The basic storyline is deceptively simple. The opening remarks suggest that a truck is the central character; in a sense it is. The truck is en route with approximately 40 people to deliver them to their respective ranch sites for work. After almost 24 hours of travelling north toward the Midwest, the truck breaks down near Des Moines at 4:00 a.m, thus interrupting the trip which is valued differently by the passengers. Suddenly, what matters most resolves around the concept each has of their own destination and final goal. The focus changes from the truck to the mass of passengers. An abrupt switch from external description to internal examination takes place, shifting the emphasis to compressed action through 14 monologues of migrants reflecting on their circumstances. The stopping of the truck marks another turn of fate that reaffirms their susceptibility to unexpected change. It denotes yet another obstacle to inhibit their quest to arrive somewhere. Not in control of their own destiny, the characters are subject to constant changes: their movement and their plans tend to be determined by conditions beyond their will. Nothing seems sure; less so the possibility of arrival. Whereas the title of the story in English “When We Arrive” implies certainty and assumed futurity, the title in Spanish – through the use of the subjunctive mood – “Cuando lleguemos” (“when we might arrive”), pinpoint with greater precision the sense of probability, almost wishful thinking, without assuming anything of the final outcome.

The central focus of the narrative allows the reader to penetrate deep into the minds and hearts of the passengers, who are a collective voice of consciousness in their gaining an internal momentum to react to their environment. By contrast, the framing paragraphs at the beginning and end of the chapter – rendered by an anonymous omniscient narrator – depict “objective” action in a detached and unaffected manner. The brief event of the stalled truck suggests a laconic and calm exterior, as if nothing were particularly wrong. This “outer” action denotes distance and normality.

Paradoxically, when the action switches to the people’s conversations, a dynamic inner world unfolds. Their subsequent thoughts and dreams generate an unuttered chorus of “sounds of silence” in the darkness juxtaposed with the chirping of crickets. All occurs at the break of dawn with the coming of a new day as the sun rises. The implication is that this “new” day for the migrant is only one of the same, a repetitive action that binds the people into a numbing existence. The new day, as they would have it, is always beyond their reach. Their figures in the shadows of the night resemble bulky objects piled inside the truck and only at dawn do they take on life-like qualities. “The

people once again became people. They started to get out of the truck and huddled around. They started to talk about what they would do when they arrived.”²⁰ Even though this segment pertains to the “objective action,” the meaning is dramatically altered when it is associated with the inner narrative.

The internalization of the character’s inmost thoughts and feelings is without a doubt the salient feature of this chapter. It fulfills a narrative purpose much like a camera that zooms into a affective zone of human drama; the circumstantial is supplanted by the existential. As the main action in the story, its principal function entails highlighting a people’s dilemma simply as people. Their subjectivized experience has many points in common, which in turn adds to the shared sense of entrapment. The calm exterior immediately subsides into another dimension of their lives: a realm of anguish, frustration, wishful thinking, contemplation, and the uncontainable desire to reach their destination. This internalization divulges common views and concerns held by a collectivity. Whereas the framing paragraph do not indulge in judging the kind of trip being taken, nor the cramped conditions, the internal monologues quickly reveal that it is not a joy ride. The truck, the vehicle of their destiny, becomes the very object that delivers them to the place of exploitation, first by hypnotizing and then by dulling their senses. Although delivery to a slaughter house would be considered extreme, the degree of suffering is real when perceived as such. Sleep is generally regarded as rest or a stage of recuperation, but here, ironically, it appears more as a prized pause in preparation for work. Another paradox emerges: sleep is highly sought by the workers at the same time they are becoming “hypnotized,” which implies another form of sleep. The latter results in a numbed state that accentuates their waking up to silence, that is, another form of nothingness.

Rivera’s technique of entering into the core of a group’s psyche substantiates his ideas of making with the living, and of facing the “other” with a degree of awe. The laconic style and tone of the external action gives way to individual perceptions that are charged with emotion. Ambiguity sets in with the objective to plot the monologized utterances as melodies of the same song. The crossroad between external and internal actions is stated by the omniscient narrator immediately before the monologues commence: “Some are asleep, others were thinking” (156). Operating simultaneously, the conscious and subconscious become confounded by not knowing which is which within the monologues. This further enhances the authenticity and spontaneity of their unveiled selves as voices that feel compelled to express their condition. Each monologue actually performs the role of an internal dialogue with itself: a conversation signals an intimation of community. The process followed in the narrative moves from external calmness into the storm of a people’s bottled-up sense of unrealized illusions, certainly a latent bastion of rebellion.

The internal monologues, composed of fourteen separate utterances, parallel and provide an analogy to the novel's structural composition of fourteen chapters. However, ambiguities are present with respect to the nature and origin of the nameless voices: although not altogether clear, eleven different persons express their own dilemmas, and one in particular, the most restless, manifests his displeasure three times. The final voice, saying "When we arrive, when we arrive..." at the tail end of the monologues underscores the central motif in the form of a collective chorus. No one person makes the statement because everyone's voice becomes one. Commonality of shared experience and purpose emerges at this point to create a bond between them. The characters, then, have carried out the same plan the author has professed in his critical essays when defining the creative act: remember past experiences; discover the dilemmas; and act on the knowledge gained. The repetition of "when we arrive" is no longer an empty wish, but rather a ritualized chant in order to overcome their situation of never reaching a destination. The repetition also marks a new momentum in that they come to better terms with what it means. Awareness leads to the next stage: defiance. The individualized notion, perhaps guarded more at the subconscious level, is subsequently collectivized into a conscious level ready for action for the benefit of a community. As Rivera would have it, the characters are now prepared to invent and to invent as self-actualizers.

The character's expression occurs as if a narrator were absent by doing it directly to the reader. The direct channel of communication permits the reader to be integrated into the narrative without having to look over the character's shoulders. The narrator has stepped back; he is not a filter. He comes one with the gamut of characters: a man who feels sick; a voice of experience who has returned on the trip; a messenger who bought hamburgers for everyone; a bitter and restless man who regrets being carried like an animal; a man who dreams of buying his own car; an indebted man who seeks a way out of a vicious circle; a compassionate woman ready to help her husband; a star watcher gazing at the sky; a chauffeur whose self-interests permit him to consider transporting watermelons instead of people; a niche-maker who aspires to a good bed; finally, the chorus that begins to palpitate with the first signs of subtle rebellion. Together they represent different voices with similar stories; they share a common battle against being lost in oblivion in spite of the great odds. Community acquires new meaning in the novel: it includes a variety of people, but above all shared purpose and share goals.

When the action changes from the monologues to external narration, or into the omniscient narrator's domain, no longer are the events simply an extension of "objective" storytelling. The detached or unaffected focus diminishes dramatically. When the people get out of the truck, a new physical relationship is evident by their huddling around

one another. If before the monologues their bond was described more in circumstantial terms, it now has a strong sense of common experience and similar destinies. They not only create their own group, but they also initiate conversation among themselves and interaction. The fact that they remove themselves voluntarily from the truck is symbolic, for they turn their back on the vehicle that will lead them to a destination of which they disapprove; instead, they look toward one another to define a collective destiny. Their act of talking, now an outward expression of their thoughts and dreams, marks a new phase of self-awareness and communion. Their formation into a huddle, simulating a circle, completes the cycle of a community willing to listen and to act, while resorting to itself for inner strength. Thus, "When We Arrive" advances Tomás Rivera's concept of a literary community as a result of values, conversation and place. The chapter serves well to illustrate this Chicano novelist's process of singularizing experience in order to make it relevant for others: "Inner sensitivity, self-definition, remembering and discovery are personal processes. All this is something sacred. And it is ours."²¹ By the means of this conceptualization of his novel, Rivera has succeeded in not only establishing community but also in immortalizing it *para que no se la trague la tierra*.²²

NOTES

¹ Salvador Rodríguez del Pino, Encuentro Interview Series #7, May 31, 1977, University of California, Santa Barbara.

² Bruce-Novoa, J. "Tomás Rivera," *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980: 148-149.

³ See his introduction in which he presents his central observations (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.: 1970).

⁴ Refer to Tomás Rivera's earliest theoretical attempts to explain the act of writing for a Chicano at the height of the Movement in a presentation titled "Literature chicana: Vida en busca de forma" at the Modern Language Association at Chicago in December 1971. In 1972 it appears as one of the copies collected by the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) from New York, containing 12 pages. Its principal significance resides in his articulating theoretical questions – although somewhat undeveloped – pertaining to Chicano narrative, and this in retrospect seems important because he contributed to Chicano criticism that at the time was barely beginning. He altered his essay slightly and renamed it in a English version "Into the Labyrinth: The Chicano in Literature," appearing in a collection of multidisciplinary studies called *New Voices in Literature: The Mexican American* (Edinburg, TX: Department of English, Pan American University, 1971: 18-25).

⁵ Rivera proposed this provocative idea in a round table conference celebrating the 1970s as a Chicano literary florescence. His essay served as the introduction, "Chicano Literature: The Establishment of Community," in *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970-1979): Critical Essays and Bibliography*, Luis Leal et al. (Santa Barbara: Editorial la Causa, 1982: 7-17).

⁶Montoya read his poem containing this central theme at various literary festivals, and conferences, and he eventually published it in *The Montoya Poetry Review* 1: 1 (March 1980): 1-5, as part of a collection called "The Trilogy Poems" of which the second part is designated as "Los Theys Are Us."

⁷"Chicano Literature: Fiesta of the Living," *Books Abroad* 49: 3 (summer 1975): 439-452.

⁸Paz, O. *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*. New York: Grove Press, 1961: 210. (Translated by Lysander Kemp).

⁹See *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*. Springfield, MA: G.& C. Merriam Col, 1976: 1961.

¹⁰"Chicano Literature: Fiesta of the Living," 440.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 452.

¹²Rivera, T. "Remembering, Discovery and Volition in the Literary Imaginative Process," *Atisbos* 1: 1 (Summer 1975): 66-77. Herein is found a well conceptualized approach as to the function, role and design of fiction and how Rivera fits within that scheme. This article demonstrates a more sophisticated development in relation to theoretical questions about the art of fiction.

¹³*Ibid.* 73.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁵See Roger Callois' *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, III.: The Free Press, 1959; translated by Meyer Barash).

¹⁶Carlos Fuentes, "The Novel Always Says: the World is Unfinished," *The New York Times* (March 31, 1985): 25.

¹⁷See Rivera's "Chicano Literature: The Establishment of Community," in a *Decade of Chicano Literature* (1970-1979), Luis Leal et al. 11-12.

¹⁸Juan Rodríguez is recognized for making such an observation in "Acercamiento a cuatro relatos de "...y no se lo tragó la tierra," *Mester* 5: 1 (November 1974): 16-24.

¹⁹See endnote 4 with respect to Rivera's article "Into the Labyrinth: The Chicano in Literature," 24. The author has also added: "Chicano literature has a triple mission: to represent, and to conserve that aspect of life that the Mexican American holds as his own and at the same time destroy^s the invention of others of his own life, that is – conservation, struggle, and invention... It is also a disquisition, a reasoned investigation in an attempt to find and use the forms that can manifest him as a totally human individual. This is why he has to search for himself, out of himself, this is why he wants to conserve himself and in so doing also invent himself in all form" (24).

²⁰Tomás Rivera, "...y no se lo tragó la tierra" "... And the Earth Did Not Part" (Berkeley: Quinto Sol Publications, Inc., 1971: 160). Other quotes from this edition will be indicated immediately with their respective pagination.

²¹"Remembering, Discovery and Volition in the Literary Imaginative Process," 77.

²²Translation: "so that the earth does not swallow it." I also wish to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Pérez for her helpful editorial assistance in the final manuscript.

Sabine R. Ulibarrí's Essays: A Critical Dialogue with Difference

*Let the essay avow itself almost a novel:
a novel without proper names.*
Roland Barthes

Sabine Ulibarrí's long-standing literary career defies any single epoch as well as any one genre. His writings exemplify a presence couched within the unique and continuous Hispanic literary tradition particular to New Mexico. In fact, often serving as a link with the past, he also ponders inevitable changes and transformations in a Hispanic society that has survived marginalized and abandoned. His literary production aims to ground itself in a specific place (New Mexico) and an ethnos (Hispanic) as two suns of his system of discourse and rhetoric, in other words, his basic reference points of experience and reality.

Ulibarrí does not speak out alone. Along with other important southwestern voices –Fray Angélico Chávez, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Cleofas M. Jaramillo, Rafael Chacón, Roberto Vialpando, Secundino Baca, and many others– he forms part of a broad constellation of writers who serve as a transitional linkage between the territorial days (before 1912) and (post) modern times. As an early accomplished poet (*Al cielo se sube a pie*, 1961, and *Amor y Ecuador*, 1966) and a splendid short-fiction writer (*Tierra Amarilla: Cuentos de Nuevo México*, 1964, and *Mi abuela fumaba puros / My Grandma Smoked Cigars*, 1977), Ulibarrí has achieved distinction for his sensitive portrayals of a region's soul and ethos at a time when it was not yet fashionable or readily promoted. Although he precedes what came to be termed the Chicano literary renaissance of the 1960s, he has also directly contributed to it, partly through his short fiction but more through a steady essayistic production. It is my contention that the latter, rarely acknowledged by critics, must be considered an essential component of his overall oeuvre, thus accounting for a variegated authorship of delving into the spirit, the passion, and the imagination of a people. His repeated incursions in the essay conjure up the image of either a visionary or a quixotic madman who confronts social phenomena the way a surgeon approaches the operating table. While recognizing

that the essay is perhaps the most fleeting of genres, he nonetheless attempts to place it in the forefront.

To adequately understand Ulibarri's recourse in the essay, some preliminary comments are necessary. It is not uncommon to find the essay ignored as a genre in the study of literature, for its perception brings to mind what Robert G. Mead refers to as a presumably "inferior genre," a genre that does not match the others in literary merit.¹ While many anthologies even tend to exclude the essay as a regular representative entry, most formal attempts to classify literature view it as organically unclassifiable or as *terra incognita*. A black sheep or outcast within the literary genres family, often it is not even recognized as a peripheral part of that family, particularly as of late when traditional genres matter less or where intergeneric hybridization is commonplace. The essay's fate, however, rests much on the type of interest it generates in terms of immediacy, impact, and timing. Fundamentally at the root of the problem is the very issue of its definition and conceptualization.² General variant descriptions are usually offered, but consensus is rarely reached. Critics are more apt to describe what an essay is not rather than what it is. An epistemological approach inevitably denotes a type of Pandora's box in that the term "essay" represents more what René Wellek labels a "generic institution" instead of a single prosaic form. On closer examination, the essay, what Xavier Villaurrutia (104) calls "una literatura de ideas" (a literature of ideas), consists of a hybrid construct – what Alfonso Reyes terms "the centaur of the genres" (Oviedo 12) – that, according to José Luis Martínez in *El ensayo mexicano moderno* (1958), ranges from the article and the critical study to the monograph and the treatise. Somewhere in between this vast spectrum of approaches and methodologies emerges one notion or another of the essay, depending on the reader's reception and grasp of the subject. Perhaps part of its inherently polemical quality is ascribed to its elastic, flexible, and exploratory nature; that is, the essay is many things at once. No wonder José Miguel Oviedo (13) classifies it as antidogmatic, asystematic, and with some frequency heretical, but he also adds: "El ensayo es una forma *dialogante*, un pensamiento que quiere ser comunicación abierta, tanto con el lector como con el mundo histórico al que pertenece" (16; The essay is a *dialoguing* form, a thought that wishes to be open communication, as much with the reader as with the historical place to which he forms a part).

As to its actual origins in the Renaissance, including the usage of the word *essay*, credit is first attributed to Michel de Montaigne in his *Essais* from 1589. Yet Francis Bacon has observed an irrefutable fact: "The word is late [in literary history], but the thing is ancient" (Martínez 8). With all its possible definitions, there seems to be little debate as to its diverse range and moldability. Perhaps Oviedo, in *Breve historia del ensayo hispanoamericano* (1990), best synthesizes the apparent polemics with regard

to its intrinsic makeup: “El ensayo, aunque definible, parece no tener límites. Género camaleónico, tiende a adoptar la forma que le convenga, lo que es otro modo de decir que no se ciñe a una forma establecida” (II; the essay, although definable, seems to have no limits. A chameleon genre, it tends to adopt the form that best suits it, which is another way of saying that it does not restrict itself to a single established form). The essay, then, lends itself as a medium to expound on a topic that demands a certain vantage point or position; it is by definition didactic, original, and reflective in its composition. And by implication, a specific opinion is delineated with either partisanship in mind or at least a definite hypothetical prospectus.

Ulibarrí’s essays, then, operate much within these parameters, except that he also offers other twists. His essays comprise a pivotal aspect of his agenda to recover part of the Hispanic literary presence as he experienced it while living in northern New Mexico. At the same time, his motive involves an active reassessment of what it means to be Hispanic in a social ambience that has either been oblivious to their presence or does not possess the necessary tools to understand them. From his writings emanate a creative spirit tempered by the pragmatic desire to effect change in ideology and perception, for the good of cultural interaction. While indulging in cultural comparative analyses and some theoretical/philosophical questions, there is the underlying inducement to spur a new sensibility about Hispanics outside his ethnic group and within it. If at times he seems mildly lofty or oppositional, his essays require a qualification: his chosen field of discourse entails, first, a quixotic didacticism about cultural politics in the broadest sense of the word and, second, a profound attempt at searching for thyself, much in the vein of José Ortega y Gasset, Miguel de Unamuno, Aurelio Espinosa, Walt Whitman, and Octavio Paz. He insists on this search to establish that Hispanics do in fact belong within the social matrix of the United States instead of being viewed as newcomers to it. What emerges is a foundation for better understanding to document what a Hispanic is within a larger American historical context of permanence and continuity.

Part of the reason for the limited recognition and dissemination of Ulibarrí’s essays is explained in terms of his minimal interest to publish them –suggesting that they immediately become part of the public domain. Most exist in mimeograph form with few published exceptions,³ and his main collection, “One Voice of Juan Hispano (A Collection of Lectures on Hispanic Themes),” has principally existed as a manuscript in progress. The functionality of this collection, along with other independent essays, is determined by their specificity to a given situation or request. Therefore, one key consideration is that Ulibarrí’s essays are deeply rooted in a Hispanic oral-intellectual tradition, which stipulates a dynamic interaction of forensics, polemics, cultural / political exchanges, a parabolic function, and editorial duels as widely evident in early Hispanic

newspapers. If part of the initial motive is rooted in stirring new reflections about a particular subject, didacticism is often complemented by a sublimely confrontational style and tone. Well lodged in this oral tradition of playing out discord and perspectives of difference,⁴ Ulibarrí, however, does not dichotomize between oral and written literatures. Except for a few anthologized samples of his essays, the bulk of his essayistic production remains unpublished and generally uncatalogued. But this does not diminish their intrinsic value, because the majority of his essays are cultural disquisitions whose effectiveness is already field-tested in lecture tours nationally and abroad-receiving much enthusiastic and favorable acclaim as unforgettable pieces of public discourse.

His essays usually target a specific event (i.e., a conference, symposium, lecture series, rally, issue, etc.), and, therefore, they represent a topical landmark by probing into established thought as it relates to culture, history, and politics by Chicanos and/or Hispanics. If at times he proposes to be provocative, at other times he wishes to raise dust or at least attempt to reduce rhetoric and misconceptions to their bare bones. Ulibarrí never appears complacent or resigned to accept conditions as they might exist, but neither is he openly discontent or bitter. His writings aim to fill in gaps, that is, he bridges cultural interaction for the sake of attaining a new synthesis of comprehension. Besides emanating as manuscript versions or temporal pieces, a partial explanation for their exclusion from critical discourse is that Ulibarrí's essays directly correspond to the arena of oratory as public deliveries or performance, a tradition reminisced by Hispanics with high esteem but currently on the decline. Their intent is to address a specific situation or respond to a particular need, as a spokesperson, a performer, an agent of exchange, a catalyst, and a thinker or even a visionary. Viewed in a larger context, his writings also add to the long-standing legacy of debunking myths or rectifying historical distortions, or in other cases, as purely intellectual reflections. As part of a generation prior to the Chicano movement, he represents an important link to the past as it overlaps into the present by contributing to the ongoing review and analysis of contentious issues, using the essay as a medium and forum to discuss topics of concern. He does not invite controversy, but he does not avoid it either for he seeks truth, appeals to reason, and ultimately wills a new social order.

Ulibarrí's "One Voice of Juan Hispano"⁵ is a varied compilation of fourteen essays but certainly not an exhaustive one in proportion to his lifetime activity in the genre. It features some of his most memorable lectures, which have endured changes and modifications, depending on the time and occasion. However, he also has to his credit numerous other loose essays that exist in mimeograph form or xerox copies, which he generously shares with friends and interested parties. "One Voice of Juan Hispano" came about simply as an effort to cluster a series of lectures once an essayistic

corpus was forming; it is not the result of a deliberate selection process. Because the collection, as a preliminary assemblage, continues unpublished, its primary objective is to propose representative essayistic samplings of diverse topical concerns. The body of essayistic work comes together more as a manageable text or working draft. Most of all, the collection serves well as a testimony to his combative spirit, *inquietud* (restlessness), and commitment to the ideas espoused in the essays.

“One Voice of Juan Hispano” encompasses a wide range of subjects and concepts, covering four basic areas: Hispanic culture, cultural politics, education, and philosophy and literature. While the author posits an “everyman’s” vantage point, stemming from the “Juan Hispano” label, he likewise proposes to define a firmly but not dogmatic or doctrinaire-nationalistic perspective in tone, modality, and composition. His essays correspond well to the parameters of the genre, but the finality is not strictly essayistic in and of itself for they must be judged essentially as pertaining to oratory or performances. The feature of “one voice” serves to accentuate the personal focus, which is typical of the essay. As Pilar A. Sanjuan (9) observes, “one element that remains constant in all the definitions of essay ... is subjectivity, the author’s point of view.” In the case of Ulibarrí, it must be emphasized that his prosaic writings form part of oral tradition; his essays are, first, meant to be heard and then read. Verification rests in that his presentations have become noteworthy as speeches and, less so, as written expositions. The principal category to which they belong is found in José Luis Martínez’s breakdown of the essay into ten central categories in his capital study, *El ensayo mexicano moderno*. Although Ulibarrí’s hybrid essayistic production relates to various categories as outlined by Martínez, such as “el ensayo interpretativo” (the interpretive essay) or “el ensayo expositivo” (the expository essay), one classification embraces his writings better than any other: “el ensayo–discurso u oración ... como expresión de los mensajes culturales y civilizadores” (the essay–speech or oration ... as an expression of cultural and civilizing, messages) in which the essayist is a buffer or guard keeper of culture. As Martínez points out: “Formalmente oscila entre la oratoria del discurso y la disertación académica, pero lo liga al propiamente llamado ensayo la meditación y la interpretación de las realidades materiales o espirituales” (Formally, it oscillates between the art of public speaking of a speech and the academic dissertation, but meditation and interpretation of material and spiritual realities link it fittingly to the so-called essay).⁶

Ulibarrí furthermore manages to transcend the limitations of a single classification because, in most cases, his objective revolves around the composition of a public declaration, better known as a manifesto, that is, a forum for broadcasting a new vision of how things might be. Directly involving himself in the whirlwinds of controversy and polemics, he recognizes full well not to acquiesce to contrary views or

to retreat. For that reason, his recourse is not diplomatic double-talk or discretely and pleasantly rhetorical dilutions; instead, he prefers to dynamically engage in differing critical dialogues to aspire to a new synthesis of understanding. Confrontation is preferable to silence; the unflinching pen is better than the indecisive posture. Most of all, he dwells on enouncing opinions with incisive or witty observations so as to rethink ideological questions. He might not always possess a unique theoretical platform for dissecting Hispanic issues, but he certainly sheds new light on how to perceive cultural happenings and modes of thought. Ulibarrí's essays embody a renewed attempt at disseminating ideas in the best tradition of Juan Luis Vives, Michel Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Miguel de Unamuno, Mariano José de Larra, Octavio Paz, Octavio Romano, and others. His essays are a tribute to his people, for he functions as a knowledgeable spokesperson for Hispanics, being both jury and inquisitor, both leader and follower, both advocate and devil's advocate. His writings aim to stir, teach, provoke, rally, instruct, guide, and, above all, affirm dignity, self-respect, and create a higher awareness of issues proper to Hispanics. In that sense, he offers philosophical therapy at the same time that he intimates a deep conviction toward self-regeneration. Much like his favorite literary figure, Don Quixote, he tries to mend wrongs and undo the snags of injustice, while suggesting a path of redemption.

The majority of the essays in "One Voice of Juan Hispano" are characterized by their brevity, generally between four and eight pages, implying that their intentions are direct and pungent for quick consumption. Their composition denotes a quick – reading or listening– in one sitting, with the exception of "Sor Juana, the Woman" and "The Magic of Don Juan" which are both article-length essays of thirteen to fifteen pages that entail carefully argued observations within the traditional confines of literary criticism. The latter two consist of more in-depth exposés of the complex nature of a literary figure and a literary archetype, respectively. Both essays are constructed from the point of view of interpretation and analysis to closely examine and decipher enigmas. Every angle rests on original observations and conclusions. Although the expository style resembles a literary essay, the highly subjective presence of a critical reader leads us to believe that these two writings conform to the "ensayo interpretativo" as described by Martínez. That is, they deal with actual reading, and, therefore, the exercise is purely intellectual with a peripherally extraliterary application. With respect to the famous Mexican nun of the seventeenth century, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Ulibarrí comments: "Sor Juana is fascinating because of her duality, her multiplicity. She is a personality of many dimensions and proportions, many sides, of many and fleeting shades. She was, and continues to be, an enigma, full of contradictions, mystery and interrogations" (1958: 13).

It is in the shorter essays, however, where Ulibarrí best exhibits his flair for eloquence, biting wit, and unwavering assertions in well-focused prosaic treatments of single subjects. By consistently setting out to define and defend Hispanic causes or issues, he insists that his audience / reader give credence to a Hispanic perspective as a way of promoting intercultural dialogue and exchange so as to negotiate or mediate differences from a position of strength instead of weakness. His style, charged with energy and vigor, vibrates in an effort to appeal to empathy and rational understanding, while carefully avoiding cultural demagoguery or self-righteousness. He resorts at times to flights of poetic registers to make his points that much more attractive and sensorially convincing. Logic and common sense are well balanced vis-à-vis the obstacles of prejudice and bigotry. His central thrust is to meticulously dismantle contradictions instead of indicting gratuitously. In a real sense, Ulibarrí deconstructs myths and stereotypes to see them for what they are: false and self-perpetuating assumptions or smoke screens that distort or obfuscate truth.

One of his favorite topics is language and how it contains and conditions a people's view of the world. In "Differences and Similarities Between the Hispanic and the Anglo-American Cultures," the author emphasizes how idioms in language "will reveal the inner life, the secret reality and the privacy of the people who speak it. The language is the best conductor of cultural values" (1). Although the examples provided in this essay might lead to arbitrary selections, the illustrations fulfill a purpose of demonstrating how certain ordinary idiomatic expressions contrast dramatically from one language to the other, thus revealing a fundamentally different rate of speed. English appears to stress speed (i.e., "run to the bank," "run down to the neighbor's" etc.) whereas Spanish seems to accentuate a less hectic speed through the multiple idioms containing the verb *andar* or a metonymic connection between "to walk" and "to be" ("anda muy bonita" / She is pretty, "no anda bien" / not being well). These examples actually purport to be tricky because they do not always relate to movement or a rate of speed. Nonetheless, Ulibarrí proceeds in this essay to carefully trace the history of the mestizo and how Moorish, Indian, and African bloods contributed to the formation of a new composite in the Americas. To explain divergent views from Anglo-Americans, he at times utilizes Unamunian argumentation, such as the Hispanic tragic sense of life, or Octavio Pazian interpretations to highlight the relationship between life and death as two complementary phases of the same thing. The listener/reader receives poignant cultural comparisons in an unforgettable abridged form.

Since language encapsulates much of his philosophical and pragmatic bent, this topical groundwork serves as a common denominator in most of his essays. So much hinges on its continuity for Hispanics. As he points out in "Language and Culture,"

The language, the Word, carries within it the history, the culture, the traditions, the very life of a people, the flesh. Language is people. We cannot conceive of a people without a language, or a language without a people. The two are one and the same. (1)

Language represents such a fundamental constant in Ulibarri's efforts to define culture that, he claims, everything must be done to preserve it for it contains the secret of cultural meaning. As one of his principal concerns, he states, "If the language goes, the culture goes with it. This is precisely the spiritual crisis of the minorities of the United States" (2), to which he adds,

Each language is a unique vision of the world. All of the history of a people is synthesized in its language. It is the novel in which a people has deposited its laughter and tears, its triumphs and its failures, its aspirations and disappointments, its attitudes, thoughts, prejudices and beliefs. The language is the living current that joins the individual to a culture, a history, a vital reality. The language gives the individual an identity and quality. (3)

Its survival then depends on education wherein the meeting of differences is best ironed out for the good of society. Consequently, an adamant and uncompromising defender of bilingual education emerges evoking education in general as the instrument for change and mediation. In the foreword to *La fragua sin fuego/No Fire for the Forge* (1971), he notes,

I submit that ignorance and stupidity are criminal and infinitely unAmerican. Human beings are not refrigerators and cannot be forced into the same mold. Viva la diferencia! ... Take us as we are. We'll be glad to do the same for you. New Mexico will be the richer for it. (4-8)

Another important area of discourse where Ulibarri excels is in discussing, and unmasking, stereotypes and caricatures as pernicious figments of cultural conflict. A meticulous and deliberate approach befits the highly charged and emotive topic in order to unravel their elusiveness. Above all, he proposes that stereotypes and caricatures often defy critical thinking as modes of convenience, which becomes a simplistic response in dealing with difference. He stipulates that these relieve the person of the responsibility of thinking by succumbing to easy and quick images as configurations of untruths and fabrications.

The fact that these images may be, and often are, essentially untrue, deceptive and usually malicious is never investigated. These images frequently carry a built-in perversion, discrimination or bias. They make the purveyor feel superior, and the victim inferior. They appear in the guise of something innocuous, or friendly, or funny. ("Education and Stereotypes and Caricatures," I). Again, his answer lies in education wherein new alternatives might be sought to alleviate and deflate a long tradition of pitting one group against another. This power play requires a renewed sense of egalitarianism

from which the Hispanic will directly benefit. These changes would then have an impact on children's habits as well as their relationship to a learning environment. Therefore, the institutions would no longer serve as homogenizing factories but rather as agents of intercession or compromise for the sake of translating differences for children. As is evident, this New Mexican writer does not simply analyze a given situation; he indulges in proposing solutions to specific problems.

Ulibarrí also treads on sensitive topics, for example, in his essays "The Spanish Woman" and "Hispanic Individualism." The data presented might be questionable in its accuracy, but it makes enjoyable reading for the curious. While avoiding any polemics or more current revisionism by feminists, he manages to make succinct assessments of highly complex social phenomena by grounding his comments on Spain. Not developing the idea to its maximum possibilities, he does not venture into prescribing Hispanic women's roles in today's society. Instead, he opts for concluding how religion has directly shaped Spanish culture: "One would almost dare to say that Spain is more Marian than Christian" ("The Spanish Woman," 4). It would have perhaps been more enticing to sociologically apply this cultural value to peoples in a locally recognizable setting, although the associations are implied. His comment "Spain comes pretty close to being a matriarchy" ("The Spanish Woman," 5) is at the very least provocative and contains an ideological point worth examining further, given that he seems to turn the patriarchal system on its ear. Men, instead of appearing strong and virile, occupy the status of a satellite in the family organization, at times approaching the quality of wimps who are unable to handle minimal household chores. In "Hispanic Individualism," Ulibarrí again places his subject in Spain, leaving it unsaid as to its concrete relevance to Hispanics in the Americas. He prefers to examine original Iberian roots from a philosophical stance rather than specifics to people in this continent, perhaps hinting that constants remain as cultural determinants and that their new variants are too complex to adequately unravel into totally new entities. This is the selection process of a thinker who chooses his topics and develops an ideology of culture. Through the power of association we are to appreciate a legacy of racial mixtures and syncretic deities. The intimate experience of miscegenation with indigenous peoples and of African origin only seem to augment Hispanic complexity, diversity, and differences into a true melting pot, almost to the point that it is virtually impossible to reach a single classification. In other words, they defy any Eurocentric concept of ethos.

Therefore, the author in many of his essays alludes more to Hispanic antecedents as unique in comparison with the rest of Europe, and he concentrates less on how different Hispanics have become by leaving it understood. He covers controversial points related to "national character" à la Octavio Paz; however, he is careful not to

become a victim of pitfalls inherent in that approach. Nonetheless, he evaluates general trends and interprets their meaning without depending on empirical information to prove his observations. For example, in "Spanish Catholicism," he incisively observes, "even the atheists in Spain are Catholic. Catholicism is more than a religion, it is a way of life" (1). His perspective leans toward highlighting constants and common denominators that still remain as factors conditioning our way of seeing the world. For that reason, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that he is more of a thinker and a poet than a sociologist.

On close review of Sabine Ulibarrí's essays, we discover a vantage point of unforgettable exposés that permit reflection by rethinking and reformulating concepts toward culture and Hispanics in particular. Sometimes fiery or feisty and other times patiently didactic, his essays lead the reader / audience through a new mental path of evaluating history and social behavior. He is adept at mapping out valuable strategies of viewing Hispanic culture as an important-but different-element in American society. Pride glows throughout a firm but rational resistance. He resists facile rhetoric laden with political jargon; instead, he pursues the means of persuasion through careful analyses. He alludes to a people's long-standing presence, durability, and resilience *vis-à-vis* social changes, conquests, and onslaughts. In addition, he shows the path toward change without making that process become a one-way road toward unconditional assimilation. Ulibarrí then taps into common sense, historical consciousness, and cultural-political rights. As a reminder of what we have been, he emphasizes retaining the essence of our ethos. Finally, he provides an essayistic testimony that although certain institutions (e.g., *sociedades literarias*, or literary associations) are things of the past, that he has fulfilled a role of informant, conscience, troubadour, critic, spokesman, and role model who has tried to fill a void. If the Hispanic voice has not been as prevalent as before, he now sets out to demonstrate how to relive that tradition by manifesting small dosages of a spirit filled with *inquietud* and commitment for his people, thus reclaiming part of ourselves in the process. Ulibarrí's essays, his person, his message, and his ideas embody the cultural philosophy of a New Mexican Hispanic whose time in history has always been now.

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NOTES

¹ To confirm this impression, one might review such works as René Wellek and Austen Warren's *Theory of Literature*, Rafael Lapesa Melgar's *Introducción a los estudios literarios*, Charles Tatum's *Literatura chicana*. The general finding is a penchant for overlooking the essay-or at least downplaying

it-as if it does not form part of the five traditionally established genres. For a more ample discussion, consult Robert G. Mead, Jr.'s *Breve historia del ensayo hispanoamericano* in conjunction with Peter G. Earle's and Robert G. Mead, Jr.'s *Historia del ensayo hispanoamericano*.

² Given the divergent views on the nature of the essay, Enrique Anderson Imbert opts to avoid the tempting pitfalls of a definition thus: "Como no creo en los géneros tampoco creo en las definiciones. Una aproximación escolar sería: el ensayo es una composición en prosa, discursiva pero artística por su riqueza en anécdotas y descripciones, lo bastante breve para que podamos leerla en una sentada, con un ilimitado registro de temas interpretados en todos los tonos y con entera libertad desde un punto de vista muy personal (120; Since I don't believe in genres neither do I believe in definitions. A scholastic attempt might be: the essay is a composition in prose, discursive but artistic for its richness in anecdotes and descriptions, sufficiently brief so as to read it in one sitting, with an unlimited register of themes interpreted from all angles and with total freedom from a very personal point of view).

³ The published essays are as follows: "La lengua: Crisol de la cultura," in Marie Esman Barker's *Español para el bilingüe*; "Cultural Heritage of the Southwest," in Philip D. Ortego's *We Are Chicanos*; and his foreword to *La fragua sin fuego/No fire for the Forge*.

⁴ This term, generally understood in various ways, here is utilized according to the concepts proposed by Jacques de Derrida (141) in "Differáncé" when he states, "We shall designate by the term differáncé the movement by which language, or any code, any system of reference becomes 'historically' constituted as a fabric of difference. "Differáncé is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element is said to be 'present,' appearing on the stage of the presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element."

⁵ Any reference to specific essays contained within this collection will be referred to with their corresponding pagination by individual article because the unpublished manuscript lacks consecutive pagination. The essays contained are as follows: 1. "Differences and Similarities Between the Hispanic and the Anglo-American Cultures"; 2. "The Spanish Woman"; 3. "Hispanic Individualism"; 4. "The Hispano: A Case of Names and Identity"; 5. "Spanish Catholicism"; 6. "Language and Culture"; 7. "Education and Stereotypes and Caricatures"; 8. "A Land and a People"; 9. "Foreign Language Teaching: Who Gives a Damm?"; 10. "The Language Teacher"; 11. "Children and a Second Language"; 12. "Hispanic Literature in the U.S.A."; 13. "Sor Juana, the Woman"; and 14. "The Magic of Don Juan."

⁶ *El ensayo mexicano moderno* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958: 10-11). The author offers the following categories: (1) ensayo como género de creación literaria (the essay as a genre of creative writing); (2) ensayo breve, poemático (the brief, poetic essay); (3) ensayo como fantasía, ingenio o divagación (the essay as fantasy, ingenuity, or digression); (4) ensayo-discurso u oración (the essay-speech or oration); (5) ensayo interpretativo (the interpretive essay); (6) ensayo teórico (the theoretical essay); (7) ensayo de crítica literaria (the essay of literary criticism); (8) ensayo expositivo (the expository essay); (9) ensayo-crónica o memoria (the chronicle-essay or memoir); and (10) ensayo breve, periodístico (the brief, journalistic essay).

Hard-Core Barrio Revisited: Violence, Sex, Drugs and Videotape through a Chicano Glass Darkly. Introduction to *Barrio on the Edge/ caras viejas y vino nuevo*

History is on fast forward it's the age of synthesis...
Rubén Martínez, *The Other Side*

1. FROM HARD-CORE BARRIO TO IVY LEAGUE

Alejandro Morales is typical of those who have managed to overcome that centripetal and merciless social environment known as a hard-core barrio. From such unpropitious beginnings, he has emerged to become a definite force in contemporary Chicano literature, particularly the experimental novel, by combining *nouveau roman* aesthetics, a Latin American thrust and a Chicano impulse. Although a metonymic barrio resonates in much of his work—from hard-core to affluent—Morales also grounds his narratives in a sense of veiled historicity, almost implying that these narratives require a matrix or foundation in order to establish a verisimilitude of their own. Except for his first novel, *Caras Viejas y Vino Nuevo* (1975), which obsessively focuses on the barrio, his fiction generally consists of a complex network of related stories that interlace a series of characters and their circumstances and go beyond any spatial and social confines. Morales weaves together strands of human drama by juxtaposing existential experiences with historical backdrops, or social dilemmas with purely aesthetic fancies, thus breaking down the barrier between social realism and craft-oriented fiction. Most of all his novels attempt to reinvent themselves by contributing to the discourse of difference and innovation.

Alejandro Morales was born on October 14, 1944, and raised in the Simons barrio of Montebello, California, not far from downtown Los Angeles. Born to working-class Mexican immigrant parents, he received most of his early education in the immediate neighborhood, which consisted of a town built around the Simons Brick Company. This town developed into a barrio totally separate from the surrounding communities. Morales states that the town was virtually owned and managed by the owner of the company, Walter Robey Simons, whose paternalistic benevolence prevailed until 1953

when the company was shut down. The insular existence of the Mexican workers soon turned into a life of conflict and chaos as they saw their town literally disintegrate.

When schools in the Simons barrio closed, Morales transferred to other schools; he attended Montebello Junior High and Montebello High School from which he graduated in 1963, a time in his life that was to mark him forever. Between his senior year and first year at California State University at Los Angeles—which he attended from 1963 to 1967 and from which he received his B.A. in 1967— he became involved with a rough East Los Angeles crowd and was swept up in the world of alcohol and drug abuse. The lowest point he experienced was when he ended up in a barroom brawl and was convicted of assault and battery, serving time in the Los Angeles County Jail. The young Morales had felt disoriented and unsure of his future, but this traumatic event shocked him into action. From this point on, he began to express his reflections and inner turmoil through writing, “trying to write my way out of the mess that I was in.”

In 1967 he began to settle down, marrying Rohde Teaze in the same year and briefly working as a teacher at Claremont High School between 1968 and 1969. His goal, however, was to radically change his environment and meet new challenges; thus, in 1969 he enrolled in Rutgers University from which he received his M.A. in 1971 and his Ph.D. in Latin American literature in 1975. Since then, he has worked as a professor of Latin American and Chicano literatures at the University of California at Irvine while also serving as an essayist, critic, and book reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*. Morales has received numerous recognitions and awards, such as the Ford Foundation Fellowship (1972-73), the ITT International Fellowship (1973-74), and the Mellon Foundation Fellowship (1975), and he was a finalist for the Mexica Press Literary Prize for *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* in 1974. Curiously, this novel did not attract a publisher among Chicano literary outlets, which saw in it a controversial portrayal of hard-core barrio life at a time when they sought uplifting narratives of social vindication and redemption. As a result, Morales resorted to Editorial Joaquín Mortiz in Mexico City, which accepted the project as a way of testing the literary waters of the time.

2. FROM THE EXPERIENTIAL TO EXPERIMENTAL EXPRESSIONISM

Alejandro Morales stands out as one of the most prolific Chicano writers, with five novels, various short stories, and numerous critical articles to his credit. His work has had a considerable international impact: there are now six translations of his major novels besides the versions in English or Spanish, including Dutch and French translations. He forms part of an important nucleus of Chicano writers who independently connected with the Chicano literary movement of the 1970s by contributing new perspectives and a new language. Along with Ron Arias in *The*

Road to Tamazunchale (1975), Isabella Ríos in *Victuum* (1975), and Miguel Méndez in *Peregrinos de Aztlán* (1974), Morales introduced new techniques and ambiguous language as fundamental elements of Chicano narrative. Thus Morales's writings exceed in craft what Tomás Rivera had initiated in 1971 with "... y no se lo tragó la tierra," a highly respected experiment but which continued the social realist mode. Morales's generation, on the other hand, shattered the sense of refractive realism that claimed authenticity and genuine social commitment.¹

In addition to the polemical *Caras viejas y vino nuevo*,² Morales has published *La verdad sin voz* (1979), *Reto en el paraíso* (1983), *The Brick People* (1988), and *The Rag Doll Plagues* (1992). In this group of writings, we find constant renovation and persistent experimentation. He moves from the hard-core barrio ambience of imprecise physical and character representation to more global issues dealing with the long-standing threat of plagues—even in the future—in *The Rag Doll Plagues*. In his second novel, Morales creates intrigue by juxtaposing three story lines: the social idealism of an Anglo doctor, the struggles of a university professor with academia, and Mexico's troubles with modernization. *Reto en el paraíso* is more epic in scope, weaving a series of multilayered stories—including existential, historical, social, magical realist, and mythical elements—into the highly experimental composition of a *novela totalizadora*, whereas *The Brick People* aims to recreate a specific place through a social biography while mixing historicity with magical realism. In sum, Morales offers a wide array of subjects and has been experimenting extensively with a variety of discourses, but in essence he reinterprets history from a Chicano point of view in order to better appreciate what connects Chicanos to both the United States and Mexico, officially as well as unofficially.

3. CARAS VIEJAS Y VINO NUEVO: CONTEXT, INSPIRATION, AND RELEVANCE

Some works withstand the test of time and even seem to evolve as they acquire new meaning and significance beyond what was ascribed at the time they were written.³ By breaking through the time barrier, these works resist a single classification thanks to their constant adaptability and universality. Sometimes they seem to be noticeably different only because readers adopt a new perspective and worldview. The reason that Alejandro Morales's novel *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* contains as much relevance today as it did in its original form in 1975 is not only that it has undergone this kind of metamorphosis but that it was ahead of its time. In many ways, it probably offers greater insight into the demoralization of contemporary barrio life—unbridled violence, car-jackings, a proliferation of drugs and weapons, sexual abuse, dysfunctional

families, turf warfare, and a general sense of futility and disillusionment—than at the time of its publication. The Chicano reading public of 1975 simply was not prepared to receive such striking depictions of the hard-core barrio, with its crude, graphic details imbedded in a language that resisted itself.

Part of the work's dilemma was that it attempted to thrust an emerging Chicano readership into the complex world of modern novel making. After all, popular themes such as migration, lower-class suffering, and neoindigenist mythification were very much in vogue in the Chicano literature of the time as ways of legitimating a messianic cultural agenda. The treatment of urban topics, on the other hand, still seemed rudimentary or at least secondary and poorly conceptualized. Therefore, it was a shocking quantum leap from Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales's *Yo soy Joaquín* (1967), a textbook history lesson of Chicano poetics filled with pathos and redemption, to Alejandro Morales's *Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, which offered an inverted ambience of negation and ambiguity that challenged the senses as well as traditional meanings. Morales's sublime nationalism, practically invisible on the surface, confused those who wished to indulge in a positive social realism through uplifting narratives of cultural regeneration and renewal. Indeed, this novel both irked and baffled those who expected epic idealizations with characters determined to overcome their adverse circumstances. The neonaturalist bent of *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* was simply too hard to swallow for many readers because it represented a real nightmare they would have to relive.

Morales's novel focused on the battlefield of the present and the future in urban pockets of poverty known as hard-core barrios, where Chicanos suffered second-class citizenship, marginality, and alienation. The agricultural fields, in conjunction with the United Farm Workers' struggle led by César Chávez, had already become a domain where some small but significant triumphs were visible and where a sense of pride had developed. However, urban America was the last frontier for Chicanos; there discrimination and a lack of opportunity were particularly acute in the midst of what some Chicanos saw as inhuman conditions. Barrios, then, once viewed as protective zones of relative insularity and cultural homogeneity, were quickly becoming wastelands, turning into hotbeds of tension and contention. If the farm worker sector is given credit for initiating the Chicano movement, the subsequent urban struggle continued the movement and garnered measurable gains in civil rights beyond the workplace. The barrio offered a microcosm of historical relegation within American society; as a depository of long-standing problems and neglect, it became the threshold and anchor for Chicano mainstreaming. In other words, the barrio would make or break Chicano self-determination.

Morales's *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* delves into this dynamic by unveiling a social stratum that many Chicanos preferred to overlook. The novel rattled their illusions of social mobility and economic development by portraying the barrio as a place that was their best friend and worst enemy. However, it was not enough to re-create an ambience in strictly realistic terms, a place that could be identified and located on a map. Instead, Morales chose a refraction of various barrios into one metaphorical barrio that is anonymous, geographically imprecise –although he indicates that it is in the general area of Los Angeles– and devoid of physical markers except for “this side” and “the other side.” What concerns Morales is an experiential, subjective barrio –a state of being rather than a place– that questions referents and the activity of referents. People live here, experience it from within, and perpetuate its vices as well as its virtues. The barrio has a life of its own, much like a cultural entity that marches to its own rhythm and conflictive circumstances. Morales's novel is not only about the odds of survival and life's predicaments, but also about challenges and intimations of a better tomorrow, or as an anonymous narrator (possibly Mateo, one of the main narrators) states: “Many dreams have covered the eyes with mystical desires and a brutally savage melancholy” (50).

The barrio may be a harsh and even corrosive place, but its rules only reflect an exaggerated image and distorted imitation of the outside world that influences and stifles it. It creates an extreme scenario for human survivability in the form of a caricature and convex reflection of the outside. Thus, the barrio becomes a cruel distortion of what mainstream society produces and then rejects and abandons much like a nonrecyclable pile of trash. It is precisely this ambience of despair that motivates Morales to try to understand its misfortune, decipher its complexities, and unfold its problematic condition through a series of contrasting characters involved in an existential struggle of Sisyphean proportions. Unable to change, the barrio has become cannibalistic and self-perpetuating, defeating any redemptive aspirations. Even so, Morales feels a compelling desire to pay homage to his hard-core barrio when he writes in the dedication of his novel: “For my barrio, which will be with me forever.”

4. ANALYSIS OF A BREWING INFERNO: “STARTING KAOS”⁴

Caras viejas y vino nuevo is a Chicano *Notes from the Underground* except that the voices emerge from a nowhere in which time defies space and space nullifies time. History here functions as intertext, and place as imagined contours. The barrio becomes ground zero, a sampling of urbanism lost in a no-man's-land that will later serve as on-ramps for freeways or parking lots for chain stores. More than an internal colony with political and economic ties, it is the ruins of a land ravaged by stagnation and an insuperable hopelessness, a brewing inferno that is about to explode. In this shattered world turned

inside out there is no room for euphemism and conventional social decorum. The barrio appears like a time bomb kept from exploding by tenuous rays of hope that become lost in the blurred shadows of instinct, vice, desire, and intentional fallacies. Characters are vague phantasms of themselves, personalities become mingled or confused, and discourse crisscrosses like lost ships at sea. Sharp delineations are purposely avoided to evoke a reality that is not measured by objective or empirical landmarks but that instead consists of a smattering of details that configure an abstract painting of interpenetrating shades. The result is that the reader is submerged in a world of indistinct shapes and voices that come out of the night, muddled by hallucinogenic substances.

Constructed in a hyperrealistic mode –I suggest the term “mystic realism”⁵– Morales’s text treads a new path for the Chicano novel within the current of the Latin American *nueva novela*. A definite spirit of renovation motivates Morales’s narrative, and its central impulse overturns traditional and formulaic novel writing in the manner of the antinovel. Whereas Tomás Rivera’s “... y no se lo tragó la tierra” attempted to blaze a trail in contemporary writing by describing the life of migratory workers through disjointed happenings and echoes (with a resonance of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*), and Ron Arias’s *The Road to Tamazunchale* injected serious humor into an old man’s fanciful defiance of death through tongue-in-cheek parody, Morales’s work opts for challenging the modes of neorealism through a combination of *nouveau roman* techniques and an unpredictable *Clockwork Orange*-type of antiaesthetic. The tone is iconoclastic, even zany, irreverent, and self-deprecating: “Psychiatrists masturbate horses and scream: The Russians are coming!” (36). *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* does not seek order and harmony; quite the opposite, it aims to faithfully re-create chaos in an urban jungle, and, as in José Eustacio Rivera’s *La vorágine* (1924), the characters are duly devoured by the environment.

Morales’s experimental narrative embarks on strategies that are indeed innovative and challenging. Ultimately, his novel invents itself, but what makes it particularly intriguing is that it accomplishes that objective through the extensive use of ellipsis. The narrative leaves much unsaid, which can partly be attributed to mind-altering substances that influence vision and memory, but it also seems to be holding back, giving only essential hints of actions and descriptions, in a shocking arrangement where texture and discourse are synonymous. That helps explain the splicing of loose clauses connected by insistent semicolons (film segments?) –awkward connectors of possible transitions or a mere grammatical device to join floating syntactical constructions, holding the narrative together like flimsy paperclips. As a result, the text represents only a small portion of what actually happens and what the characters sense and feel; that is, it recognizes its own limitations vis-à-vis the reality it represents. The

rest—a kind of vacuum, which is significant in itself—is suggested, hinted at, insinuated, and left between the lines. What we read is but a small fragment of the totality of a story that deals with a place in decline. Instead of giving the reader a slice of reality, the author chooses to focus on a graphic, expressionistic portrayal that challenges the senses. The narrative becomes an aura of language and of the tensions it contains, rather than running along a well-planned story line.

Conceived within the *nouveau roman* tradition and somewhat conditioned by postmodern Latin American novelistic experimentation—especially writings about the precarious situation of urban youth by Mexican La Onda writers such as Gustavo Sainz and José Agustín—*Caras viejas y vino nuevo*, the depiction of a Dantesque inner-city inferno, tries to capture a social reality that in the late sixties is either on the brink of extinction, about to explode, or on the verge of self-destruction. In such an atmosphere, all choices become troublesome and worthy of reflection because of their magnitude. A pathological fringe seems to populate the novel, accounting for the collision course between Julián's inevitable death (in the beginning) and Mateo's unjustified demise (at the end). Death moves the story along, for death is omnipresent, disguised in various shapes, lurking throughout the narrative like an unforgiving conscience. Morales resorts to familiar experimental techniques in order to regenerate the art of showing rather than telling and unfolds a new vision of a social experience that Chicanos had not come to terms with because it defies facile explanation: hard-core barrio life. Morales provides the prism through which to view that experience. The lens through which the narrative is filtered is the barrio inhabitants' perspective of rage and addictive escapism, in which emotions and complexes are openly displayed.

The central thrust of Morales's novel is to capture an ever-changing world with new techniques appropriate for presenting chaos and disorder as self-generating forces. Alain Robbe-Grillet, in *Towards a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (1965), proposes a nonrationalist approach to novel writing that does not claim theory as its ultimate goal but rather provides optics for viewing the human drama in the process of development. For Robbe-Grillet, there are no fixed signifiers when dealing with the discontinuous and with the inner dimensions, both intellectual and emotional, of human nature.⁶ Confusion and chaos are the elements that directly shape the narrative and the language: "With the vein about to burst, the ancient passion of every man will come forth to declare that words matter less than the clan's ageless, escalating fear" (50). Various levels of perceived reality merge to create a total subjectivity of the here and now consisting of instinctive passions, paroxysms, fears, atavistic behavior, and a generally affective state. Therefore, time is not chronological, space is not physically defined, and things—especially specific body parts captured with a zoom lens—take on a vital role as main

characters, almost replacing flesh-and-blood characters. Instead of being the central voice, the narrator simply becomes one more element in the story, often disappearing or blending in with other confused and confusing voices in this amorphous, fragmented, and polyphonic text.

To define the style in which *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* is written as mystic realism seems appropriate; thus, “They live their lives intoxicated; ... they always see reality gushing out of the bottle” (168). It is also consistent with presenting inhuman conditions and describing how people become their own worst enemies after assimilating violence as a lifestyle, drugs and alcohol as instruments of transcendentalism, sexual desire as purification or subjugation, and mere adrenaline as a source of momentum. Extremes are dominating in this social ambience. Greatly influenced by cinematographic discourse –there is much nervous camera positioning– Morales’s style resembles a mural of uninhibited images that pretend to tell it like it is with vulgar, and even pornographic, overtones. Embellishment is rare in these images of violence and visceral reactions, and at times the narrative takes on a frenzied pace, a frazzled verbosity using a convoluted syntax and confusing semantics, all contained within a grayish realm of indistinct shapes. Spatial references are ambiguous. Raw nerve, cynicism, fear, and rage drive the pulse of the narration, as shown in the agitation and frequent outbursts of Julián, the self-destructive protagonist. The irony resides in Julián’s relentless and almost childlike search for his dead mother –a veiled allusion to the Oedipus complex– which is senseless because he has directly contributed to her demise along with his abusive father. His need for immediate gratification, suicidal tendencies, and insolence are his basic weaknesses and make him elude any social responsibilities. Mateo, an intimate friend and admirer of Julián, functions as counterpoint in that he also participates in some of the questionable activities of hard-core barrio life while trying to find meaning in his life and the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Much of the novel’s highly charged style and content, including scatological language and erotically explicit descriptions, aims to produce sharp surrealistic images of the characters and their environment. It is impossible for the reader to remain neutral or objective when confronted with the sordid expressionism of the scenes. Just as Juan Rulfo’s novel *Pedro Páramo* was described as emerging from the *ultratumba*, Morales’s text is grounded in what might be termed *ultrasentidos*, that is, the raging force of unconscious feelings. Animalistic tendencies are prevalent, verbal warfare is common, and insults are everyday occurrences, as in the scene in which Julián is confronting his father: “He fell a spray all over his face and sensed a thick green glob of phlegm sliding down the side of his nose; from the corner of his right eye, Don Edmundo’s words battered him” (28, emphasis mine). *Tremendismo* (violence and

deformation), *esperpento* (the grotesque and the grossly disproportionate), and mystic realism (aberration of the senses and inverted ecstasy) become the three axes around which all action and characterization of the narrative rotate, in protest against a morally repulsive social order. The characters' only response to their environment is bizarre and pathetic behavior. A quasi-Gothic novel of phantasms rushing toward their inevitable death ("Many lives were born and died in those infinite moments" [56]), Morales's work is shaped by frequent distorted images that alter the senses and thus change the reader's perspective. At times, the language in this account of barrio life seen through a glass darkly alters an image, making it appear orgasmic, bristling with emotions and devoid of self-control. The following scene offers an insight into some of the techniques Morales uses in his text:

Julián opened a bottle of beer, gulped it down, peered at the light through the bottle a deformed coppery brown world, with her as if inside the bottle, naked and looking at her rash. Julián, bring me the Vaseline! Órale, Virgy, órale, he looked at her a bit mockingly and let out a diabolic laugh, yaaiiii, his finger pointing at her, yaaiiii. Vaseline, ay, Vaseline! (84)

At other times, scenes are filled with one eroticism and sexual depravity; love is actively sought, but only hallucinations or a deathly presence is encountered. The characters' sporadic attempts to transcend their situation are thwarted by an inverted and perverse mysticism that is quite distant from the union with God or any transcendental values. Divinity is understood as either delirium or hallucination, phenomena that preclude any form of communication. Instead of seeking divine guidance or perfection of the spirit, the characters use drugs and alcohol, sex, or rage as a means to escape from their suicidal environment: "They believe they have found themselves under a spiritual ecstasy without realizing that in fact their ecstasy is only a manifestation of mental alienation."⁷ The inhabitants of the barrio with their crushed spirits and dazed senses seem to be driven by oxymorons and paradoxes, such as "long live death," "young veterans," and "from the sewers emerge genies assaulting hatred."

In Morales's novel, synecdoches, fragmentation, and juxtaposition do not appear as mere techniques; they are the essence of the novel, the pillars around which revolves a vortex of multiple significances. Robbe-Grillet asserts that the new novel does not depend so much on plot and a sequential ordering of events but that, instead, gestures and things assume a special meaning as precarious tools.⁸ In this Chicano novel, truncated and incomplete descriptions contribute to the overall ambience of ambiguity.⁹ Frequently, violence is seen as if through a zoom lens that captures quick glimpses of fractured images, particularly of disjointed things instead of whole entities. Objectivity becomes a mere illusion in Morales's descriptions of barrio happenings:

The mob of angry bodies moved from one side to the other; it had a mind of its own, formed by everyone in the crowd who, given the opportunity, expressed a cathartic violence. Hearts palpitated in the bodies that were trying to avoid the melee ... Arms with punches, feet with kicks, heads with headbutts, mouths with bites and painful grimaces flooded by opened veins on faces, bellies, breasts, and balls of that whirlwind that engulfed them without their realizing it. One bloodied face with a mouth and smashed nose carne into full view. (46,48)

Here violence is not only a gratuitous act but also an integral part of all aspects of hard-core barrio life; it figures as a conditioning and socializing factor and can be triggered at any moment by feelings of hate or delirium. Thus Morales uses Julián's psychological portrait as a literary motif with which to unravel the action in the novel: "The worm in his head gnawed at him and increased the hatred he felt for his father" (24).

5. MORALES'S LITERARY TECHNIQUES

It is revealing to note the literary strategies the author uses to immerse the reader in the depths of hard-core barrio life. Normally the preterit tense (English simple past) would be used to describe to the reader what the place was like at an earlier time. If the author were to use the present tense, the reader would get the impression of a perpetual present focusing on the here and now, a strategy that might suggest that the narrative is devoid of a past. Morales's innovation rests on the clever device of depicting almost all the action in the imperfect tense (English past progressive)¹⁰ a kind of perpetual present within the past that continues to unfold until almost breaking the barrier of the present. Besides situating the narrative in the epicenter of past events, this device creates a sense of urgency by approximating the historical present. Most importantly, Morales's technique conveys *the* idea of a past that is in the process of becoming. The implication, then, is that an uncontainable past is fast approaching the present, or, as Rubén Martínez states: "History is on fast forward / it's the age of synthesis."¹¹ However, it could also suggest that this past is on *the* verge of manifesting itself, of reaching a point of no return, of exploding. Unfortunately, Max Martínez's original English translation of *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* obfuscated this sense of the past and of gestation by rendering most of the narrative in the simple past tense instead of the past progressive (or one of the other possible English translations of Spanish imperfect), thus distorting the historical perspective, which is keenly differentiated in the original text.

Although such a distinction may seem trivial, it is crucial to the overall design of the novel. The imperfect tense gives the reader a notion of the continuity of past actions as opposed to discontinuity or negation. By placing his readers in the vortex of things developing and evolving, Morales enables them to participate in their genesis. Instead

of emphasizing completed actions –as if objectivity were ever attainable– he stresses the unfolding of processes. Thus, by showing that it is in the process of becoming a historical entity, he effectively debunks the ahistorical stigma of the barrio. Morales’s literary stratagem, then, closes the gap between place and history, while immersing the reader in the human drama of feelings and passions. By using the imperfect tense, he gives his readers a glimpse into a developing consciousness in a place where they did not expect to find it. He could hardly have used a more effective device to make them feel and live the barrio from an insider’s vantage point while gaining a historical consciousness and perspective.

In addition, the “open-endedness” of the imperfect tense resembles the cinematographic technique of splicing images together to enhance the dramatic effect of a scene, except that in *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* the chronology of events is reversed, thus magnifying the significance of all the parts. The motion of reversal in the work parallels the rewinding of a videotape that is meant to be re-viewed indefinitely. The backward motion, much like a replay, provides a sense of reverberations and echoes but mainly serves to evoke the memory of past events. The intent is to trace the cause of these events by reconsidering the processes of causality so they can possibly be reordered or straightened out, allowing the reader to reach a conclusion that is different from that of the novel. The options are numerous: because barrio life, as depicted in Morales’s novel, is profoundly dehumanizing, perhaps another set of strategies should be sought to avoid the total demise of a place that could offer a semblance of community. Only by rewinding and re-viewing the tape can we gain a greater understanding of what is before us and search for other answers, different alternatives, and new solutions to the present dilemma.

Symbols and other signs presaging danger are numerous in Morales’s narrative; some are ambiguous, others have multiple meanings. Rampant violence lurks in every corner. The sensorial qualities of smell, sound, and taste add to the vitality of the work. Fires abound throughout the landscape as omens of things to come. In their double function as both a force of destruction and a means to purge malignant forces, these flames not only shed light on the end of an era but also signal a new one. Satanic elements like the Buenasuerte brothers – a name filled with bitter irony – serve to propel others toward self-destruction by providing drugs or inciting them toward violent acts or sexual abuse. Wailing sirens or *lloronas* hunt and haunt the barrio dwellers, suggesting an omnipresent mythological element in otherwise humdrum scenes of urban tension and personal tragedy. In Spanish this produces an effective play on words because sirens (*sirenas*) and wailing women (*lloronas*) can be mirror images, or at least echoes, of each other. The two become superimposed and confused, which

suggests that they may be one and the same.¹² The sirens—of police cars or ambulances undergo a metamorphosis and are perceived as the legendary wailing woman who is calling for her lost children, whom she has killed. The *llorona* figure, which suggests a larger Mexican cultural-historical background, is transformed into sirens: a way to warn of impending danger and possibly recover what has been lost. Guilt, obsession, social paralysis, and fear merge and assume control of the characters' personalities. Perhaps the Oedipus complex of the male characters reveals their unconscious desire to find a cultural mother who will comfort and protect them in the hostile environment in which they live.

6. *CARAS VIEJAS Y VINO NUEVO* AND THE SOCIAL REALITY OF THE BARRIO

When all these loose ends are tied together, the novel ceases to be mysterious or obscure. It is no longer only about human depravation in a hard-core barrio; its convoluted structure and explicit images serve as a catharsis in this terrifying world of inverted values, lurking violence, dazed senses, spiritual ecstasy, and bottled-up fury. The novel, then, as a depository of human degradation, offers damaging social implications. Although it might be considered merely an allegory of a place in critical need of renovation, its significance transcends that of a simple piece of engagé literature. Its Christian and biblical connotations are numerous: there are thirty-three passages associating drugs with the Host and the Eucharist;¹³ Mateo —the conscience of the barrio— bears the name of one of the apostles and principal writers of the New Testament; and references are made to Christmas, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, false prophets, and the unorthodox notion of mysticism.

The reader is informed, in passing, that the action takes place in a specific historical era, the late sixties, a time when barrios were beginning to make an effort to change their mortiferous existence and their place within a society that had traditionally abandoned them. The political implications here are sweeping because their efforts coincide with the Chicano movement's growing influence as it spread from the rural sector into inner-city life. A new awareness and consciousness of the self were emerging and seeping into the most remote corners of Chicano presence. In a scene that is emblematic of the entire novel, Julián enters a disgustingly filthy bathroom and sees himself reflected in black, swirling water, an image that reveals to him the depths of his self-destruction. He experiences a kind of epiphany that enables him to recover a part of himself, although for him it is too late. The cursory mention of a 1968 calendar hanging half-hidden behind the door is significant because it places his Dantesque descent within a precise historical frame. Julián, like the barrio he inhabits, has reached

the depths of decadence and degeneration, and all he can do is salvage the little that is left of himself.

Mateo, Julián's counterpoint, is the only person who is able to visualize a different social order. He becomes a witness, critic, and prophet of the barrio and eventually dies from leukemia. Although he does not die a violent death like some of the others, it is untimely nonetheless. It seems that the hard-core barrio has no mercy.

Caras viejas y vino nuevo depicts the moving and troubling living conditions of a human sector that has been passed over by historical evolution in this age of modernity. Progress here is a mirage, or at least only a fleeting phenomenon. Hard-core barrios encompass those spatial and social spheres that have been left relatively untouched by social progress and have become the dumping grounds of a society that stigmatizes, segregates, and differentiates. Morales's novel exemplifies the effects of long-standing subjugation and the toll it takes in strictly human terms: his characters are vulnerable human beings who have been reduced to a merely instinctual and animalistic level. In this zone of perdition, reality is distorted by drugs and other stimulants; vices and desires turn into perverted forms of overcoming adversity. To gain an understanding of the complexities of this kind of environment and its dehumanized inhabitants, we must rewind the tape and review the events that created it, hoping that new answers can be found somewhere along the way.

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NOTES

¹ For further discussion, see Francisco A. Lomelí, “State of Siege in Alejandro Morales’s *Old Faces and New Wine*,” 191-92.

² Citations of Morales’s *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* will be from my translation, *Barrio on the Edge*, and its corresponding pagination. From the start Morales’s Spanish text was received by critics with some dismay; there were serious reservations and even contempt in Mexico and the United States because of its obscure qualities and a somewhat convoluted syntax and structure. (See Evodio Escalante’s article, “Morales: escrito en chicano,” 1188.) Max Martínez’s 1981 translation of Morales’s text, *Old Faces and New Wine*, facilitated the accessibility of the work but fundamentally altered its effect by restructuring the narrative segments into “chronological” order, apparently in an effort to make the text easier to follow. Part of the central motive of the present translation is to capture the author’s original sense of experimentation as well as his Daedalian and, at times, deranged and disjointed virtuosity. I have made every effort not to embellish the original while trying whenever possible to reproduce within the confines of the English language the semantics and even syntax of the original. I have also attempted to re-create the explosive nature of the barrio – which is much like a time bomb – and its marginal condition, together with the author’s unclear geographical allusions within an ambiguous construct of references. All of this is intentional in the original and consequently reflected in the translation.

³ The twentieth anniversary of the novel’s publication and this present Clásicos Chicanos edition confirms that fact. *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* continues to be one of the most provocative and controversial Chicano novels.

⁴ This expression in graffiti form, which was found in East Los Angeles, offers a plurivalent significance filled with nuances and ambiguities. Is it a desire, a critical assessment, an objective, or simply an observation? The answer lies somewhere in the eyes of the beholder.

⁵ This mode of expression is unique for Morales and is used in this novel only. The author does not label his style as such.

⁶ See Robbe-Grillet, *Towards a New Novel*, 138-155.

⁷ González, “*Caras viejas y vino nuevo*,” 17. (Translation mine.)

⁸ Robbe-Grillet, *Towards a New Novel*, 21.

⁹ For further discussion, see my article, “State of Siege in Alejandro Morales’s *Old Faces and New Wine*,” 191-92.

¹⁰ This is one of the critical flaws I see in Max Martínez’s translation of Morales’s novel: he rarely distinguishes between the imperfect tense and the preterit, concentrating on the latter and virtually ignoring the former. It is also curious that critics have completely ignored a distinction that I regard

as being central to the structure of this novel.

¹¹ Martínez, *The Other Side*, 136.

¹² The ambivalence in this key symbol is perhaps best explained in Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 61-62. Campbell defines sirens as both “life-threatening” and “life-furthering.” In Morales’s work, however, the reference to Mexican culture is undoubtedly charged with traumatic historical overtones.

¹³ For further discussion, see my article “State of Siege in Alejandro Morales’s *Old Faces and New Wine*.”



Concentric Circles in *Real Women Have Curves* by Josefina López

While Chicano literature in general has made some inroads into mainstream American literary circles, not all genres or sub-groups have enjoyed equal attention. Canonizing efforts have established a plethora of writers who have attracted immediate recognition nationally and internationally. Even the most casual reader of Chicano/a literature can identify Luis Valdez, Sandra Cisneros, Alurista, Rudolfo Anaya, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa and others. The genres of the novel and poetry continue to garner the greatest following, consequently obscuring some other significant voices and expressions. Although theater with El Teatro Campesino contributed directly toward the Renaissance period, critical inquiries on theater have recently lagged considerably. Theater written by Chicanas meanwhile continues to represent one of the least developed of all areas.

In Donaldo Urioste's extensive bibliography which appeared in the third volume of Chicano writers of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in 1999 (Lomeli & Shirley 295-352), among the 39 works in theater cited, only 7 are by Chicanas, or a mere 18%. This telling statistic reveals a relatively gloomy picture as to creativity by women in theater. Studying the sociology and politics of such a situation could produce some interesting albeit troubling results, but the objective here is to examine the play by Josefina López, originally performed by El Teatro de la Esperanza at the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco on May 25, 1990 and published for the first time in 1992.¹ López stands out as one of the more outstanding Chicana dramaturgists whose penchant for theater has already earned her wide recognition for her humor, wit and genderized plots. Having written her first play at the age of eighteen, she has become a key vanguard figure in this genre thanks to scintillating as well as unforgettable works like *Simply María, or the American Dream* (1996), *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* (1997), *Unconquered Spirits: A Historical Play* (1997) and *Yes! You Too Can Be a Chingona* (1997). But it was *Real Women Have Curves: A Comedy* which definitely put her on the map for the poignant story of female bonding vis-à-vis external pressures and how they channel these into a conscious decolonizing process.

López's *Real Women Have Curves: A Comedy*, a two-act play consisting of five and four scenes, respectively, closely resembles Luis Valdez's actos through the frequent humor, satire and socially oriented topics, except that special care is taken to avoid overly

charged or propagandistic constructs. In other words, since the *commedia dell'arte* seems to prevail in many of the scenes, the author does not resort to agitprop dramatics, although they are suggested. Mexican tent theatrical techniques play a central role in a kind of slap-stick comedy and satire combined with other serious themes. The five plump to huge, or at least overweight, women characters here are not uni-dimensional or archetypal; rather, they resonate a network of concerns on culture, class and gender. They are described in the following terms:

ANA... 18, plump and pretty, sister of Estela, daughter of Carmen. She is a recent high school graduate and a young feminist.

ESTELA... 24, plump, plain-looking, owner of the 'Garcia Sewing Factory'.

CARMEN... 48, a short, large woman, mother of Ana and Estela. She has a talent for storytelling.

PANCHA... 32, a huge woman who is very mellow in her ways, but quick with the tongue.

ROSALÍ... 29, only a bit plump in comparison to the rest of the women. She is sweet and easygoing". (López 8)

What begins as deceptively simple and humoristic becomes a reflective investigation into a series of women's issues that are heavily gender-based, but which at times have widespread implications beyond gender.

The play functions at various levels by describing a series of concentric circles of different kinds of space, beginning with the setting of a small sewing factory, extending to realms outside the factory and concluding with interrogations into the female body. Estela as the owner of "García Sewing Factory" oversees her mother Carmen, her sister Ana and two other women, Pancha and Rosalí with the determination of finding viable ways to achieve the lofty goal of producing 100 dresses for Mrs. Glitz's women's garment corporation. What resembles a small-scale family sweat shop actually takes on a thematic thrust of female bonding whereby the women can appropriate the various spaces affecting them after experiencing a series of doubts, fears, indecisiveness and powerlessness. The goal of producing an astronomical number of dresses in such a short time becomes the catalyst in discovering their ultimate social status, their circumstance, their *latinidad* and finally their dignity and self-worth. This play of catharsis and transformation follows a chain of events whereby the characters discover their potential upon confronting forces that either estrange them from themselves or shackle their sense of freedom. What occurs is the unfolding of what Denise Chávez and Linda Feyder call a process of "shattering myths", that is, breaking images of domination: "It is the necessary process that our culture must experience in order to create new, more realistic images, more humane roles and relationships" (Chávez & Feyder, 1992: 8). In this manner, Josefina

López forms part of a new wave of Latina playwrights who are in the vanguard of “not only creating new images—perhaps new ‘myths’—but they are engaged in forging a new culture through art and the empowerment of women” (Chávez & Feyder 8). Such an impulse corresponds well to what Adela de la Torre and Beatriz M. Pesquera suggest in their anthology titled *Building With Our Hands: New Directions in Chicana Studies* (1993) in which they delineate acts of domination, acts of resistance, cultural representations, contested domains, hard choices and changing roles, and institutional as well as “uninstitutional lives”. Such configurations clearly imply a kind of renewed agency whereby Latinas redefine their gender in multiple ways and spheres.

The subtext of the play concretely appears as a response to the 1987 Simpson-Rodino Amnesty law designed stop the influx of undocumented people entering the U.S. by granting real residency to thousands living in the U.S. since 1982. Despite the exhibited humor, the play echoes a serious tone.

A series of internal dynamics between the five women contribute to their approach toward resolving problems and at the same time produce a unique *esprit de corps*. The first inner circle consists of a family triangle – a kind of alternative trinity of strength – comprised of Estela and her incessant search for social mobility, which is constantly thwarted by her status as an undocumented person (the only one with that status in the family and among the group of women workers). She resents society’s view of her as an “illegal alien” as if she were abnormal, or a type of interloper or intruder unworthy of any rights. This perception motivates her to excel and meet any challenge possible. Her self-worth and legitimation then are measured by her productivity. Carmen, on the other hand, acts as the supporting mother willing to contribute to her daughter’s business while enjoying a good time and indulging in light *chisme*. She often brings *mole* (a Mexican sauce containing ground chocolate, chile and other spicy ingredients) and rice for the workers at the same time that she injects humor through anecdotes and life experiences. In contrast, Ana, the youngest member of this self-defined circle, reluctantly and disdainfully participates in this work environment, except that her involvement is understood in terms of killing time before going on to college.

As a budding feminist, Ana serves as a conscience for all of the women but in the process discovers – to her amazement – their (and her) condition as workers. As the internal chronicler of their situation, Ana goes from exercising a keen individualism to discovering a sense of a worker’s cause. Also, as the youngest member her idealism becomes a tool of resistance in order to address garment workers’ plight but, even more so, women in particular. The last parliament in the play demonstrates a clear crystallization of a developing ideology:

ANA. I always took their work for granted, to be simple and unimportant. I was not proud to be working there at the beginning. I was only glad to know that because I was educated, I wasn't going to end up like them. I was going to be better than them. And I wanted to show them how much smarter and liberated I was. I was going to teach them about the women's liberation movement, about sexual liberation and all the things a so-called educated American woman knows. But in their subtle ways they taught me about resistance. About a battle no one was fighting for them except themselves. About the loneliness of being women in a country that looks down on us for being mothers and submissive wives. With their work that seems simple and unimportant, they are fighting.... Perhaps the greatest thing I learned from them is that women are powerful, especially when working together...." (López 69).

Besides the inner circle of the aforementioned trinity, there is the other concentric circle of the other two women: Pancha and Rosalí, who both complement and add to the overall thematics. Together, the five women create a series of links in the form of the Olympic rings, a kind of bond of solidarity, as tenuous as some of the connections may appear. In López's play, two core issues operate at opposite ends of the spectrum: Estela's omnipresent status as an 'illegal alien' in the United States versus the politics of 'real women' who do not fit the so-called ideal size 7 of half-starved, bone-displaying models of a hegemonic culture. This form of body or moral terrorism gnaws at the women through an implicit *violence* of victimization. All action as well as self-realization hinges on claiming or reclaiming their space of work, and by extension, their bodies or their respective selves. A constant struggle for legal status hovers over the characters like Damocles' sword, ironically so, even for the women who are already legal—the exception is Estela, the owner of the garment shop, who continues to be undocumented. When someone reminds Pancha not to worry about La Migra,² she states "Ay, I keep forgetting". The reduced quarters of an asphyxiating working space (a kind of hell) become emblematic of their condition as workers and women. Repeated allusions to calming effects create a sense of encirclement and persecution: constantly closing doors, opening them cautiously, interpreting *any outside* footsteps as La Migra, creating secret codes for knocking on the door, play acting, silencing each other to avoid detection, exacerbating the hot working conditions by not allowing fresh air in, avoiding contact with outsiders, etc. A leitmotif of hiding persists as if their person, their status as workers and their bodies need to remain out of sight. In one scene, they refer to themselves thus: "Vamos a estar como gallinas enjauladas" (López 25). The mousetrap in the opening scene parallels their situation and the machine on which they greatly depend for their livelihood and social mobility is not coincidentally termed an over-lock machine. In other words, their entrapment becomes well greased conditioning and partly self-generated as if for their own protection, consequently

suffering a cleansing process, or peripeteia, by which they reemerge with new vigor and determination.

Framed somewhat within the ideological theater model, the work navigates many murky ethical questions mixed in with humor, self-deprecation and ultimately a deconstruction of positionality through *chisme*, the instrument by which they distinguish truth from fiction, mirage from substance or forced disguises from real outfits. *Chisme*, a form of implicit play-acting, allows them to freely and without inhibitions discuss options while evaluating each other's relationships. Thanks to *chisme* they compare notes, acquire information and keep each other honest or at least as a part of the esprit de corps. Through *chisme* they discuss sex and men. For that reason, the characters follow a path of revelation to become de-colonized as objects of desire and subjugation by ceasing to simulate or imitate what they are not. The play essentially offers the many obstacles these women face in order to strip such external impositions, leading to a highly comical scene in which they literally disrobe near the end because of the unbearable heat and the demands of working against the clock and deadlines. The scene is highly symbolic because of its collective nature, as if getting to the bare truth about who they really are. Much like the Pachuco figure in *Zoot-Suit* who rises with affirmation from the assault from the sailors, their inhibitions are also lost and they become women ready to defy the magazine ideals of female models. They discover, therefore, that 'real women' are shapely, even full-figured and in some cases *rellenitas*, and set out to reestablish what they are about through a sense of gender politics—a sign of political reaffirmation. They mock the size 7 dresses they are forced to sew and initiate an empowering act by making more realistic sizes, such as 14, which fit them comfortably. As an act of protest, Estela calls Mrs. Glitz and announces her refusal to continue making such 'unrealistic' sizes, and together with the other women workers, they agree to open a boutique with sizes that fit regular or real women. By overcoming their initial shame, they manage to repossess their dignity and courage with an anti-essentialist posture while liberating themselves from such social strictures that define body and, ultimately, soul.

Divided into two acts, the dramatic piece emphasizes a construct of five (5 characters working during 5 days), historically placed to coincide with the amnesty of 1987. The author creates the environment of unsettling fear and even persecution and the consequent instinctive reaction to scatter and hide from the ever-changing presence of an imagined but forever haunting Migra. Its presence provokes the initial fear but also becomes the source that ironically leads each woman toward a new state of liberation from varying circumstances. The Migra, a social force of Gestapo tactics, moves the women toward cautious movements and enclosures. They consequently come to grips

with and confront the main issues that concern them: Estela does everything possible to avoid detection and deportation by becoming self-reliant; Carmen overcomes her submissiveness while managing to accept her body's cycles (i.e. menopause); Ana injects a renewed feminism while overcoming her youthful haughtiness; Rosalí learns to deal with the political implication of dieting; and Pancha gains new insight into sexuality while debunking it as a taboo. In the end, each gains a greater awareness of women, womanhood, women in labor (meant in multiple ways) and indeed as social beings. The necessary introspection (in the reduced quarters) allows for the women to achieve a higher order of potential and individuation for the sake of accepting themselves for who they are, thus responding to outside influences and impositions on their gender, their conditioning and their bodies.

The concentric circles multiply as the women's concerns intersect. From the external force of the Migra, their attention goes inwards onto themselves. Estela actually gains confidence and lets the Migra become less of a deterrent in her decisions, thus conquering that fear. Carmen, the mother, overcomes an imagined pregnancy at the same time she focuses on what is real and what isn't: for example, she realizes that a van roaming the neighborhood is not the Immigration Service. But, she is not alone: somewhat like Don Quixote and his windmills, others confuse allelullahs for winos, homeless for spies, and police for immigration officials. Ana, youngest member, teaches them how to say "no" in a key scene of gaining clarity of purpose:

CARMEN. **Pobre mujer**, I'm lucky **mi viejo** doesn't hit me.

ANA. Lucky? Why lucky? It should be expected that he doesn't. That woman should leave her husband. Women have the right to say 'no'.

PANCHA. You think it's that easy?

ANA. No, she's probably dependent on him financially, or the church tells her to endure, or she's doing it for the children.

PANCHA. You're so young. Did it ever occur to you that maybe she loves him?

ANA. I'm sure she does. But we can't allow ourselves to be abused anymore. We have to assert ourselves. We have to realize that we have rights! We have the right to control our bodies. The right to exercise our sexuality. And the right to take control of our destiny. But it all begins when we start saying... (*ANA quickly climbs on top of a sewing machine to continue preaching.*)... **¡Ya basta!** No more! We should learn how to say no! Come on, **Amá**, say it! Say it!

CARMEN. What?

ANA. Say it! "No!"

CARMEN. Okay, I won't.

ANA. **Amá**, say "No!"

CARMEN. (*as if she won't*). No.

ANA. Good! Rosalí, say it.

ROSALÍ. (*casually*). ¿Pues por qué no? No.

ANA. Pancha, say it. No! (*PANCHA stares at ANA, she won't say it.*)” (López 33-34)

In this scene, they collectively, and individually, reach a new state of awareness about their rights and most of all about their condition. Their person as well as their social status take on new meaning. Such reminders are symptomatic of the process they need to experience in order to better understand their social roles as women and Latinas.

Needless to say, the effects are liberating as they now see each other as women beyond any categories, compartments, stereotypes or boxed-in notions. The concentric circle of their sense of collectivity and solidarity tightens, perceiving their group as a force to reckon with. Indeed they have come a long way from the previous state of distrust and apprehension, secret competitiveness and the dogged propensity to underestimate themselves.

In other words, for the first time they demand to be taken seriously, consequently shedding themselves of one more barrier imposed on them by social norms, established by both men and other women. In order to reaffirm their newfound sense of camaraderie, they form a semicircle—again, notice the emphasis on circles, they hug and laugh triumphantly. Without sounding redundant, they come full circle to expect a new social order and one they begin to act out on their terms.

Real Women Have Curves: A Comedy by Josefina López represents a work that thematically creates a space, a safe zone (much like Ana's seclusion in the bathroom to write her observations), whereby women appropriate it as theirs after eliminating the layers of contestation and tension among them — in great part, thanks to humor. While each reserves a personal agenda, each brings to the table baggage of being women who don't easily fit into any mold by Anglo American standards. Through echoes of Brecht, Ibsen, Pirandello and Valdez, these women face their estrangement, they uncover their true identities, they seek a collective truth through otherness and they unmask societal mythifications about their cultural background, their social status (including class) and in particular concepts of normativity in relation to body size. Therefore, what starts out as an exploration into the psychological effects of scars of being and living as “illegals” or undocumented, soon evolves into other psycho-social concerns. If their legal status is the larger concentric circle that

controls them instinctively, the work then focuses on other more compelling factors, such as the acceptance of being larger women. Partly dedicated to Susan Orbach for her pivotal book titled *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, the five protagonists, each in her unique way, come to realize that acceptance of who they are marks the true first step toward liberating themselves from that and other complexes. They suddenly become decolonizing agents of change ready to act on what they consider most important without necessarily giving into the temptation of making diets or fatness their main focus. In this work that mocks and resists ridiculous standardization, the women choose economic action as their first battleground and as the focal point to begin to address other issues affecting their lives. In that way, they decide to establish a boutique of evening gowns and accessories designed by Estela and company, except that the products will consist of sizes that correspond to what they consider 'real women,' that is, sizes 13 and 14. Therefore, López's work interrogates what real or common women means. By turning an apparently sexist expression on its ear, the play allows a catharsis to develop whereby the women learn about gender issues thanks in great part to closed physical quarters, that is, a closed circle that forced them to become closer psychologically and ideologically. An open circle also develops in the form of outwardness by which they overcome their fears while preparing for their dreams and aspirations. The act of handing Estela their checks to create a common account symbolizes the degree of trust in their enterprise but, most of all, in each other. The play ultimately shows how solidarity and common purpose can lead to a heightened sense of consciousness as they envision greater freedom to define for themselves *their* social domain. The body, as a decolonized cultural artifact, offers a network of new meaning by which to discover, comment and act on other definitions of power, potential and desire.

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NOTES

¹ The play was later published in 1992 by Rain City Projects from Seattle.

² The terms “Migra” is short for Immigration Service, which is generally perceived as an element of persecution against Latinos.



Peregrinos de Aztlán: Textimonio de desesperanza(dos)

¡Coros henchidos desgañitándose
en los eternos laberintos del silencio!
(*Peregrinos de Aztlán* 146)

1. PROLEGÓMENOS

Miguel Méndez representa un verdadero caso único en las letras chicanas, en gran parte por su cualidad arrolladora como poeta, cuentista, ensayista y novelista, pero más aun por haberlo logrado como autodidacta. Mientras que otros escritores cuentan con un entrenamiento formal, y algunos incluso tienen la máxima formación de un doctorado universitario, Méndez — sin títulos ni diplomas — ha desarrollado su distintivo estilo gracias a su profunda dedicación a la escritura. Es decir, encarna lo que podría denominarse un autor popular debido a sus orígenes humildes. Su manejo magistral de un lenguaje rico, variado y polifónico produce un repertorio tal que su estilo es uno de los más nutridos en la literatura chicana. Además, su concepción nativa de una imaginería propia de la región entre Sonora y Arizona, y su sentido mítico del tiempo, marcan dos tonalidades originales. Como posible analogía, Miguel Méndez ha contribuido giros barrocos a las letras chicanas de igual manera que Alejo Carpentier dejó sus huellas en la literatura hispanoamericana.

A pesar de ser reconocido como una de las máximas voces chicanas, sobre todo en México, Miguel Méndez sigue siendo relativamente postergado como escritor de primera fila. Los críticos suelen aludir con comentarios laudatorios a su extraordinario léxico, mas no ha llegado a figurar como parte de la ola de escritores chicanos más leídos. La razón dada es su lenguaje exigente que aborda en lo barroco con giros singulares de la frontera, lo cual demanda del lector un perfecto conocimiento del español estándar como los regionalismos típicos del habla yaqui, incluyendo también todas las variantes posibles del español popular (por ejemplo, del ámbito rural), del barrio o del que traspasa las clases sociales. Méndez recoge y reconstruye un lenguaje que generalmente se había considerado anticuado y olvidado o ajeno a la creación literaria, otorgándole una nueva configuración con su fina sensibilidad de poeta perspicaz. Así le inyecta nueva vitalidad

y validez a un lenguaje soterrado que se había mantenido al margen de la expresión escrita. Aunque no crea neologismos o un lenguaje nuevo, no cabe duda de que acude a una fuente verbal y de imágenes arraigada en la tradición oral donde el lenguaje multifacético y algo rebuscado cuenta por sí como manifestación de una cosmovisión milenaria de matices arcaicos y meticulosos refinamientos. Hace relucir, entonces, un mundo lingüístico que está configurado de ecos de las antiguas crónicas por su detalle y su rica reserva de palabras utilizadas para así precisar lo visto o lo experimentado. Es un lenguaje donde la imaginación siempre está a punto de encontrarse con sorpresas o repentinos cambios (*shifts*) semánticos. Por eso se requiere a un lector agudo, paciente y determinado a descifrar todos los retos léxicos y verbales por haber.

2. TRASFONDO BIOGRÁFICO

Nacido el 15 de junio de 1930 en Bisbee, Arizona, apenas a unas cinco millas de la frontera con México en el barrio “Tin Town”, Miguel Méndez experimenta el repentino desarraigo a los cinco meses cuando su padre se encuentra desempleado por la clausura de las minas durante la década de la depresión. Esto provoca el éxodo de la familia al trasladarse al ejido El Claro en el estado de Sonora, donde recibe su primera y única instrucción formal hasta el sexto grado. Admite la impresión permanente que deja en él ese pueblo lleno de tragedia y dolor, un lugar intenso de inesperados roces con gente desamparada de todas partes, incluyendo familias yaquis y algunos repatriados como sus padres. Allí le brota un estado de ánimo particular, permitiendo que se le grabaran sensaciones que después son claves en su vena creadora. Según ha declarado, ese espacio y tiempo contribuyen a su sensibilidad: “Mi espíritu de niño lastimado prevalece en mí en una melancolía suave que me resguarda de la tristeza grande, siempre latente” (Alarcón 1981: 3). Como llega a gozar de la lectura a una temprana edad, gracias a las lecciones de su madre, luego le surgen unos deseos incontenibles por la escritura a los diez años. Y así se desprende su impulso motivador: “La causa principal que despertó en mí la afición a escribir fue la de construirme un mundo interior, vasto y siempre en expansión” (Alarcón y Cárdenas 151).

Para 1945 el joven Miguel Méndez regresa solo a Arizona para probar su suerte y se instala en Tucson en 1946, ciudad donde permanece hasta hoy día. Luego se dedica a diversos trabajos manuales como campesino, labrador y, más tarde, descubre su oficio más duradero como empleado de obras de construcción y albañil. En los campos agrícolas llega a pizcar prácticamente de todo, por ejemplo, frutas y verduras, y es un tanto en el ámbito rural como el urbano donde empieza a escuchar historias y anécdotas de una masa de personas ambulantes. Aquí se topa con una buena parte de la materia prima de su creación literaria a la vez que empieza a perfilarse su temática social en

un primer borrador novelístico a los dieciocho años. En una entrevista señala que su actividad de cuentista se inicia a fines de los años cuarenta y dura unos quince años, resultando en una serie de manuscritos que se quedan inéditos hasta el advenimiento del Movimiento Chicano de los sesenta (Rodríguez del Pino, 1977).

Su trayectoria creadora — por mucho tiempo labor callada y solitaria — ya traza varias décadas pero no es hasta 1970 cuando cambia de oficio al ofrecérsele un puesto en Pima College en Arizona, donde actualmente da clases. También ha sido contratado como profesor en la Universidad de Arizona dando clases sobre literatura chicana. En 1984 Méndez recibe un reconocimiento oficial altamente significativo, considerando sus modestas procedencias, de Doctor Honoris Causa, otorgado por la Universidad de Arizona en Tucson.

3. UBICACIÓN CONTEXTUAL

Miguel Méndez forma parte de la primera ola contemporánea del llamado *boom* chicano o Renacimiento de los sesenta.¹ Más específicamente, se le encaja dentro de la Generación Quinto Sol,² la cual surge en 1967 en torno a la empresa editorial Quinto Sol de Berkeley, California, con *El Grito: Journal of Contemporary Mexican American Thought*, de donde se desprende una nueva ideología y agenda literarias con el fin de promover un nacionalismo cultural. Aparece por primera vez en *El Grito* en 1968 su muy elogiado cuento metafórico, “Tata Casehua”, cuya contextura neo-indigenista concuerda bien con los valores en boga durante el apogeo del Movimiento Chicano. Es decir, el énfasis en el elemento nativo y telúrico aporta dos melodías favoritas de la época para explicar así un pasado legítimo y propio. El cuento pronto se convierte en narración clásica de la ficción chicana que denuncia y aboga por los desposeídos a la vez que establece un claro vínculo con la identidad indígena, en este caso yaqui. Por consiguiente, se hubiera anticipado la publicación de *Peregrinos de Aztlán* por Quinto Sol, ya que el escritor arizonense proporciona en su texto una visión épica de dimensiones cósmicas—una cualidad fundamental para los editores de Quinto Sol. No obstante, algo ocurre: la editorial se debilita con la clausura de la revista en 1974, limitando su capacidad de producir libros; el manuscrito de Méndez presenta un problema logístico para una edición bilingüe por la dificultad de sus variantes lingüísticas; y se ejerce una posible cautela editorial por temer una representación de personajes en distintos grados de verosimilitud favorable o desfavorable. El texto no es cotejado seguramente porque no siempre contiene pinceladas positivas, desviándose entonces de los objetivos de la máquina publicitaria de unas empresas chicanas. Por eso, Méndez acude a publicar la novela por su propia cuenta con la Editorial Peregrinos, una imprenta local que funda en 1974.

Con *Peregrinos de Aztlán* Méndez se coloca entre los narradores más destacados de la nueva novelística y cuentística a principios de los setenta, considerando, por ejemplo, a Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Estela Portillo Trambly y Rudolfo Anaya. Méndez, como los mencionados, también elabora una visión horizontal, o sea, global del pueblo de origen mexicano, articulando con mayor fuerza su desarrollo histórico como su gestación intrahistórica en un espacio determinado: la frontera. Pese a su lugar en la vanguardia de las letras chicanas, se lee escasamente debido a las técnicas de índole experimental y el lenguaje expansivo de sus narraciones. Sin apologías escribe exclusivamente en español y señala con juicios mesurados lo siguiente:

La literatura chicana se significará grandemente, tanto en inglés como en español. No tendremos de ninguna manera que rivalizar los que escribimos en uno u otro idioma. Vamos a decir que nuestra literatura nace de varios idiomas, pero que nace de un solo corazón. También para la literatura chicana que aparece en lengua española veo un futuro muy luminoso. Ya verás, no pasarán muchos años sin que lo nuestro logre el aplauso de propios y extraños. Me refiero también a Latinoamérica y España. En cuanto a la función de las obras chicanas escritas en español, está entre otros motivos el de vitalizar y preservar nuestras raíces más profundas. (Alarcón 1981: 6)

Como su texto (igual que toda su producción) está sólo en español, se cree que ha limitado su circulación entre lectores en los Estados Unidos; en cambio, en México — donde tal vez se distingue como el escritor chicano más conocido — la asequibilidad de sus libros indica un problema de difusión general. De igual manera, Méndez ocupa un lugar especial porque suele identificarse como uno de los escritores de primer rango, cuya literatura va renovándose constantemente con aportaciones llamativas.

Fuera de contar con el ojo clínico de un prosista maduro, también sobresale por su sensibilidad de poeta y ensayista, y ha escrito una obra de teatro que se perdió. Se caracteriza, entonces, como un autor con múltiples habilidades creadoras capaz de incurrir en cualquier género con una relativa facilidad. En la actualidad, su producción consta de ocho libros: dos novelas de primer orden (incluyendo la segunda, *El sueño de Santa María de las Piedras*, de orientación hacia lo mágico-real), un poemario comprometido en dos partes (*Los criaderos humanos* [épica de los desamparados] y *Sabuaros*) y cinco colecciones donde se combinan los cuentos con ensayos, mitos o narraciones folclóricas (véase la bibliografía). Aunque es difícil reducir la producción de Méndez a unas pocas cualidades, con el afán de sintetizar se encuentran las que aquí enumeramos: giros filosóficos de preocupación social, lo poético abstracto o contemplativo, lo alegórico satírico, el humor regenerador, la tradición de lo trágico, el determinismo ambiental, la memoria de la historia, el choque de generaciones y culturas, la conservación de valores arraigados, la frontera como espacio de confluencia, la tradición oral en conjunción con

las bellas letras, los experimentos intergenéricos e intertextuales, y mucho más. Miguel Méndez es quien mejor encarna al escritor chicano capaz de captar un mundo ficticio que va más allá de una simple frontera para así demostrar los distintos estratos de la coexistencia, sea ella económica, psicológica, mitológica o política.

La crítica es casi unánime al ensalzar *Peregrinos de Aztlán* como una de las novelas más logradas de la literatura chicana ya que trasciende un regionalismo espacial, lingüístico y literario. No es tarea fácil situarla bajo una sola clasificación porque también desafía los estrechos rótulos o categorizaciones académicas. Como obra única en 1974 cuando el género de la novela estaba en pleno florecimiento y madurez, contribuye a ampliar y explorar, de manera directa, perspectivas insólitas que para esa época se ignoraban. Su aparición, sin duda, marca un hito significativo a la vez que reafirma un supuestamente repentino estallido del grado de sofisticación entre escritores chicanos. Aunque no se beneficia del apoyo publicitario de una editorial de renombre, *Peregrinos* se impone como novela de categoría, lo cual se confirma con la copiosa bibliografía incluida. En parte recoge la temática del trabajador migrante de otras obras como *The Plum Plum Pickers* (1969) de Raymond Barrio e “...y no se lo tragó la tierra” (1971) de Tomás Rivera, pero en *Peregrinos* se remonta a México para delinear un trasfondo ya trágico que acompaña a los trashumantes peregrinos. Sobre todo, consigue ubicar la mayor parte de la acción en un espacio indefinido, la frontera — que parece purgatorio —, donde los personajes están en proceso de integrarse a un mundo de desilusiones.

Peregrinos se distingue como novela totalizadora al poner el realismo en tela de juicio para mostrar sus insuficiencias. Se presenta una realidad poética al par de una existencia descarnada y se yuxtapone el pesimismo con la esperanza. Mediante su óptica épica, se recrea la trayectoria de una colectividad amorfa y anónima, dando así una visión horizontal de una realidad social. Es decir, esta obra coincide mucho con la novelística del boom latinoamericano: por su composición de técnicas complejas e interrelacionadas, la caracterización estratificada en analogías o contrastes o paralelismos, los temas soterradamente de orden político, su cualidad de regionalismo, y la insistencia en experimentar con el lenguaje. Hay resonancias tenues de novelas como *La casa verde* de Mario Vargas Llosa, *Pedro Páramo* de Juan Rulfo, *Los pasos perdidos* de Alejo Carpentier, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* y *La región más transparente* de Carlos Fuentes, *El coronel no tiene quien le escriba* de Gabriel García Márquez, *Al filo del agua* de Agustín Yáñez, *Los de abajo* de Mariano Azuela, *El indio* de Gregorio López y Fuentes, *Huaspungo* de Jorge Icaza, *El Señor Presidente* de Miguel Ángel Asturias y *La vorágine* de José Eustasio Rivera. *Peregrinos* de Miguel Méndez establece una dialéctica intertextual con obras latinoamericanas, al mismo tiempo que intenta cimentar las bases modernas de lo que Luis Leal³ y Cosme Zaragoza (1984) han denominado la novela aztlanense.

4. EXPLICACIÓN TEXTUAL DE PEREGRINOS DE AZTLÁN

El plan narrativo que se propone Méndez en *Peregrinos* es multifacético al enlazar su problemática con la novelística de Latinoamérica. Según dos críticos, Méndez “. . . here creates *the* Chicano novel of the downtrodden” y ofrece “definitely the first [and] most ambitious Chicano novel written in Spanish” (Lomelí y Urioste 43-44; lo subrayado es del original). Por un lado, establece una prosa combativa al estilo del realismo crítico, mas su objetivo también incluye poetizar una realidad cruda de gente desesperanzada mediante el neorrealismo. Por otro lado, se esfuerza por fundar un tipo de arte narrativo que sea propio del pueblo chicano, sea ello por las conflictivas experiencias como por sus variantes de lenguaje o sus tipos sociales. El resultado es una obra que destruye fronteras tanto literal como figurativamente. Por ejemplo, también se encaja dentro de la susodicha novela regionalista de igual manera que podría considerarse dentro de la novela indigenista y de la Revolución Mexicana. La clave de su confección ecléctica reside en que a la vez se acerca a una nueva categoría más enraizada en los Estados Unidos, o sea, la novela de anti-guerra— pensando, sobre todo, en el movimiento juvenil en contra de la Guerra de Vietnam. *Peregrinos* es todo esto y aun más; insiste ante todo en ser chicana. En este contexto, se plantea la clasificación más acertada del libro de Méndez como novela de espacio totalizador, según los principios teóricos de Zunilda Gertel.⁴ Corresponde a dicha categoría por:

... mostrar una compleja realidad espacial cerrada y cíclica... a la vez ruptura y entronque de la tradición. No podría calificársele en un canon temático o de corriente literaria; su estructura tiene visión integradora y universal. No es novela realista, ni fantástica, ni psicológica, ni de violencia, ni barroca, y es todas al mismo tiempo. (Gertel 150-51)

Primordialmente, *Peregrinos* es una novela en busca de sí misma, un ‘textimonio’ donde los narradores, los alter-egos y las demás voces sueltas tratan de darse forma. Da la apariencia de discursos diluidos que se pierden en un vértigo confuso y caótico. El desierto o la urbe se tragan a los personajes, quienes son indefensos y vulnerables. El motivo del viaje, el cual implica movimiento o posible mutabilidad, aquí funciona irónicamente ya que sólo se experimenta lo cíclico, el estancamiento o la inercia. Aunque los personajes figuran como “peregrinos,” es obvio que su movimiento es apenas lateral pero siguen igual en sus condiciones inmejorables, retornando siempre al punto cero. El aniquilamiento o la negación predomina ante todo, borrando así cualquier potencialidad de que se superen estos peregrinos en un ámbito nuevo. Todo se nivela hasta el punto en que los personajes principales terminan muertos. La muerte no sólo resulta inevitable, sino que también es el denominador común. La novela, careciendo de una verdadera trama, se caracteriza por ser más bien de reflexión que de acción. El

aspecto contemplativo está muy presente en las disquisiciones poéticas, pero lo que cuenta sobre todo es un meta-lector que pueda reordenar los hilos disyuntivos de vidas inconexas para así darle sentido a la narración como a su historia.

Desde el prefacio, “El autor” se dirige al lector para suplicarle comprensión en su quehacer narrativo, y revela que ha tenido que desviarse del plan original. Admite: “Te confieso que falló mi intento preconcebido, no por mi voluntad, sino por una extraña rebelión de las palabras” (21). O sea, la obra que está por delante no equivale al proyecto prístino, sino que es rendimiento de un lenguaje de “voces inoportunas, feas por toscas y deformes” (21) que se le imponen al autor. Deja al lado la vanidad de implorar la implícita aprobación a favor de que se tenga compasión por los seres que cuentan su dolor, sentimiento y cólera. Y, se hace tanto hincapié en el lenguaje porque es éste el que habla y murmura en el texto como extensión de los personajes mismos. Adentramos en una novela que apunta a ofrecer una versión inortodoxa al forjar una auto-conciencia de la escritura como contra-texto de la literatura más tradicional o altisonante: “con un lenguaje vivo más vida enseña un relato que con el fosilizado, sublimador de lo muerto en bellas esculturas de mármol” (21). Conceptuada como obra de palabras “suavecitas y redondeadas”, el resultado final sugiere una anti-novela por la cosmovisión recreada de un vulgo sin portavoces. *Peregrinos*, como consecuencia, no debe leerse sólo para deleitarse en las fantasías frívolas de la expresión ligera; el propósito cobra una tonalidad más seria y urgente. Se trata de un mundo sufrido y, por ende, su lenguaje brota de un cauce de angustia. La novela la compone un lenguaje vivo—no regido por reglas gramaticales—que está en flujo y se altera de acuerdo con las circunstancias sociales, constituyendo de esa manera un fiel “textimonio” de un pueblo relegado que ahora se manifiesta. La obra, según el prefacio, tiene como finalidad el desdoblamiento de una realidad oculta que suele verse en términos de lo ahistórico, callado y apagado. El texto en sí representa una explosión de esa previa imagen para figurar entre los pueblos con voz y derechos. Se superan los convencionalismos sin reprimir voces veladas y también se rescatan vivencias que de otra manera no figurarían en las páginas de la literatura. En Méndez, la creación literaria está al servicio de quienes se han mantenido al margen.

Como prueba de que *Peregrinos* funciona como contra-texto o anti-novela con un determinado compromiso social por los personajes y sus circunscripciones, aparecen comentarios en varias ocasiones, sea por los narradores o en diálogos, donde se niega un hecho. A comienzos del relato, el narrador omnisciente cuenta no sólo lo que es el protagonista, Loreto Maldonado, sino lo que ya no es: “No, el viejo Loreto ya no era cualquier campesino ingenuo” (25). La importancia de este nuevo punto de vista está en que se trata de personajes percibidos con otra perspectiva. Si antes eran abnegados, sumisos y marginados, ahora se describen con otros lentes. Ellos mismos no van a

cambiar necesariamente, no obstante, es fundamental que el lector los capte con otra orientación compasiva de entendimiento. Las constantes negaciones salpicadas por toda la novela sirven para calificar la verdadera naturaleza de los seres sufridos, otorgándoles así una revaloración distinta. Otros ejemplos abundan: “No a la conquista del oro van estos hombres escuálidos, caminando a noche y día; los lleva la demanda vital de proteínas” (55); “¡Mientes! No hay poesía ni poetas, todo es una mascarada para no ver la tragedia humana; sólo los holgazanes que ignoran el dolor y el crimen, aduladores del poder, le cantan a las flores” (bastardilla en el original, 135); “¡No!, no, ya no se trataba solamente de su pequeño sufrimiento de niño-hombre, de adolescente, ya lo invadía otra pena más honda... dolor universal” (158-159); y “Así la historia... como en un mal sueño nos dejó varados en la isla del olvido, presos... Ni dignidad ni letras para los esclavos, dijeron los dominadores, solamente la ignominia, la burla y la muerte” (183-184). La obra de por medio pretende proporcionar un testimonio al fundamentar la naturaleza de un mundo infrahumano.

La trama de *Peregrinos* se distingue por ser engañosamente reducida en eventos con una extensión temporal que dura un poco más de dos años. La apertura de la historia *in media res* permite entrar en acontecimientos de orden ordinario y rutinario. Nos topamos con Loreto Maldonado, un lavacoches y guardacoches, que deambula por las calles desoladas de una ciudad fronteriza buscándose la vida. Su circunstancia un tanto física como espiritual llega a verse como sintomática de lo que otros personajes están padeciendo. El ocupa el epicentro de la novela y de allí giran los demás en una forma concéntrica. En resumidas cuentas, Loreto sobresale como la *raison d'être* de las múltiples narraciones por el hecho de que se asocian con él directa o indirectamente. Desenvuelve varias funciones: desencadena la historia de vidas paralelas; sirve de eje narrativo como núcleo de referencia; es el punto donde convergen todas las vidas; y le otorga unidad situacional, espacial y trasfondo histórico a lo narrado. Careciendo de una acción principal, todo en la obra gira en torno a la búsqueda de una docena de personas por la supervivencia. De alguna manera, se relacionan ya que el destino los ha reunido en una localidad fronteriza: “la república que habitaríamos los espaldas mojadas, los indios sumidos en la desgracia y los chicanos esclavizados. Sería la nuestra, la ‘República de Mexicanos Escarnecidos’” (96). Esa coexistencia de coincidencias, su legado personal o familiar, sus dilemas e ilusiones, igual que sus problemáticos y frágiles sueños — en conjunto, esto les da un sentido de estado común, de grupo o comunidad. Se desarrollan en la novela entonces estos nexos de convivencia, lo cual produce una historia mayor de víctimas y victimarios. En *Peregrinos* se traza una visión transversal de realidades y personajes contrarios que en muchos casos comparten un enlace simbiótico.

La armazón estructural en *Peregrinos* conduce a cuestionar quién se destaca como protagonista, debido a que un sinnúmero de voces anónimas, inclusive subconciencias, objetos personificados y seres míticos — hasta la muerte sale de personaje — se superimponen a las evocaciones o pronunciamientos de personas específicas. Vale recordar que el objetivo de la novela es adentrarnos en el caos y la turbulencia del sufrimiento humano de una colectividad. No importa tanto el enfatizar a un solo personaje, aunque ya se ha señalado cómo Loreto Maldonado, cuyo nombre sugiere “sin talento” y “con mala suerte”, representa el foco, concediéndoles vida y relevancia a las historias sueltas de los demás. Contribuye a rescatarlas del olvido (Bruce-Novoa 1977: 63), no tanto como coleccionista sino por haberse topado con ellos, o por medio de las memorias, incluyendo lo que recoge de segunda mano. No obstante, Loreto — también inmerso en la miseria — apenas figura como protagonista implícito en una tercera parte de los fragmentos que componen la novela,⁵ desempeñando el papel de receptáculo o depósito de confesiones, relatos y lamentaciones. Si su importancia disminuye como presencia, también aumenta su significación como persona responsable por darle unidad al desahogo colectivo.

Casi todo en el texto apunta a recrear una visión subterránea, la otra faz de la moneda, o la intra-historia de un sector que no pertenece a la sociedad oficial. Es consistente con el compromiso social del autor al crear un texto de oposición a la vez que ensalza una realidad ignorada: “Mas Méndez no escribe folletines políticos ni manifiestos utópicos—aunque sus obras contengan elementos de los dos” (Bruce-Novoa, “Torno”, 81). Para lograr dicha finalidad, se pincelan a los personajes con rasgos propios y detallados, confiriéndoles dimensión psicológica de individualidad. Por ejemplo, se descubre que Loreto no es un lavacoches cualquiera, sino que es: “yaquí de pura cepa con la regia apariencia de una estatua arrancada de la entraña del granito” (38), y después de su muerte se describe en una fotografía como general en la Revolución Mexicana. En otro caso, Jesús de Belem se describe a sí mismo en términos ordinarios, no tanto como el posible ídolo redentor infalible; se considera médico de almas y cuerpos: “yo, aunque farsante, soy más médico que muchos pendejos que perdieron cejas y pestañas estudiando en las universidades” (106-107). Y la Malquerida, cuyo nombre sugiere una suerte desgraciada, no es la supuesta prostituta degenerada, y nadie sabe su nombre verdadero, Rosenda Pérez Sotolín. Surge del anonimato cuando las autoridades la procuran para averiguar la muerte de su hermano y allí es cuando se expone su desdicha por haber sido secuestrada y engañada, terminando como una pobre pueblerina explotada: “Yo era una humilde mecanógrafa con el alma plena de ilusiones, muy hermosa... como era buena y honrada merecía lo mejor del mundo... ¿quién le concede justicia a una muchacha humilde, sin dinero y sin influencia política?” (130-131). A través de la obra

se indaga en vidas semejantes para delinear sus cualidades singulares y así eliminarles la cara borrosa de “sombras, fantasmas, seres inexistentes” (56). De esa manera, los personajes cobran profundidad como experiencias vitales merecedoras de la atención y compasión del lector.

La novela de Méndez documenta una realidad social fronteriza que por lo general queda oscurecida o relegada. Trata de diversos casos crónicos que padecen en carne propia el desempleo, la pobreza, el hambre, la guerra y la prostitución: “el hambre los tumba y el orgullo los levanta” (27). Narra sobre un espacio literario que hasta 1974 se había pasado por alto como materia prima, con pocas excepciones como Luis Spota en *Murieron a mitad del río* (1948). Por lo tanto, el escritor chicano ahonda en elementos peculiares a la franja cultural propios de una especie de *no man's land*. Acude a técnicas que permiten la complejidad de niveles igual que la simultaneidad de acción o reflexiones. Mucho de lo que el lector observa nace de Loreto, cuya presencia se siente en varias ocasiones como sombra “sumiéndose en recuerdos, luchaba con un pasado brumoso, como un nadador que quisiera navegar contra la corriente de un río presuroso” (84). Es decir, lo narrado surge como fuerza incontenible desde lo más interior de su existencia, lo cual explica un contenido dinámico y vibrante. Por medio de Loreto, llegamos a conocer la impotencia rabiosa de una serie de voces que desahogan sus frecuentes frustraciones. El *leitmotif* de “voces” impregna el mundo narrado y es imprescindible subrayar que incluso personas específicas, como Loreto y los otros once protagonistas, se manifiestan más en forma anónima que como individuos. Estas voces, a veces asumiendo características de personajes independientes, predominan como ecos y en otros casos murmullos, dándole al texto una índole de estar presenciando una sublevación de seres marginados: “Aquí las voces caminan lejos porque naiden las detiene” (65); “La ciudad con su ventarrón de voces también remolineaba las de ellos por los parajes de la tristeza” (68); “Los hombres partían a sus quehaceres, malhumorados... Dejaban un reborujo de gritos de niños... y las madres gritando con notas tan agudas e histéricas... que curiosamente coincidía el volumen de sus voces con el ladrar de los perros flacos” (71); “Extraños sueños los del indio Loreto... lo despertaron voces que no entendía” (111); “¡coros henchidos desgañitándose en los eternos laberintos del silencio!” (146); y “romped el silencio de las centurias con la agonía de vuestros gritos” (184).

Al par de las repetidas alusiones a una radiografía de voces en que “la historia escrita, coqueta liviana, los desdeña... (157), se recalca sobre la causalidad de sus desahogos. El factor decisivo es el hambre, vista visceralmente en términos de motivo inicial que provoca el peregrinaje a los Estados Unidos, o sea, considerado meca para los hambrientos. Aquí figura como elemento obsesivo que se matiza con una serie de anáforas:

Los viejos pueblos herrumbrosos cobraban desahogo... El hambre, combustible de ilusiones, no se estrellaría más contra el círculo de sierras... el hambre desesperada que saltando de las crónicas se ha echado por las carreteras que llevan hacia el norte... en el trayecto van sembrando sus voces como una enredadera de lamentos, como un rosario de blasfemias, como una escalera de preguntas sin respuesta... Hombres que han habitado el espacio, pegados a la tierra como los cactus y el maíz... Van a los Estados Unidos a buscar alimento desesperadamente. Tienen hambre ellos, tienen hambre sus hijos, sus mujeres tienen hambre, un hambre de siglos, hambre rabiosa; un hambre que duele más allá de las propias tripas... ¡Hasta la entraña materna!, hambre de tener una mesa con tortillas, con frijoles... ¡Hambre de comer algo! Para que las tripas no aúllen como perros torturados... ese llanto del hambre tan agudo en su desmayo que escarba sepulcros... (55-56)

El hambre casi siempre viene acompañada por su fiel complemento, la sed. Las dos necesidades esenciales para la supervivencia cobran carácter humano en los peregrinos por medio de unas insistentes imágenes de “arrastrarse”, el proceso definitivo de la humillación. El arrastrarse, el favorito verbo *leitmotif* rechinante de la novela, marca el grado de nivelación de los seres míseros, reducidos a un plano sub-humano: “Habían caminado toda la noche anterior, seguían de frente dispuestos a descansar a la primera sombra... sólo sus sombras cansadas arrastrábanse untadas en la arena caliente” (64); y “Del sur iban, a la inversa de sus antepasados, en una peregrinación sin sacerdotes ni profetas, arrastrando una historia sin ningún mérito para el que llegara a contarla, por lo vulgar y repetido de su tragedia” (66). Como es evidente, la novela no intenta ser subliminal en sus descripciones. Al contrario, trata de sacudir y producir un efecto chocante para que el lector se entere de la “perversión interminable.”

Con el fin de involucrar al lector en las tragedias encadenadas, y así proporcionar mayor dimensión narrativa a la materia, Méndez ha creado un complicado sistema de narrar. Las acciones giran en torno a Loreto, a veces en una especie de vértigo, y es él quien suplanta el desorden con su visión integradora que simula una historia de espejismos. También opera a varios niveles de ambigüedad cuando las voces se funden. La novela, como consecuencia, se convierte en una caja china de sagas troncadas donde los narradores o personajes y sus actos o palabras se confunden:

Through the use of flashbacks, memories, dialogues, the superimposition of times and spaces and the juxtaposition of a variety of linguistic idioms, Méndez has created a complex kaleidoscopic effect... In this sense, Méndez joins the mainstream of the contemporary novel. (Gonzales-Berry 86)

Por si esto fuera poco, al acento plurivalente de *Peregrinos* se observa en una estructura experimental prefigurando las técnicas cinematográficas de montaje y *racconto* en una obra arquitectónica compuesta de sueños, delirios, *stream of consciousness*,

monólogos interiores, narraciones fragmentarias, perspectivas múltiples, vidas paralelas, voces míticas, meditaciones, saltos espaciales, diálogos, recuerdos o ensueños, indagaciones líricas y versiones distintas del mismo hecho (Lomelí y Urioste 43-44). La contextura delata una obra llena de estratos connotativos en un conjunto dinámico y conmovedor.

Los personajes principales por lo general empiezan en la pobreza, siguen en el anonimato, luego son explotados y finalmente mueren sin trazas de algún reconocimiento. A los migrantes o “peregrinos” se les asocia con emprender un viaje por devoción religiosa para visitar un santuario, pero esa alusión alegórica corresponde más bien en *Peregrinos* a viajeros en busca de la superación económica y espiritual. Consideran a Aztlán como ese santuario y el desengaño les enseña que su larga trayectoria los ha conducido a la perdición. El materialismo de Aztlán, como la franja fronteriza, en vez de ser lugar donde realizarse se convierte en “camino, eternos calvarios” (56) de la codicia y la deshumanización. En cambio, el Aztlán mítico en las versiones milenarias de poetas (el vate y Lorenzo Linares), los “verdaderos revolucionarios” (Rosario Cuamea y Loreto Maldonado) y otras voces anónimas (de orden mitológico) contrarrestan el materialismo vulgar con un mundo idílico, sugiriendo un retorno a la mitología azteca. En algunos casos, sólo les quedan sus ilusiones: “vi en peregrinaje a muchos pueblos de indios hollados por la tortura del hambre y la humillación del despojo, recorrían a la inversa antiguos caminos en busca del origen remoto” (96). Por lo tanto, el desierto nutre como destruye (Johnson, 52-53), mientras que la ciudad fronteriza — seguramente Tijuana por sus calles y su famoso centro de burdeles y clubes nocturnos —⁶ figura como diosa del vicio. Desconsuelos poéticos brotan del vate y de Lorenzo, admirando lo majestuoso y la belleza árida del desierto, cuya contradicción reside en ser un féretro (“eres la tumba inmensa de los proscritos y del imperio de los indios”, 88) y una potencialidad (“el desierto, virgen de la voluntad del creativo”, 95). En contraste con el desierto — poética telúrica — que ofrece vida o muerte, la ciudad resulta devoradora donde los seres son socavados de su humanidad de tres maneras: borrándoles la identidad, cosificándolos y animalizándolos (Alarcón 1989: 92). Los anglos acomodados, como la familia Cocuch y la familia Fox (nótese que se afemeniza a ‘Foxye’ al castrarse), llevan una existencia hueca y decadente, cegados por la ambición sin escrúpulos. El Chuco, el personaje chicano de más relieve, sirve de ejemplo para denunciar a la sociedad que lo ha estereotipado, lamentando los efectos en personas de su grupo social. Pese a sus destrezas en la labor agrícola como invencible campeón, siente haber sido reducido a un ente insignificante que sólo cuenta por su trabajo. Por lo menos se conforma con llamarse “chicano”: “siquiera ya es uno algo” (38). Lo trágico está en que los mencionados personajes

mueren de diversas formas: Loreto Maldonado fallece “de pura hambre crónica” y vejez en su jacal al estilo del antiguo barrio tijuaneño llamado Cartolandia; Lorenzo Linares delira (“desde antes de morir, siempre fuiste recuerdo”, 146); Pánfilo Pérez se metamorfosea en un enorme pájaro de alas negras — como Ícaro — y cae cuando el sol le da un soplón; Frankie Pérez, soldado chicano de Vietnam, muere solo en Asia aunque Loreto ya había atendido al joven solitario en un “velorio simbólico” después de un desmayo; el colorido y recordado compañero revolucionario de Loreto, Coronel Rosario “Chayo” Cuamea, quien desflora a la muerte en una escena esperpéntica, muere simbólicamente una segunda vez al rescatarse su vida en las reminiscencias de Loreto; Jesús de Belem, símbolo del cristianismo terrenal y humanista, es golpeado por las autoridades policíacas; y el artista “El Corneta” enloquece al fracasar en su búsqueda por su hijo perdido. Como puede verse, todo parece terminar en muerte o destrucción, volviendo al estado original del ámbito lleno de ceniza, unos “círculos gruesos nubarrones oscuros”, o a la “pesadilla infame.”

5. CONCLUSIÓN

Miguel Méndez crea en *Peregrinos* una novela abrumadora de múltiples implicaciones. Las inexorables tragedias de los desamparados se desplazan a veces con un estilo descarnado y provocador. Los distintos estratos de significado permiten revivir las experiencias de los personajes directa e indirectamente, exponiéndose una humanidad indefensa en agonía ante infinitos obstáculos. Pese a esta visión de desesperanza, la obra contiene unas notas en busca de la catarsis y regeneración, algo que se confirma con las varias alusiones a vuelos, transformaciones y seres mitológicos. Es decir, está subyacente una fuerte noción de trascendencia o lo que Cecilia Ubilla-Arenas designa como el sueño humanista (Ubilla-Arenas 75). En ese sentido, la obra de Méndez es fiel en documentar por medio de la ficción un testimonio totalizador que contribuye de sobremanera a la literatura chicana. Tal vez es más significativo que su novela aporte al entendimiento de una patente y olvidada realidad social fronteriza entre dos países. Aunque Méndez no se propone soluciones fáciles o categóricas, las voces milenarias, refiriéndose a los “caballeros tigres” y los “caballeros águilas”, hablan por sí mismas al final con sugerencias simbólicas (“Regresad más allá de la cruz de caminos, romped el silencio de las centurias...”, 184). El consejo elucidador apunta a relacionar lo mítico (creencias o lo cultural) con lo histórico (materialismo o acondicionamiento social) con el fin de definir el destino: “El destino es la historia y la historia es el camino tendido ante los pasos que no han sido” (184). Nos parece claro que el autor aboga por la auto-determinación histórica al reconciliarse, primero, con su pasado y de allí enfrentarse con osadía a las exigencias del mundo moderno.

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NOTAS

¹ Véase la tesis doctoral de Alejandro Dennis Morales (“Visión panorámica de la literatura mexicoamericana hasta el boom de 1966”, Rutgers University, 1976) quien propone por primera vez el concepto del *boom*, aludiendo paralelamente al fenómeno latinoamericano. Aunque situar el año de 1966 como el inicio del *boom* parece prematuro, el resumen de algunos factores claves son valiosos para entender el florecimiento que llegó a una cumbre en la década de los setenta. Fue más bien Philip D. Ortego, con su tesis “Backgrounds of Mexican American Literature” (University of New Mexico, 1971), quien entabló una discusión pormenorizada acerca del concepto del Renacimiento chicano.

² Esto se discute más a fondo en un artículo inédito mío titulado “Quinto Sol: Genesis of a Generation,” National Association for Chicano Studies Conference, Salt Lake City, April 9, 1987.

³ Él discute dicho concepto a fondo y con numerosos ejemplos en “Cuatro siglos de prosa aztlanense”, *La Palabra* 2: 1 (Primavera 1980): 2-15. Sin embargo, la etiqueta de “literatura aztlanense” le corresponde a Guillermo Rojas, quien por primera vez se refiere a tal fenómeno así en su “Toward a Chicano/Raza Bibliography: Drama, Prose, Poetry”, *El Grito* 7: 2 (December 1973): 1-85.

⁴ Véase su lúcida exposición en *La novela hispanoamericana contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Columba, 1970), 150-158. Mucho de lo que explica se relaciona con la novela de Méndez, sobre todo, los saltos de lo objetivo a lo subjetivo y lo siguiente: “La configuración de un espacio total con proyección mítico-histórica, demanda una actitud alerta del narrador y un acercamiento al lector para que no decaiga su participación en la ficción” (152).

⁵ Se puede observar que la primera edición de *Peregrinos* de 1974 está dividida en tres partes que van descendiendo en su extensión (de 91 a 73 a 27 páginas): la Parte Primera de la mencionada edición consiste en 33 fragmentos identificables (con sus respectivas subdivisiones) donde Loreto aparece en 8; la Parte Segunda está compuesta de 12 fragmentos (de nuevo con más subdivisiones) donde él está presente en 4; y en la Parte Tercera de 6 fragmentos (también con subdivisiones internas) el protagonista sólo figura en 2. Nótese que el papel de Loreto se reduce por la mitad de una parte a la subsiguiente. Es significativo considerar la estructura externa de la primera edición ya que en ella se insinúa una asociación bíblica por la insistencia tríptica — resulta más obvio en la primera parte de 33 fragmentos —, sugiriendo así la condenación perpetua de los “peregrinos” mediante el sacrificio y terminando en el crucifijo o la muerte. Coincidentalmente, la presencia de Loreto Maldonado en 14 segmentos narrativos se asemeja a las 14 estaciones del Vía Crucis. Además, los relatos en su conjunto describen a 12 personajes principales, como portavoces del sufrimiento entre las víctimas y la decadencia entre los victimarios—inversión simbólica de los apóstoles. Otro elemento bíblico indiscutible es Jesús de Belem (a veces Belén) como analogía prototípica de Cristo, sólo que en la novela se hace hincapié en sus cualidades humanas por ser curandero y yaqui.

⁶ Aunque en una ocasión se menciona el nombre de Tijuas, la forma diminutiva para Tijuana, lo más seguro es que cierta ambigüedad existe respecto a la ciudad específica porque en otra escena se refiere a un ferrocarril, haciendo pensar en Mexicali ya que Tijuana nunca ha tenido servicio de trenes. Nótese también el juego de palabras ingenioso al referirse a Tijuana como “esta ciudad singular con aires de reputación dudosa...” (20).



Cecile Pineda's *Face* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: Poetics of Synthesizing an Identity

The mirror is an ambivalent symbol.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Bordelands*

Caras y más caras...

Ricardo Sánchez, *Hechizospells*

Narrative fiction has frequently tangled or dialogued with its social context, either by *realistically* engaging in a recreation of identifiable elements or by radically altering the modes of refracting representational reality. From Fernando de Rojas's *Lazarillo de Tormes* to Antoine Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, or from Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* to Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, the novel has indulged in the extended metaphor – particularly the allegory – much like Julio Cortázar's clever comparison with the short story in that the novel *wins* not by a knockout but by rounds (“Del cuento y sus alrededores”). Literary ventures by U.S. minorities are certainly no exception because of their predicament and circumstances that oscillate between marginality and opposition or assimilation and subversion.

U.S. minorities live out a unique relationship of constantly negotiating with their social reality as well as a dominant system of symbols. For this reason their literature tends to go beyond the desire to simply experiment, the latter being a primary motive of renovation. Another hurdle confronts them: the challenge to present a topic for general consumption beyond the in-group allusions. Therefore, they must consider how to make a work more palatable or reduce its explosive and/or controversial nature in order to make it accessible to the greatest number of readers. Concessions surround this production but still subtlety is one of its objectives because readers often react to explicit demands placed on them by a novel, especially if *literary value* is deemed sacrificed for the good of a social agenda. In light of minorities' struggles to achieve acceptance and legitimacy, it appears that extra demands in society cross over into the literary domain as well. The registers by minority writers are rarely viewed as generic or race-less, thus influencing the readers' reception of the final product. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Cecile Pineda's *Face* (1985)

are fittingly lodged between dialectic of difference by balancing the two extremes between expectation and realization.

For example, both novels respond to their respective historical contexts in a similar manner but distinct in form. The issue of identity emerges forcefully as the principal consideration while symbolically exploring its dilemmas and ramifications. Again, the theme of identity in itself does not surprise anyone, only its magnitude and structural complexity. For instance, Ellison creates one of the most provocative and powerful metaphors in modern times about an African-American's search for self within a society that does not acknowledge nor does it know how to cope with him. Obviously, the protagonist moves within an environment that negates his very presence. Pineda, on the other hand, also delves into identity as a basic human concern while conjuring up a number of essentialist questions about what constitutes a person. Together, they prove the topic's renewed relevance despite its intangibility, as reinforced by the movie *Darkman*, Ariel Dorfman's *Mascara*, Milan Kundera's "The Face", and many others.

Although the historical backdrop of the two novels is separated by over thirty years (1952 and 1985) and two racial experiences (African-American and Latino), they nonetheless share various points in common in the obsessive pursuit to deal with the crisis of identity and self-validation. Besides, a strong sense of space persists: Ellison grounds his work in a dichotomy between the Old South and the North, specifically Harlem, and for good measure, the vertical contrast between a cellar and the city; meanwhile, Pineda opts for an horizontal Brazilian setting, mainly in Río de Janeiro but also the interior known as the hinterlands. Both project a paradoxical idealism where each protagonist believes in his locale as the potential for shaping the person they wish to become. The nameless character in *Invisible Man*, for example, tries to naively blend in without necessarily having to concern himself with his blackness on his sleeve. For Helio Cara in *Face*, Brazil represents the epitome or panacea of racial miscegenation where it supposedly does not matter what you are, but he comes to discover that it does. Both protagonists live out a process of *desengaño* and suffer the consequences for it. Repeatedly pushed and eventually expelled from their locus, they symbolically become characters on the run with no real place to hide except within themselves. Unwittingly, they become fugitives for no reason of their doing.

As social outcasts, they construct a sort of cocoon they regard their own from which to view the outside world and its trappings. Analogous to Dostoyevsky's *Notes From the Underground*, they perceive the world either from bottom-up or from inside-out. This insistence on spatial constructs becomes the outer crust of the metaphor to designate a notion of persecution and entrapment. Besides, their descent into the underworld conjures up the image of a living hell or a temporary relief from it. It is

from this point of annihilation that they must recover to regain their humanity, since the alternative is extinction. Both works philosophize about identity from very different vantage points, yet their common concern is to examine a calculated method of separation from society as a form of protest and contestation to the treatment they have received. Most of all, we find a detailed elaboration of an ideology on how to find alternative options through gumption and ingenuity, that is, as acts of last resort. Therefore, we discover an interfacing of comparable or complementary themes: in *Invisible Man* the notion of invisibility as a measure of unacceptability and discrimination; and in *Face* how the loss of a face becomes a lamentable synecdoche for the entire person. Both works then present the situation of how two normal human beings are transformed into social monsters, not for their inner makeup but for their sheer external appearance. The emerging common thread is one of deconstructing a social matrix of alienation and negation through an x-ray of the dehumanization processes.

Ralph Ellison is one of the first to establish the groundwork for analyzing the problematic of being Black in a modern setting shortly after World War II. His metaphorical conceptualization, indeed an interesting provocative oxymoron, raised the consciousness about his people's unchanged plight in a new arena that transcends the traditional black-white framework. Blackness is viewed as a state of mind conditioned by social factors, suggesting however a deterministic outlook of any possibilities for real change. As Phillip Brian Harper observes: "...blacks' status as 'signifiers' with respect to whites has dual implications. On the one hand, blacks' destiny always to affirm white identity at the expense of their own seems inevitably to lead to their invisibility" ("Fragmentation and Synthesis" 684). In other words, we are led to believe that Blacks will always be Black, among whites, Blacks, or anybody else in which individuality turns out to be something virtually impossible to attain. For Ellison, invisibility embodies multiple connotations: marginalization, decentralization, psychic fragmentation, historical denial, and sociological obliviousness. With *Invisible Man*, he creates a long-lasting metaphor to encapsulate his view of his people's condition, a subject of profound significance that had been summarily swept under the rug, down-played, redressed for its volatile and sensitive nature, or simply ignored. Invisibility shifts the attention from a black-white paradigm to grayness, that is, ambivalence and ambiguity, oscillation and doubt. While professing an anti-absolutist stance, he recognizes that people by nature are fluid, ever-changing, dynamic, and rarely predictable. This is the human condition he wishes to highlight in his protagonist.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* entails a complex representation of synthesizing Black identity from its various and rich sources: folklore (both southern rural and northern urban), jazz, blues, oral traditions, variants of speech, and others. The protagonist's

confessional testimony, a conscious act of ironically disrobing, but not always knowing what to take off and what to leave on delves into convenience, contradiction, and convention. As an unusual picaresque character, his unreliability brings into question what he unveils, especially for his eccentricity and incursions into the absurd, bringing to mind what Patrick W. Shaw calls a “sociopath”. He views himself as invisible, both literally and figuratively, appearing to come out of nowhere, devoid of parents for he provides no specifics about them. His grandfather, the only element of his past, seems to be his principal source of origin in reference to family ties, character, and culture. In fact, it is his grandfather on his deathbed, a haunting remembrance in the form of a leitmotif throughout the book, through whom a subconscious nightmare repeats itself that offers an ambiguous warning about socializing with whites:

On his deathbed he called my father to him and said, “Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy’s country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion’s mouth. I want you to overcome ‘em with yeses, undermine ‘em with grins, agree ‘em to death and destruction. Let ‘em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open.” (13-14)

This figures as a touchstone of the inevitable. In the meantime, the protagonist moves almost aimlessly within a white world that dictates his every move. He also extrapolates that being Black implies constant adjustments to an inequitable relationship of power and dominance. His principal dilemma lies in naively believing in self-individuation when as a Black person he is associated with a specific group, much like a photograph of Black men in which they are described as a ‘mob’. That is, his blackness determines his response from whites before he can begin to act out his individuality. His grandfather’s words then ring as a last minute revelation that frames a form of protest in order to counter invisibility.

The nameless protagonist, whose anonymity is a direct symptomatic reflection of his invisibility, basically has no other recourse than his invisibility: he measures himself in white terms (although stating “which is not a color but a lack of one” 435), he represses his past, and he denies his connection with other Blacks. Thus, his designated condition and identity are meant as an act of affirmation but on the long-run really becomes subversive. A perverse paradox develops: he highlights his invisibility with 1,369 bulbs in his cellar, certainly an exaggerated amount of light he pirates from the Monopolated Light & Power Company. If he truly accepted his condition, he would have no need for such extravagance. His over-compensation is turned into a way of dealing with his own illusion. At the same time, remaining in the ‘hole’ suggests a Dantesque descent into

at least being something. Like the *Aeneid* and the Cueva de Montesinos, the voluntary choice of the underground is revelation and discovery, a shedding of cobwebs from the mind, and insight where truth becomes apparent. Here is where he can truly see while going against conformity; it is an act of self-defense but also a creative one to establish something unique and authentically his within what he terms “outside of history”. Although invisible to others, he can relish at least being visible to himself.

Ellison’s novel involves a character’s attempt at mythifying himself. He is indeed complex, desiring to become divorced of social history. This delusion is ironic for he resorts to his cultural referents – jazz and blues – for inspiration and for determining what is real. His main dilemma is trying to have it both ways: becoming isolated and using his culture to his convenience. Unable to cope with his blackness, a central point even to his sense of existence, he opts to become more transparent than invisible, asserting “I now can see the darkness of lightness” (5). His isolation becomes a retreat into a gratuitous metaphysics and an assault against society in general. This explains his attraction toward Rinehart, a preacher, gambler, numbers runner, and ladies’ man, all at the same time, who becomes various persons for the many, a chameleon with a thousand faces or at least a mask for every occasion. Among his various fake ‘selves’, he seems to be seeking his real lost self while mirroring what society has turned him into. The invisible man is torn between singularity and plurality; irony resides in his unidimensional invisibility which precludes what he aspires to: that is, indulge in all possibilities. Ellison’s novel is very telling for it lays out a complicated network of dangers, trappings, and conditions to understand how to maintain a keener sense of identity and culture. Curiously, *Invisible Man* contains many elements paralleling the life of Malcolm X (remarkable oratorical skills, involvement in a secret association, a determination for maintaining his integrity, a basic distrust toward those who profess righteousness, a latent political agenda, and charisma). The fictional life of the protagonist and the real life of Malcolm X seem to fuse at times, leaving the conjecture that either the novel anticipates the historical person or the latter modeled some of his acts after the fictional character. Nonetheless, life and fiction here seem close, and if not, quite similar.

Cecile Pineda’s *Face* also embarks on a highly symbolic journey toward creating, or better yet, reconstructing an identity. From an accidental fall off a cliff in Río de Janeiro, Helio Cara’s face is mutilated or erased, transforming him into a sort of invisible man, more specifically, faceless. Not a self-proclaimed condition, it is one imposed by fate and, unlike the protagonist in Ellison’s work, spurs him to making himself visible again by first recovering from a metaphoric death, whereas Ellison’s character concentrates more on the creation of a symbolic tomb. As the narrator in *Face* asks: “Had he perhaps died a little?” (10)

This preoccupation can be explained in literary terms, but historical context also plays a key role. The novel appeared in the middle of the Reagan era during a time in which ethnic identity was assaulted or said not to matter. Therefore, Pineda's metaphoric response is to illustrate how and why identity are so pivotal, even though the story is devoid of any identifiable allusion to Chicanos. The author's background as a Chicana cannot be dismissed altogether to weigh the topic's resonance as a symbolic and historical gesture. Could it be that the author suggests a different kind of resolution to the problem of identity much in the vein of Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*? Such an in-depth exploration into identity during the anti-ethnic ideology of Reaganism does not seem farfetched. On the contrary, it proves that such a subject has continued to attract attention in philosophical as well as sociological terms. Provincialism here is discounted but still speaks to Chicanos and anyone else when dealing with heart and soul issues. Pineda masterfully demonstrates that as a Chicana novelist she can indulge in universal concerns, although critics looking for facile signifiers of ethnicity rather than literary truth might do otherwise.

Pineda, much like Ellison, presents identity as an extreme case scenario in a modern version of an Elephant Man or a Kafkian human-monster. Lacking in racial qualifiers, the protagonist nonetheless provides a symbolic lesson for those who are judged by their mere appearance. The intertextual connections with *Invisible Man* at this point seem obvious and even analogous. Both works underscore the importance and relevance of the theme of identity as essential to the question of human dignity.

Through Helio Cara a number of associations are made: his last name is emblematic of his deepest concern and also echoes the title of the novel. He is someone who suffers something worse than extinction for he becomes a non-entity, not invisible but perhaps paradoxically worse, threateningly visible. His face ends up dominating the rest of his body and soul, as others seem not to see anything else: "It was a face, a face half-man, half-beast" (59). In the process he loses a sense of himself as a social being, depending on others to affirm his humanity. The face acquires a rich plurivalent significance in the novel from merely physical to social, and from philosophical to spiritual. Helio Caras's face, or lack of one, equates to a sudden stroke of losing one's identity (identification and dignity) as well as feeling his very essence questioned. After all the face is usually the first and last part of a person we look at to recall uniqueness. The protagonist learns to count less on others because of their fickle loyalty or self-interest. Consequently, he recoils into himself, settling into the depths of his psyche. Because of his serious physical disfigurement, he experiences personal rejection or a form of social expulsion by two persons close to him, his boss at the barber shop and particularly his

girlfriend. His only alternative is to regroup and dedicate all of his energies to literally reconstructing his face from scratch through resourcefulness and determination.

Much like the *Invisible Man*, Cara also isolates himself from general view and society, except that his descent is more into himself rather than creating a spatial representation of his condition. Whereas Ellison's protagonist operates in an urban underground hole, which implies darkness but in this case defies it literally although not figuratively because of the excessive lighting, Pineda's central character comes out at night to enjoy a degree of invisibility while momentarily shedding his disguise. Of course his conspicuous white handkerchief and hat, comparable to the *Invisible Man's* donning a hat and shades, serve as a second skin, or at least a temporary one. In a sense, both become creatures of the night. Again, the intertextual implications are evident at various levels, including the narrative structures employed by the two authors. Both novels are divided into three distinct parts emphasizing the desire to reach a synthesis on the subject of identity. *Face*, for example, begins more or less where chapter 11 of *Invisible Man* takes place, that is, at the scene of a new beginning after having a brush with death. Whereas Ellison's work constantly integrates a comparison between the South and the North, above and below, Blacks and Whites, Pineda's novel contrasts the coast of Brazil with the interior, the physical and the spiritual, the intrinsic and the extrinsic. Helio Cara in particular returns to the hinterland, the place where his mother used to lived, thus a symbolic return to the womb and from where he begins his road to recovery by initiating the actual facial reconstruction, becoming his own surgeon and sculptor of a 'mask'. In both works, the personal quest also turns into the process by which the novel unfolds, establishing an intimate link between the narrative and the characters' conditions. Pineda, for example, includes this emblematic epigraph attributed to M. Merleau-Ponty in *Phénoménologie de la Perception*: "Like a novel, the face is a web of living meaning, an inter-human event, in which the thing and its expression are inextricably joined". Both characters attempt to claim and recover something as their own: in that way, they proceed to create external manifestations of themselves, such as the underground dwelling by the *Invisible Man* and physical features of Helio Cara. In addition, the narrative point of view of both operates from the vantage point of dealing with time and space through an active process of remembering or evoking their origins, where the past encroaches into their present, at times haunting them or in other occasions reminding them of their evolution and change.

Face, then, involves much more than a mere creation of a replacement in the form of a mask, for the quest becomes a voluntary one, not simply ontological. Helio Cara realizes that his face is also inextricably tied to society and how he cannot function adequately without it. But, most of all, he participates in choices instead of being a fixed genetic result, giving him a sense of becoming a creator of his own person and identity.

Therefore, whereas fate took away his naturally endowed physical attributes, his will power now takes over in order to truly create a unique face to the world, even if it is one generally acceptable by social norms. Ostracized originally from that society, he returns but in his own terms and now a much stronger person.

These two novels grapple with an intricate amount of questions pertaining to the reformulation of how the protagonists are perceived by themselves and society. In order to transcend their condition, they must first suffer the various stages of negation, or a type of death, the emergence of a new consciousness, and an ingenious, proactive response to recreate themselves, suggesting another social order. In this way they monitor and regulate the forces of alienation and dehumanization to protect the humanity they have left. Thus, they become at the end creators of their own person. They actually reenact a sense of their birthright. Above all, they do not take anything for granted; rather, they imagine and reinvent an identity to become bearers of a new creation. That is how they underscore originality and uniqueness. *Invisible Man* and *Face* represent two sides of the same coin for two distinct social groups, who as minorities seek out ways of providing a provocative exposé on how they view and experience the forces of socialization. The allegorical constructs of both novels are perplexing while attempting to break new ground in the controversial issue of identity, one that demands constant reconsideration and new challenging metaphors because it fundamentally strikes a sensitive chord of human concern.

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Fray Gerónimo Boscana's *Chinigchinic*: An Early California Text in Search of a Context

In principle, the cultures of the world, past and present, form an interconnected continuum, and it is somewhat arbitrary to dichotomize this continuum on the one specific issue of whether particular cultures do or do not have writing, and to call them civilized or uncivilized accordingly.

Alfredo L. Krober, "Ethnographic Interpretations," 1-6.

Literary history as a distinct pursuit in Hispanic or Chicano letters marks a relatively recent development in scholarship. Before 1970 literary historians did not see this field as unique; uncertainty and vacillation predominated with respect to the proper identification of early colonial or territorial texts. Oftentimes, these texts are examined in light of their relevance to contemporary social experience as understood in modern times, and thus their significance has been minimized. Critics of contemporary Chicano literature have generally centered their attention on more contemporary authors and their works in the quest to define the here and now. The political urgency of the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s did not permit philosophical evocations or reflections into the remote past. Social issues demanded far more immediate attention than incursions into the "purely" esoteric or inherently intrinsic. But as a sizable corpus of literary production has emerged and Chicano literature has gained wider acceptance nationally and internationally, critics have increasingly become interested in examining these early literary antecedents. Part of the new fascination with literary history is grounded in the opportunity to gain a better insight in our forebears' thoughts and imaginative fancies. This colonial literary heritage suggests a basic truth: there is a continuous strand linking the past with the present, despite the tribulations of political and economic oppression experienced by the Mexican people. Moreover associating cultural hydroponics with Mexican displacement in the United States is both inaccurate and malicious, for the underlying sentiment denies a long-standing Mexican presence during the colonial period and before the area became the U.S. Southwest. When this historical fact is

viewed in its full implications, early Hispanic works of literature become key links to our cultural legacy. It is vital, therefore, to reassess these early works and to examine their contents as testimonies of their time.

Luis Leal, a highly respected literary historian whose specialty includes the colonial literature of the Southwest, introduced an approach to the study of this literature that interfaces the cultural and historical dynamics of Mexico and the United States. In his pivotal study, "Mexican American Literature: A Historical Perspective" (1973), Leal provides useful parameters for the conceptualization of a literary history. He cites a comprehensive bibliography from the colonial period which includes little-known, and barely imagined, texts. His nomenclature for periodization establishes key variants and distinctive features of each historical period. Most important, his eclectic recourse to data from many areas and disciplines (such as history, lore, fiction, art and philosophy) is effective in linking a complex network of interrelated components. This linkage provides a watershed framework through which we can integrate all genres of literary works from the Hispanic and Mexican Southwest.

Another important venture entails a recent development in the application of new critical approaches to the study of literary history. Concentrating on a specific area, such as narrative (e.g., autobiography), regional case models (e.g., New Mexico or California), contrastive gender modalities (Chicana literature), the difference between written and oral traditions (Jacques Derrida and Walter Ong), a single genre (e.g., theater), or theoretical comparisons of movements and schools (e.g., postmodernism), allows (or much broader experimentation and examination).¹

The field of historical inquiry in literature has been greatly affected by a cross-pollination of the aforementioned approaches in dealing with early texts from the Hispanic colonial period (1540-1821), the Mexican period (1821-1848), and the different territorial periods, which vary from region to region (1848 to 1912). It is no longer sufficient to use a traditional historically oriented methodology because the results tend to be either faulty, misinterpreted, or incomplete. The most reliable praxis in achieving maximum results requires an interdisciplinary focus which demands a set of criteria that supersedes a single specialization. The examination of an early work, for example, requires knowledge of a whole array of fields to properly comment on its pretext, the text itself, and its context. A unique work that certainly contains the necessary features for challenging a critic or literary historian is *Chinigchinich*; (pronounced chi-ñi'ch-nich; chiñich-ñix; chi-ni'ch-ñich; chi-ni'ch-ñish; or chee-ngich'-ngich), which was written by a San Juan Capistrano mission priest named Fray Gerónimo Boscana between the second and third decades of the nineteenth century.² It is representative of the type of intergeneric accounts produced during the first 350

years of colonization in the provinces of the *vasto norte* of New Spain, as described by Luis Leal in the case of California:

In general it can be said that California colonial literature is didactic in nature. It consists of diaries, letters, memoirs, *memoriales*, chronicles, histories, travelogues, *relaciones*, essays and a few scattered poems and plays. Written first by the explorers themselves and then by the missionaries, government officials, military men, and other non-professional writers, its immediate end is seldom aesthetic. (Leal 1987: 24)

The variant ways of pronouncing its title are symptomatic of *Chinigchinich* elusiveness; the work has been subject to a number of concerns and polemics ranging from questions of textual authenticity (there is an undetermined number of manuscripts, although more than likely only two) to the reliability of the translations. Other questions relate to Boscana's intent and ulterior motive in writing the work, the testimonial accuracy of the subject's versions, and the author's own biased – or culturally conditioned – interpretations. Quite evidently, the many veiled truths (or untruths) juxtaposed inside and outside compound the problem of deciphering this one text. Part of the problem no doubt resides in its multigeneric makeup and its fluctuation from one genre to another. As a consequence, the modern reader might subject the work to unrealistic or unattainable expectations; for example, empirical data might be judged by nonscientific methods, and fictional material might be evaluated accordingly by possible scientific content. The issue of rendering *Chinigchinich* literally or figuratively becomes central to unraveling its intrinsic nature. How are these dilemmas and multiple dimensions to be reconciled? One approach is simply to read the available text(s) from a specific perspective instead of pretending to cover all options. Essentially an ethnographic and anthropological treatise on the Juaneño Indians from the San Juan Capistrano area in southern California, *Chinigchinich* clearly defies pre-established notions of traditional literary paradigms as well as common ethnological methodologies, although a case could be made for either camp. However, the principal aim here is to understand the work's underpinnings from a literary perspective.

In his *Handbook of the Indians of California*, Alfred Luis Kroeber claims Boscana's memoir is "easily the most intensive and best written account of the customs and religion of any group of California Indians in the mission days" (1925: 636). The official chronicler of Boscana's native city in Mallorca (Lluchmayor), Bartolomé Font Obrador, further comments: "Nada de cuanto fue escrito por los franciscanos que misionaron en California, incluyendo crónicas de viaje, diarios de expediciones, tratados varios, etc., puede compararse al estudio especializado y sistemático del misionero de Mallorca (Font Obrador 5; "Of the writings by Franciscan fathers who evangelized in

California, including travel chronicles, expedition diaries, various treatises, etc., none can compare to the specialized and systematic study of the missionary from Mallorca”). On another occasion Kroeber says that “his picture is much the fullest, is spiced with concrete detail, but also is definite in its broad contours and, for his time and profession, is liberal and enlightened” (1957: 212). Carl Schaefer Dentzel perceives Boscana as a missionary with a kind appreciation for the California Indians’ native ways: “The Franciscan Father Boscana belongs to this enlightened group” (Moriarty viii). John P. Harrington, in an annotated reprinting of *Chinigchinich* underscores a similar view: “The Relación Histórica ... is easily and by far the most ethnological of any of the essays or accounts written in the Spanish language during the Spanish period of the history of the Californias” (Robinson 1978: 96). In the accompanying preface to Harrington’s 1978 annotated edition, William Bright classifies the priest’s manuscripts as “ethnoscience” (Robinson 1978: iii). In his earlier (1934) translation Harrington claims the rights to a second manuscript by the Franciscan priest, adding: “There was comparatively rich Spanish archival material to be found, consisting of chronicles of voyages and land expeditions, church records, etc., but no other good description of a tribe and its customs, although certain writings on Lower California Indians constituted the nearest second to the Boscana [manuscript]” (Harrington 1934). Boscana himself is credited by his first translator, Alfred Robinson, originally in 1846, with having admitted the following in his introduction: “Perchance someone may enquire how I have obtained so much information relative to the secrets or religion of these natives when, up to the present time, no other Father has written on the subject” (Robinson 1978: 17). A reasonable qualification is that Boscana was operating as a pioneer in a new area of knowledge while exploring many aspects shrouded in secrecy. His methods of observing rituals and ceremonies might appear anthropologically questionable and at times primitive or scientifically fallible, but he seems to have made concerted efforts to be faithful to what he saw and heard, despite his firm conviction not to succumb to a suspension of disbelief. However, his goal was not so much a scientific treatise as it was a sociological tract with which to decipher myth, worldview, and a totally different religion. His observations were made for the purpose of understanding the Juaneños so that he could proceed with his ultimate aim: to use the information as a didactic tool for Christian evangelization. In the process he delved amply into myth, cosmogony, legends, fantasy, the supernatural, customs, habits, and an extensive belief system, all of which were part of a rich oral tradition. Of pivotal importance is the fact that in writing *Chinigchinich* he was functioning as a scribe (“Since these Indians did not use writings, letters, or any characters, nor do they use them, all their knowledge is by tradition, which they preserve in songs for the dances” [Harrington 5]) for events

and the participants' thinking and their scope of reality. He thus fluctuates from the cognitive to the unknown, entering the domain of imagination and literature while blurring boundaries between the creative and the scientific. Besides, if the intrinsic makeup of *Chinigchinich* produces elusive conclusions, it is because we may be seeing an early precedent to the contemporary but enigmatic, Carlos Castañeda and his *Teachings of Don Juan*. Or perhaps we may discover a late Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, whose documentation of Náhuatl cultures represents classic ethnographic work on sixteenth-century Mexico. Either way, Boscana also transgresses the traditions of his era by using genre boundaries and meshing disciplines –writing in a remarkably *sui generis* mode.

Chinigchinich represents a work difficult to classify within a single narrative structure or framework. It conforms quite well with the tone and tenor of the writings found during the colonial period vis-à-vis its wide-angle coverage of diverse topics, its various perspectives integrated into a text, and the utilization of set formulas. The work's objective appears multifold: at times the central narrative fluidly meanders between informing and speculating; and at other times Boscana denounces what he learns while almost admitting that he is awestruck by it all. Although his training and vocation cannot permit him to even consider accepting the Juaneños' belief system, he cannot help but demonstrate some degree of amazement for the profound meanings in the traditions they avow. He also manages to transcend the standard chronicle format because the engaging nature of the narrative is more important than the information related. In addition, he discovers along the way that the disclosures are grander than his capacity to relate them. What apparently begins as a matter-of-fact account in chronicle form becomes an autobiographical search for the right language to properly capture what he vicariously witnesses. The problem is an internal or psychological one as well as an external or social one. The text is as much about a limited narrator's perspective as it is about an indigenous people: his editorializing and judgments, his conjectures and intuitions, his intimations and perceptions. In other words, the unfolding of the narrator's circumstance and insightful optic override all the authentic ethnological data he can unveil. As an incredulous narrator, he is predisposed to defy and debunk what he is told, considering it *extravagancias*, superstition, and irrational behavior. He is intrigued, nonetheless, by the cosmic similarities between the Juaneños' cosmogony and that of Western civilization and how these are governed by unexplainable coincidences that transcend cultural lines. However, he does not always present counterarguments because he realizes the futility of dismantling an established belief system he is unqualified to judge. Perplexed by the unfolding of this incredible Indian love and the firmness of his own theological doctrines, he exercises discretion and restraint through both overt and subtle signs of praise for another people's complex order of beliefs and practices.

The text constitutes a meticulous effort to reconstruct a people's sense of history and mythology through a systematic but pseudo- or quasi-anthropological approach, one influenced by the teller's religious or didactic agenda and Eurocentric point of view. Boscana notes:

By gifts, endearments, and kindness, I elicited from them their secrets with their explanations, and by witnessing the ceremonies which they performed I learned by degrees their mysteries. Thus, by devoting a portion of the nights to profound meditation, and comparing their actions with their disclosures, I was enabled after a long time to acquire a knowledge of their religion. (Robinson 1978: 18)

The work must be considered syncretic because a certain amount of assimilation had already taken place, and the two worldviews – Western and Juaneño – had begun to interface.

Given the flaws in his nonscientific strategies to extract socially verifiable evidence, Boscana nevertheless penetrates the cultural barriers of his time, which tended toward a stalemate between Native Americans and recently arrived Hispanic Mexicans. We find a work that involves itself more in uncovering an ethos than discovering the most expedient way to convert the Indians into something else. Although *Chinigchinich* lacks a conventional plot, it does offer multifaceted narrative strata without confining itself to conventional models. Its plurality of traditions plus its diversely hued construct help explain its fascination for readers: it offers infinite interpretations at various levels (especially if it is true that more than one text exists).

While he was assigned to the San Juan Capistrano mission between May 17, 1812, and February 4, 1826, Fray Boscana became intensely inquisitive about the Juaneño Indians, a group sandwiched between the Gabrielinos to the immediate north and the Luiseños to the south.³ Its religious fervor motivated his desire to decipher their forms of religion, symbolism, and iconography with an eye to adapting them to Christian teachings. To this end he proceeded to cultivate a series of informants whom he considered infallible given the circumstances of language differences and their ability to communicate, as well as his ability to understand: "I confess that it is difficult to be able to penetrate their secrets, because the signification of their usages and customs is not known to all of them" (Harrington 5). Deviating at times from his initially stated objective, he nevertheless provided significant parameters for documenting the ethnohistory of an observed primeval culture. His original goal may have been a handbook on evangelization procedures for future priests who needed to become better informed about the Indians' "absurdities and extravagances," but he accomplished much more. He uncovered and reconstructed a rich and amorphous body of oral knowledge and bestowed on it a comprehensible meaning by rapping into an extraordinary wealth of

anthropological, religious, orally literary, mythological, sociological, and purely cultural records as they were being transmitted from one generation to the next. The text(s) of *Chinigchinich* probably achieved more than the author intended with his fragmentary note-taking: perhaps he never fully conceptualized or realized the scope of what he had started. As a text(s) in the process of becoming, it contains the simultaneity and plurivalence of voices that congregate between the lines. The abrupt ending hints at an unfinished endeavor or an open book. Alfred Robinson, the first to locate a copy, asserted in 1846 that “it is uncertain if the Holy Father ever intended it [the manuscript] for publication. After his death in 1831, it was found among his effects, with other writings, which came into the possession of the Syndic of the Missions, who kindly presented it to me” (Robinson 1978: vi). The work’s merit lies not so much in its intrinsic quality as in the potential it presents for interpretations; it is an unfinished product, raw data and notes.

The author’s stated intentions also deserve some comment, although the issue becomes somewhat clouded when the two known translations, by Robinson and Harrington, are compared. In both extant translations Boscana explicitly proposes to write a “history,” or *relación histórica*—without specifically stating what kind of history—of the local indigenous population. He then proceeds to salvage and deconstruct their belief systems, resorting to evangelical alternatives to further indicate the advantages of such an enterprise. Part of his aim involves comparing their previous state of “heathenism” with their present condition as Christians. His principal desire is to determine and make public their inner secrets in order to supplant these with elements of “an understanding of the true faith” (Robinson 1978: 17). In one version he alludes to his project as investigating “to a moral certainty everything that is related in the present book” (Harrington 5). Besides, the priest’s sense of humility overtakes him, although his fascination oscillates between cultural curiosity and religious zealotry. He also reveals a personal clue that might be the key to his interest in Juaneño religion and myths. His inquisitiveness admittedly emerged as a result of having to fulfill an obligation when the government of Spain circulated a set of thirty-six chronological questions to all civic and ecclesiastical authorities on October 6, 1812. This questionnaire reached San Juan Capistrano in 1814, and Boscana, along with another priest named Borfa, drafted a response as a part of a larger document called “Contestación al Interrogatorio.”⁴ If this did not directly affect his fondness for the Juaneños, it more than likely motivated him to become more precise about his observations while providing a format to do so. In Harrington’s translation Boscana goes to great lengths to minimize his personal role in divulging such confidential material from privileged informants or chiefs, while apologetically referring to himself as a “pygmy” and asking pardon for his possible

“arrogance and presumption” (Harrington 6). The rhetoric of his introduction closely resembles passages common in narrative works at the time the Inquisition was in power. The Inquisition forced authors to hide as narrators behind others’ views and perceptions as if they had had no part in what they wrote. Some authors fabricated smokescreens to divert attention from their real feelings, or they created a distance from their narrations by allowing characters and events to speak for themselves. Boscana’s special affinity with the related data suggests a triple purpose: to disclose a “fabulous in itself” indigenous background, to pave the way for Christianization, and to reconcile or at least bridge the gap between the two religious systems.

Much speculation and mystery surround the enigmatic *Chinigchinich* because it has become known through second- or thirdhand sources. According to Robert F. Heizer, Eugene Dufлот de Mofras was the first to refer to such a manuscript, in *Exploration du Territoire de l’Oregon, des Californies, et de la mer Venmeille. Exécutée pendant les Années 1840, 1842, et 1842* from 1844.⁵ Dufлот de Mofras claims to have obtained a copy in 1834, which he calls “Historia de las costumbres gentílicas de los Indios de California” (1844: 100). The key figure responsible for introducing Father Boscana’s text, however, is Alfred Robinson, an employee of a Boston trading company who first translated it and inserted it as part 2 of his famous account *Life in California: During a Residence of Several in That Territory* (1846).⁶ Later, Alexander S. Taylor reprinted translation in the series “Indianology of California.”⁷ Other authors refer to it only in passing. The primary mystery, however, revolves around the location of an original copy of the manuscript. The incessant search has resembled a treasure hunt of legendary proportions, not to exclude the phantasmagorical. Scholars sense a plot for a mystery novel – one that contains many leads but eludes solution. Records indicate apparent purchases of extant copies since the 1830s, but again, no concrete evidence has been openly displayed. In 1934, John P. Harrington made headlines in ethnography with his important translation of what he termed a variant version: *A New Original Version of Boscana’s Historical Account of the San Juan Capistrano Indians of Southern California*. Harrington, inexplicably, does not specify where or how he made his discovery, although he may have encountered an obscure copy at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. As the only consolation, he provides a reproduction of a photostatic copy of Boscana’s first page of the introduction to dispel doubts. Thus revealing a faithful and literal translation –something Robinson also claimed. Adding more fuel to the mystery, Harrington’s forthrightness becomes suspect, for he does not comment or elucidate anything about his 1930s finding in what is considered the most comprehensively annotated edition of *Chinigchinich* to date (Malki Museum Press, 1978). It seems that only Alfred Luis Kroeber is willing to divulge such secrets about Boscana’s manuscript(s):

It was secured at Santa Barbara Mission in the early 1850's by L. de Cessac, brought to Paris, and acquired in 1884 from de Cessac's associate, Alphonse Pinart, by the Bibliothèque Nationale, where it became No. 677 of the Spanish and Portuguese manuscripts. It has been seen there recently by our colleague John Rowe and by Edward H. Carpenter, Jr., of the Huntington Library; the latter, in fact, secured a microfilm copy of it. (Kroeber 1959: 283)

Another inherent concern with respect to Boscana's writings is compounded by the variety of liberties taken to paraphrase his work, oftentimes not allowing the opportunity to resolve the issue of authenticity in the composition, veracity, and/or perspective. To a degree, this has become part of a small network of ethnologists' elite lore. And the panorama of scholarly intrigue is further muddled by the real possibility that past ethnographers were not necessarily referring to the same text. Umberto Eco would certainly have a picnic with such a scenario. For example, Robert F. Heizer contended in 1976 what Bartolomé Font Obrador had already asserted ten years earlier: that Robinson and Harrington had access to two distinct manuscripts by the Franciscan friar, representing a most interesting dilemma for anyone attempting to comment on a definitive text. If it were true, then, according to Heizer, three distinct manuscripts about the same subject might exist: one translated by Robinson, one by Duflot de Mofras, and one by Harrington. This scholarly imbroglio leads to puzzlement, confusion, and infinite possibilities. No one has explicitly posited the possibility of more than three manuscripts by Boscana. We can say with some certainty that his writings were interrupted by his transfer in 1826 to San Gabriel mission, where he eventually died in 1831.

Since no third manuscript is accessible, comparison can be made only on the two known translations. In general, they contain essentially the same information, except that discrepancies such as omissions or additions are evident. Their compositions, for instance, not only reflect the translator's peculiarities and style, they actually denote substantial variances in content, amplification, and opinion. Perhaps they might most accurately be described as versions in progress, although the dates of their completion are also indeterminate. In Harrington photostatic copy dating from 1934, the years 1812-22 are etched on the left margin in what appears to be a reference to the title of research: "Through labor and cunning during a period of more than ten years [marginal annotation: from 1812 to 1822], I have been able to investigate to a moral certainty everything that is related in the present book" (5). More than likely, it represents the duration of his collecting the ethnohistorical data, because Harrington's translation contains fewer post-1822 references than Robinson's, suggesting that the later version was written later or subsequently brought up-to-date.

Boscana's texts elicit a number of questions regarding their intrinsic conceptualization. Judging from the external structure, it is not always clear if these divisions are intended as "several penetrating but all too short chapters" (Harrington 1), topical notes, or skeletal frameworks. However, both texts were written to be read by someone, as can be ascertained by the references to the "reader"—nor Boscana himself—and to a "book." An argument can be made that the texts remain untitled in the modern sense, but the tradition of that time assumes the title to be the long description (a sort of abstract) that introduces the text: *Relación histórica de la creencia, usos, costumbres, y extravagancias de los Indios de esta Misión de S. Juan Capistrano, llamada la nación Acágchemen*.⁸ Why Robinson designated the version he read with the succinct title *Chinigchinich* is not altogether clear, except to indicate a preference for either brevity or sensationalism. His fascination for this local godlike figure perhaps parallels Boscana's fascination, but it would have been inconceivable for a priest to name his original manuscript for a heathen god. Free from compromising theological predicaments, Robinson yields to a romantic spirit by focusing on the exotic qualities surrounding Chinigchinich.

As if Boscana's *Relación histórica* were not already cryptic enough, each translator (Robinson and Harrington) has contributed to its legendary status by providing portions that the other does not contain. Curiously, despite the differences I have already mentioned, both versions contain approximately the same number of pages. This might be explained by the procedure of submitting a formal response to the 1812 questionnaire from the Spanish government. But nonsystematic discrepancies abound between the two versions, and together they contribute toward a more global portrayal of the Juaneño culture. The order of the chapters and the correspondence between the two translations is as follows (chapter titles are abbreviated):⁹

Robinson's translation <i>Introduction</i> *	Harrington's translation <i>Introduction</i>
I. Of What Race?	1. From What Race?
II. On Creation of the World	2. About the Creation
III. Creation of the World [†]	3. Life of Chief Ouiot
IV. Vanquech Temple	4. Instruction of Children
V. Obedience and Subjection	5. Matrimony [‡]
VI. Instruction of Children	6. Manner of Life*
VII. Matrimony	7. Obedience and Subjection*
VIII. Mode of Life	8. Temple Vanquex
IX. Feasts and Dances	9. Feasts and Dances
X. Extravagances	10. Calendar
XI. Calendar	11. Extravagances
XII. Indian Wars [†]	12. Burials and Funerals

XIII. Funeral Ceremonies	13. Immortality of the Soul
XIV. Immortality of the Soul	14. Origin of Inhabitants
XV. Origin of the Population	15. About Rancherías [‡]
XVI. Character of the Indians	

* There is a resemblance but with slight modifications.

†The chapter does not match any other.

‡A sizable section remains untranslated or is transcribed in the original Spanish.

The major differences consist in the number of chapters (16 versus 15), the number of independent chapters not corresponding to any in the other translation (3 in Robinson's and 1 in Harrington's), and the minor shuffling of chapters more evident in the middle chapters and less so in the beginning and end chapters. The three autonomous chapters in Robinson's text ("Creation of the World," "Indian Wars," and "Character of the Indians") contribute information markedly different from Harrington's text for the specificity in their ethnohistorical revelations, including extensive commentary on myth and sociology with some allusions to what was then contemporary Mexico. On the other hand, Harrington's text essentially offers one independent chapter ("About Rancherías") composed as an unfinished note outlining the various nearby villages. In comparison, the last chapter in Robinson's text advisedly informs the reader of a completed attempt: "To complete this history and to give a relation of all my observations during a period of more than twenty years' residence in the province, it will be important to delineate the character of the Indians" (Robinson 1978: 87).¹⁰ Otherwise, the correlation is indeed close in the general treatment of the respective topics.¹¹

However, close scrutiny reveals more subtle clues to the manuscripts' order of composition and their degree of polishing and focus or tonality. For example, in Alfred Luis Kroeber's view, Robinson's translation is "somewhat flowery, and we do not know what liberties he took with the vanished original" (Kroeber 1959: 282), principally because we do not have the original with which to compare it. But Harrington's translation of Boscana's introductory comments offers more tentative statements about his procedure:

Since no information is found as to where these people of California may have come from ... it is necessary (for us) to walk *blindly*, traveling to and fro with closed eyes after the truth, and perchance nor knocking at her door for a long interval inasmuch as *this chapter is all by way of conjecture*, if I err in this undertaking, it is not through will and caprice, but because of not being able to discover the light in a place so dark, *going along groping blindly*" (Harrington 7; emphasis mine).

Harrington's manuscript also appears to include data that have not been fully filtered through Christian doctrine and practices. The religious biases are ever present in

both, but Robinson's text is replete with specific biblical references that are absent in Harrington's: Robinson's chapter 4 mentions Deuteronomy, and chapter 8 inserts Adam ("It cannot be denied that these Indians, like all the human race, are the descendants of Adam" [55]). And whereas Harrington in the chapter ride "Temple Vanquex" refers to the devil, Robinson calls him "Satanic Majesty"; and chapter 3 designates Quiot, a figure later transformed into Chinigchinich, as a "monster." In other words, Robinson's text is more culturally and religiously charged, at times falling prey to hyperbole with which to rebuff Juaneño beliefs. For example, while Harrington's translation describes the dances as "very decent and for a time entertaining" (38), Robinson's version characterizes them as "very modest and diversified by a number of grotesque movements" (57-58). In Robinson a potentially compromising observation by Boscana is omitted ("spiritual souls, created in the image and likeness of God"). When cannibalism is discussed, in Robinson's version a "large piece of meat" is extracted from the victim, but in Harrington's it is a "small piece." In Robinson the Indians are "compared to a species of monkey" (87), but no such mention is made in Harrington; and a derailed scene of a deflowering ceremony is included in Harrington but not in Robinson. In addition, in Harrington more doubts emerge as to the effectiveness of priests in evangelizing Indians, but such delicate assessments in Robinson are conveniently diluted so as not to admit a losing battle.

In sum, it can be argued that Robinson's manuscript (1825-1826) postdates Harrington's text (1822), and, further, that the later possibly served as a working draft or manuscript in progress for the later version. A number of textual hints seem to verify this fact. Robinson's text contains more comprehensive material¹² about the ethnohistory of the Juaneños (i.e., the bridal song missing in the Harrington text) and seems to have benefited from trial runs, such as Harrington's version may have been. Also, the former is safer than the later in balancing praise with censorship of "heathen" practices. One obvious clue in the Robinson version is the inclusion of recent events in Mexico regarding its independence from Spain; another is the mention of a comet appearing in December 1823; but the clincher is a direct citation of September 1825. Since the historically recent information does not appear in the Harrington text, it can be surmised that the Robinson text constitutes the most up-to-date reflections and annotations. A much more subtle difference between the versions reconfirms this theory. The linguistic equivalent of *-sb* appears in the earlier Harrington text designated by the sign *x* (e.g., vanquex), corresponding to Boscana's background in the Catalanian language, coupled with the Spanish *-cb* (e.g., vanquech), indicative of the more modernized version. The differences suggest both greater care in the "final version" and that Boscana's Spanish was becoming Mexicanized after his long residence in the region.

Robinson's rendering of "Chinigchinich" (instead of "Chinigchinix," as Moriarty later proposed) represents the most recent method of transcribing the name into the Spanish system of sounds. This transliteration of two c1isrincr sounds might be coincidence, but it seems consistent with other differences between the two texts.

Part of the intriguing fascination with *Chinigchinich*, aside from the aforementioned variants and discrepancies, still continues to be the fantastic stories and legends about a Juaneño people who seemed completely unacknowledged until Boscana delved into the oral tradition of their myths. He recounts and gives form to much of what is relayed to him through the optic of an amazed listener and witness. The abysmal cultural differences he experiences constantly keep him on the brink of disbelief. Thus, his natural reaction is to downplay the elements of mythopoeics conveyed to him because their unexplained origins threaten his own; his sense of otherness is a centerpiece in the narrative. Since he is set in his beliefs and accompanied by a strong sense of a messianic Catholic doctrine, he is not about to relinquish any ground to the inventive tales, which he regards as fictitious or preposterous, terming them *extravagancias*. To admit anything less would mean he has succumbed to their enchantment. For that reason he feels compelled to denounce, qualify, or further explicate his views. This is the dynamics that operates through the text(s). That is, there is a narrative focus function at all times, characterized by a tug-of-war between awe and disbelief, personal intrusions – including theoretical argument originating from the Bible – and some posturing of civilized righteousness. While trying to deconstruct another culture's view of itself through unique but questionable folklore and ritual, Boscana also measures the limits of his own belief system. Above all, most of what he relates is told through colored glasses, and at times through a glass darkly. In that sense, *Chinigchinich* entails the poetics of an outsider trying to capture, encapsulate, understand, appreciate, and represent a culture totally different from his own. The text, then, is as much about the Juaneño Indian, as it is about their highest religious figure –and all of what *that* signifies – through whom we can unravel the mysteries of human memory as it relates to their distinctive past.

Because Boscana cannot fully comprehend that the Juaneños sprang from a non-European social context, his logical conclusion is that they must be descendants of or similar to the well-known wandering Chichimecas, as described by Torquemada in his *Monarquía Indiana*. It becomes obvious that his understanding of local anthropological development was insufficient to provide a model with which he could easily reckon. Here he exemplifies a central Mexican bias as he remains puzzled over the incredible linguistic diversity found locally, intimating a Tower of Babel syndrome while not recognizing that the local Indian groups did not experience a massive social organization of the magnitude found in Mexico. The following excerpt illustrates how

he associates the primeval disclosures with biblical knowledge at the same time that he openly creates a schism between the two:

Although this chapter has for its title, the creation of the world, the reader must not suppose it has any relation to the account given by Moses in the first chapter of Genesis. I do not intend any such thing; but merely to make known the belief of these Indians to their heathen state. We must not be surprised, if there be found many contradictions and extravagances; for these rude Indians were ignorant of the true God, without faith, without law, or king, and governed by their own natural ideas, or by tradition. (Robinson 1978: 27)

The priest resorts to analogies to exemplify or deconstruct, but a partnership in the realm of ideas is intrinsically established; she arguments for a supposedly unrelated worldview seem to crumble little by little. The Juaneños' narratives of cosmogony become their own version of Genesis, and vice versa. In addition, they have a highly detailed narration about a deluge and how their central god, Chinigchinich (a trend toward monotheism?), evolved. Also, the topic of the immortality of the soul evokes a lengthy disquisition by the priest, who wishes to show it as a human trend not foreign to the Indians. Through sometimes remarkable parallels we can deduce a universal human frame of mind that explains the unknown through allegorical series or extended metaphors of epic proportions. All rational faculties seem to defy the versions of the creation of the universe, mainly because they are intended to be accepted as an act of faith couched within a given tradition. Boscana's thinking process, entrenched in a Christian mode, leaves him unable to exercise his sense of faith on a foreign interpretation. What he does not realize is that Juaneños could logically counter with their own perspective. But as the privileged narrator of the text Boscana has the upper hand, or the last say; he can discount as well as judge by the stroke of a pen. The Juaneño culture, in a very real sense, is at his mercy for he determines the definitions and ultimate criteria. Thus the text(s) are governed by a subtle conflict between narrative frames: his own or the Juaneño story.

Boscana's text(s) do not embody uncontaminated sources.¹³ His knowledge of indigenous cultures was possibly rooted –at least by hearsay or lore– in the known classics about the Náhuatl, including the Mayan *Popol Vuh*. The conquest of Mexico was probably very much in his mind, and his recent immigration into the Americas might have been influenced by conquest stories of fancy and drama. It is possible that he sought our proven models to help him understand indigenous peoples so that he could produce a useful didactic guide on the Juaneños. Without following the lead of a kinship or link with Quetzalcoatl, this group's recorded oral history exhibits strong similarities to other Mesoamerican creation stories. In addition, strong parallels are evinced with respect to Genesis. It is almost certain that a syncretic version was

passed down to Boscana. For example, the creation narrative indicates that “before this world was, there existed one above and another below” (Robinson 1978: 27), which resembles the dual Mesoamerican deities such as the Aztec Ometéotl. The two figures (heaven and earth) are brother and sister (a resonance of Adam and Eve or, again, native dualities). Out of their relationship is born the first mortal, Ouiot, who later becomes the main divinity and whose story parallels the myth of the poisoning and exile of Quetzalcoatl. At one point, Boscana compares the following: “We have the six productions of the mother of Ouiot, corresponding to the six days of the creation of the world” (Robinson 1978: 35). Ouiot later metamorphoses into Chinigchinich, who, as a type of savior known through the process of prophetic revelation, admits returning to his people to fulfill a new destiny. This regeneration and transformation into a higher being of godlike qualities also resembles the story of Jesus Christ as a messianic figure. Boscana lays the foundation of a quasi-Christian allegory, but he also takes the necessary precautions not to associate the two too closely for fear of censorship or heresy. In the Robinson text, the next chapter (missing in Harrington’s version) continues to expand on the creation theory of the Juaneños; however, the entire discussion revolves around its localized relevance, thus thwarting any suspicion as to what he may be espousing beyond the confines of Christian doctrine. Again, we are not dealing with an objective and comfortable narrator; his theological principles are being encroached upon. Yet, while balancing between what he hears and what he believes, he is still unable to prevent himself from retelling the incredible legends and myths. His disbelief becomes the medium or discourse of the suggested affinities between the two religious belief systems.

Boscana’s explanations of Chinigchinich are fairly detailed descriptions of his dress, manners, aura, origins, and behavior. Numerous times he hints at philosophical affinities between Western and indigenous peoples, but he makes certain not to intertextually associate religious figures from distinct traditions, for he does not consider them equal. Chinigchinich is viewed as an all-powerful, almighty, and omnipresent deity: “He saw everything, although it might be in the darkest night, but no one could see him. He was a friend to the good, but the wicked he chastised” (Robinson 1978: 29-30). In another instance Boscana skillfully refrains from any reference to the Holy Trinity although the analogies are unavoidable:

Chinigchinich was known under three distinct names, as follows: *Saor*, *Quaguar*, and *Tobet*. Each one possessing its particular significance, denoting diversity of a difference of times. *Saor*, signifies or means that period in which Chinigchinich could not dance; *Quaguar*, when enabled to dance; and *Tobet*, when he danced enrobed in a dress composed of feathers, with a crown of the same upon his head, and his face painted black and red. (Robinson 1978: 30)

Chinigchinich possesses the attributes of a compassionate and enlightened god who has lived among his people; for example, he has relieved them of ignorance, taught them to dance, related how to cure the sick, encouraged them to build a temple, preached a set of “commandments” (a religiously loaded biblical term for Boscana) for the youth, and, most important, provided them with words. It is noteworthy that Boscana rarely questions Chinigchinich’s godliness, because he too recognizes and admires the degree of social organization achieved by the Indians through his inspiration. Rarely does he enunciate the words *false god*, and when he does, it appears to be used as a rhetorical tool to maintain a certain distance. Although he never explicitly admits it, he probably viewed Chinigchinich as a good starting point in the evangelization process toward Christianity. The more he was able to elucidate the legend and myth surrounding Chinigchinich, the more he would argue that the Juaneños were ready for the next stage of religious evolution. Besides, this god shares some points in common with the Christian God and Catholic rituals, as James R. Moriarty’s summary makes clear:

The religion of Chinigchinich had serious and emotionally moving ceremonies and rituals. It was founded on a group of laws which required fasting, self-sacrifice and absolute obedience. Inviolable secrecy on the part of its adherents added an aura of mystery and the allure of the supernatural, thereby drawing converts to it by these powerful psychological attractions. Finally, it contained perhaps the most important ingredient requisite for a conquering religion. Its prophet and founder gave the sanction of fear. Punishment and damnation were the lot of the disobedient and the unfaithful. Terrible avengers in animal and plant form descended on these unfortunates, causing them great physical harm and even death. (Moriarty 11- 13)

One remaining question not resolved by Boscana is whether the Chinigchinich cult designates him as a human prophet or a god who upon death ascended into a type of heaven. Both options seem to echo Christian logic. However, he does explicitly state that Chinigchinich was born at a *ranchería* (village) called Pubu. This deity thus supplied the Juaneños with both functions (prophet and god) without one being exclusive of the other. According to Kroeber, most of Robinson’s and Harrington’s theological suppositions ring with misleading interpretations clouded with rudimentary ethnographical documentation, leading him to suggest a plausible compromise:

Changichnish [*sic*] might be a reaction formation, an invention due to the imported stimulus, made by natives desirous of preserving their old religion; an imitation of the Christian God of the missionaries, whom they took over and furnished with a native name and added their own beliefs. (Kroeber 1959: 291)

If that were the case, then Father Boscana was a pawn or a victim of his own curiosity. Either way, his work should not be considered a lost effort, for he laid the groundwork

for dialogue and interchange on such matters as value systems and ways of articulating worldview. The codes, signs, and even symbols for both cultures might have seemed incomprehensible, but the initial step was taken to expose an intrinsically unique cultural tradition. The variant texts of *Chinigchinich* reveal that the Juaneños were in fact neither simple minded nor primitive, as most presumed at the time. If Kroeber is correct perhaps Boscana was suffering from a serious case of naïveté. However, the texts serve multiple purposes, such as allowing the humble priest to organize his thoughts through the prism of his eyes and his sense of the divine, marking a search for a systematic approach to penetrating beyond another culture's observable *prima facie*. In that regard, the texts created their own context—one in the process of becoming a genuinely syncretic fusion of the New World and the Old. When the original manuscripts in Spanish are looted, we will not have to depend on intermediaries to transpose or translate meaning and signifiers. Therefore, now that the context has been established, perhaps the premise of the central thesis should be inverted: it is also a context in search of its texts, for these represent the best sources available to decipher a set of circumstances that rest on a series of ambiguities. Fortunately or unfortunately, the real truth lies somewhere in between: indigenous and European social-historical experience and their perspective (mystery and the fantastic versus faith and doctrine, respectively) depend on one another to better delineate what they are about.

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NOTES

¹ An example of each approach, respectively, might be as follows: Genaro Padilla and Ramón Saldívar for autobiography, Luis Leal and Francisco A. Lomelí for regional case models, Tey Diana Rebolledo and María Herrera-Sobek for the contrastive gender modality, Nicolás Kanellos and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano for theater, and Barbara Brinson-Curiel and José David Saldívar for theoretical comparisons of movements and schools.

² I thank Professor Luis Leal for introducing me to this fascinating *relación histórica* by Fray Gerónimo Boscana through his extensive work in Chicano literary history and his conversations.

Fray Gerónimo Boscana (Jeroni Boscana in his native Catalán) was born on May 2, 1776, at Lluchmayor, on the island of Mallorca off the coast of Catalonia; he was ordained in 1792 and sailed to Mexico in 1803. He arrived in Alta California in 1806 and served at La Purísima mission from that year until 1812. He then moved to San Juan Capistrano mission, where he served until 1826, although some historians also place him at San Luis Rey mission between 1812 and 1814. It is generally accepted that Boscana composed *Chinigchinix* while at San Juan Capistrano. He died at San Gabriel mission on July 5 or 6, 1831.

³ Considerable discrepancy surrounds the exact dates when Boscana arrived at and left San Juan Capistrano. Most authorities state that he served the mission for the aforementioned fourteen-year period after moving from La Purísima. However, John Harrington, in the Malki Museum edition of

Chinigchinich (1978), says in a footnote that Boscana spent almost two years at San Luis Rey mission prior to 1814, as substantiated by his first entry signed in the San Juan Capistrano mission during the alleged two-year gap. Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., in *Franciscan Missionaries in Hispanic California, 1769-1848: A Biographical Dictionary*, confirms Harrington's position of Boscana's brief stay at San Luis Rey mission, except that Geiger proposes 1811 - 14 instead of Harrington's 1812-14. The confusion and doubt are partly based on Father Boscana's mobility during the two- or three-year period, during which he also performed services at San Diego mission on November 12, 1813 and San Fernando.

The Gabrielinos, Juanefios, and Luiseños shared more commonalities than differences as they interrelated and influenced each other – the Gabrielinos were generally regarded as the most advanced.

⁴ For further information on its contents see the document titled “Contestación al interrogatorio del año 1812 por el presidente (Fr. Presidente José Señan) de las misiones de esta Alta California, y los padres de las misiones de San Miguel, San Antonio, Soledad...”; a copy exists at the Mission of Santa Barbara under *Papeles, Misceláneos y Extractos hechos por E. F. Murray para la Bancroft Library*, tomo 7, 1887. Also consult Fray Zephyrin Englehardt, in *San Juan Capistrano Mission* (Los Angeles: Standard Printing Company, 1922: 58-60).

⁵ Mofras discusses Boscana in general terms on pages 362 -380.

⁶ It was published originally in New York by Wiley and Putnam. Other subsequent editions have appeared: one in 1933 and another in 1947 (by Biobooks, Oakland, Calif.).

⁷ See *California Farmer* (San Francisco) 13 (1860).

⁸ It is immediately obvious that Alfred Robinson exercised poetic license in translating the little from Spanish – or he had another introduction available. For example the semantic distance between *creencia* in the original and his use of “origin,” and *extravagancias* and his “tradition” are either irreconcilable translations or questionable choices. The later is confirmed when we see the original Spanish version in Harrington's 1934 edition. In other words, the descriptive titles in both versions seem exactly alike.

⁹ A similar listing is presented by A. L. Kroeber in “Ethnographic Interpretations, 7-11” in an important section titled “Problems on Boscana” (282-293). However, his comparisons are merely cursory and concentrate basically on two chapters.

¹⁰ If we take Boscana's comments literally, and there is no reason why we should not, then the Robinson version might have been completed after he transferred to San Gabriel mission in 1826. No other critic has suggested a post-1826 date, Boscana notes his residence in the province for more than twenty years at the time of writing his concluding remarks (he arrived in Alta California in 1806). Thus, the final version must have been written during the last five years of his life (before 1831).

¹¹ In fact, according to Kroeber, who counted the approximate number of words (“Ethnographic Interpretations, 7-11”), the translations contain about thirty thousand words each. If Boscana intended his originals to be works in progress, why the texts would be comparable in size (58 octavo pages written in such a rather neat hand)? [Harrington 1]?

¹² This can be readily proven by reviewing Robinson's chapters 3 and 16, which are characterized by their ambitious nature in informational utility and global focus while meticulously delineating myths and their relevance or fallacies in relation to Christian beliefs.

¹³ Kroeber openly proposes the idea of a “corrupt text” (1959: 286).



Depraved New World Revisited: Dreams and Dystopia in *The Plum Plum Pickers*

While the spirit of an era influences the reading vogue, it can also be argued that the temperament of an epoch affects a writer, most especially in the choice of symbols. A writer may be termed clever or successful by satisfying not only timeless concerns, but also temporal conventionalities. With the passage of time, however, the storyline or characters may provoke less interest if they have been too fixed in a particular historical context, thus seeming less relevant. On the contrary, some works actually gain literary significance when they are examined outside of their respective time frame or after their topical appeal has subsided because they are not longer overcharged with extra literary demands or meanings.

The Plum Plum Pickers (1969) by Raymond Barrio might fit this description within the development of the Chicano novel. At the moment of its publication in 1969, its impact was largely measured in political terms, as the farmworker issues were portrayed with a definite ideological backdrop. In strictly literary terms, most critics regarded it as the “first Chicano novel” in light of the fact that little was documented then in the area of Chicano literary history. Only in 1970 when *Pocho* (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal was “rediscovered” did it become evident that *The Plum Plum Pickers* coincidentally contained some of the same characters advanced by Villarreal in an earlier period. Even though this is so, both works are notably different in tone and message. Both novels deal with Mexican migrant workers laboring in the same region around Santa Clara County in California. *Pocho* can be characterized as an identity odyssey to define oneself existentially. *The Plum Plum Pickers* on the other hand, picks the story up ten years later and laments that there has been no visible change in the workers’ plight during that span of time. Rather than focusing on one individual search for self-realization, Barrio’s novel exposes the resourcefulness needed to survive in an industry where the prime commodity is the human pickers, defenseless against exploitation. It illustrates the problem as economic in nature—with racial undertones—and accomplishes for the farmworker in the novel what the Teatro Campesino set out to do in theatre, that is, establish the migrant worker as worthy of literary consideration.

Although somewhat overlooked by the criticism that directed itself to works of the experimental 1970s and the diversifying 1980s, Barrio’s novel places the

farmworkers as a central character in the genre. This trend is continued in subsequent narrative innovations such as Tomás Riveras's "...y no se lo tragó la tierra" (1971). When we consider that *The Plum Plum Pickers* was conceived in the midst of tumultuous political fervor and corresponding messianic tendencies, its passionate commitment might seem outdated, even losing some of its thematic urgency. Yet this does not diminish the impact of the lessons it teaches: an appeal to unionize the helpless lot in order to improve working conditions and eradicate infra-human treatment. The method prescribed might induce less emotion today, but the humanistic entreaty, the end result, is still critical and timely. Beyond ideological concerns, the novel contains a determined search for justice in a drama that pits the individual against an increasingly self-serving society that prioritizes the wants of the "haves." What emerges is a dynamic struggle by the lower socioeconomic classes, who slowly but inevitably acquire a sense of themselves and of the insatiably greedy corporate agri-business combines. The novel provides a complex social analysis operating on various levels: it recreates an almost underground element or sense common to the turbulent zeal of the 1960s; it offers a scathing indictment of an economic system that controls through technological and amoral means; and, above all, it centers on a quest to regenerate the inner forces of dignity in order to overcome hardship. The symbolic framework in which all the levels interact rests in the characters' dreams in relation to a man-made dystopia.

Structured in part within the mold of the documentary novel, this work sets out to straddle the thin line between reality and fiction with the overt intent to fuse them. It characterizes the historical period as one plagued by divisive social issues while satirizing identifiable personalities and types. The then governor, Ronald Reagan, appears as Howlin Mad Nolan, and former California Senator George Murphy is called the "tap-dancing senator." The ultimate objective involves stirring the reader's sentiments concerning the economic condition of farmworkers. The novel advocates better salaries, which would allow them to attain a social status that would elevate them from their current form of modernized feudalism, a system sanctioned by free enterprise. The attention afforded this downtrodden group seeks both historic and poetic truth. In search of that truth, the author utilizes "fictitious news items from radio broadcasts and newspapers which spoof real news releases. He strategically intersperses verses from American and Mexican songs to charge his novel with greater irony. He even uses instructions from the Agricultural Extension Service of the University of California as a refrain for one of his chapters."¹ Motivated by Paulo Freire's notion of *conscientização*, Barrio resorts to journalistic techniques and styles and incorporates them into his narrative to create an immediate effect on the reader by intruding on the suspension of disbelief. The inclusion of materials even indirectly familiar to the common reader

increases the information's – and by extension, the fiction's – believability, thus involving the reader more as a witness than a second-hand reader.²

The Plum Plum Pickers depicts a world of intense conflict and estrangement divided along socioeconomic lines between the migrant workers and those who administer their labor. From the relationship emerges an involuntary dependency, one filled with friction, antagonism, and distrust. The result is a definite sense of entrapment and futility. The migrants' situation acquires the framework of a jail in a natural setting in which free movement is only a mirage. The system of labor is designed to promote a modern form of bondage; only the pretext of opportunity exists. Yet the pretext implies that the workers indeed have the possibility of disengaging themselves from a hand-to-mouth existence. The truth of the situation reveals that any participation in such a social structure will lead only to tragedy or to outright rebellion.

A possible pitfall for the workers consists in believing that change can occur from within, and they are encouraged to assume that their participation in the system will bring about actual change. As a consequence, the characters rely on compulsive dreaming and other methods of manifesting their wishes such as daydreams, mental divagations, and constant subconscious outpourings of desire for a better life in order to overcome the monotony of their humdrum existence. The frequent dreamy digressions in the novel point to instinctive urges to fill their hopes with meaning at the same time that they confront social alienation. Because they face agents of self-denial, that is, short-circuited aspirations, their logical avenues of expression become fantasy creations and escape into an irrevocable search for something other than what is. This mental and/or emotive process imagines its own order with its own laws and logic, eventually delineating a latent state of consciousness, which can then be translated into action. Cumulative fantasies within the bounds of a degenerating setting have the potential of becoming purposeful adaptations of previsions followed by purging revelations. As Arnold Whittick observes, dreams can perform as “harbingers of hidden truths about the submerged life of the psyche.”³ Oneiric experiences have as their basis an intuitive ideology of sorting things out, often intimating what Dante considered man's moral obligation to be – and, by association, to become.

If dreams in *The Plum Plum Pickers* signal the degree of discontent between desire and fulfillment, they accomplish still another important function: the characters' reflexive anticipations lead them onto the path of clarity where they may differentiate between the rhetoric of utopia and the mechanisms of a well-planned dystopia, that is, a negation of perfectibility, in this case invaded by nightmares. As the workers' idealism gradually dissipates while they confront a living hell, they either fantasize more disparate dreams or recharge suspicion and questioning into acts of protest. The change begins

when their hopes are no match for the entrenched dystopia, which they realize is more than a state of mind. The ultimate recourse is to look for ways to alter it, to make it a more humane system.

This emerging awareness is symbolized in the structural framework of the novel: the waking up from a nightmare. The sense of awakening is emphasized by the constant references to dawn and the sun's presence. The underlying optimism, the feeling that something is about to happen, becomes highlighted by this image of persistent renewal. The migrant workers at first simply go about their business, unsuspecting, until they realize independently of the others that each is a pawn in larger scheme that involves everyone. The slow process of discovering a common bond is poetically portrayed by the "relentless ripening of the prunes" in the opening chapter, a middle chapter, and the very last sentence of the novel. As the central motif, this image also refers to the peak of maturation of a people who share suffering and whose denial is nearly over. The ripening, the culmination of a natural growth process, parallels a people's instinct for liberation. Because the concern affects a multitude, the central character is really meant to be collective rather than individualized. Lupe and Manuel Gutiérrez, however, who appear in key scenes, emphasize a partnership of struggle. The characters include victims, exploiters, and those in between, ambivalent about where they fit in. Whereas most of the humble laborers exist as objects of manipulation, they serve well to contrast with the main grower in the story, Frederick C. Turner, owner of the Western Grande Migrant Compound; Morton J. Quill, his assistant, manager and chief warden; and Roberto Morales, the contractor of cheap labor. The growers institute, execute, and condone the rules of the migrant camp, which more closely resembles a concentration camp or meat market than a workers' paradise.

All the ingredients add up to a bomb ticking in the promised land. The ticking is made apparent from the opening scene when Mr. Quill is abruptly interrupted in his sleep by the loud dissonant noises of a garbage can lid that "came sailing out of California's blackest sky."⁴ The opening "Bang bang. Crash" breaks Mr. Quill's slumber at the same time that it shocks his sensibilities – and, by implication, the reader's. Its aim is to displace him from his subconscious dark side and reintroduce him into a foreboding reality of ominous signals and potential conspirators. Vernon Lattin explains the process: "his return to real life from the underworld is not an escape with an Aeneas / Odysseus-like vision of truth; it is a return to the reality of his own hell and the hell that he manages for Turner."⁵ The surrounding darkness of pre-dawn befits his ignoble desires driven by paranoia: "Now that [the sudden noises] didn't belong in the dream. *He'd been driving his own hearse* around carefully as usual, *listening closely as usual to all the underworld noises infiltrating* his tender sleep. It was good that the crash

came along when it did” (31; emphasis mine). As an agent of death, driving a hearse, and a guardian of hell, for being the inn-keeper, Mr. Quill, who is described by the narrator as “his blubbery majesty,” symbolically introduces us through this dream-state into a Dantesque prune town called Drawbridge. The name of this town happens to be the only fictional name used among the many actual Santa Clara County towns. As shopkeeper of the compound, he has the authority to determine the fate of the workers in a town which is the point of entry into a place of nightmares and suffering. Drawbridge, a point of no return, calls to mind a gate-like structure, a part of a fortress to regulate movement. This metaphoric representation can best be understood here as a passageway into a feudalistic state and part of an anachronistic dystopia operating under false grounds of offering opportunities.

The description of Mr. Quill’s character helps to unravel a complex series of interactions and innuendoes about the storyline and about what he represents. By drawing our attention to Quill as one of the central characters, the author is able to focus on the source of the problems inherent to the feudalistic makeup of a migrant camp. Described as one-eyed, his visual handicap also denotes him as a devourer of humans, a modern version of the Cyclopes, but one who has sold his soul to the company store in exchange for petty compliments and the promise of a raise, no matter how miniscule, from Mr. Turner. Exemplary for his conformity and plagued by a deep sense of emptiness and shallowness in his life, he derives a sadistic satisfaction from running the residents’ lives while at the same time he obligingly justifies the debt peonage system. He holds no remorse about bilking the poor, as long as the compound remains a profitable venture. Besides, he firmly believes he is offering a useful service to a lazy, undignified lot by allowing them to partake in a natural paradise in which work is bountiful. The essence of his character is in his last name, which lends itself to various interpretations. As Turner’s moral forager, “Quill” may refer to the hollow shaft of a feather, a writing utensil from the past, which in turn inks in a person’s fate; or, it may be seen as an object to inflict pain, like a porcupine’s spiny bristles; finally, it could be a bilingual play on words with a phonetic rendition that suggests “kill.” These qualities fit his person, designating a straw man who acquires power to compensate for his moral deprivation, his solitude, and his numerous human frailties.

As manager of Mr. Turner’s dystopia, Mr. Quill plays the key role in unfolding what this world of negation means for the unsuspecting workers. In the opening scene of banging noises, Quill meets up with Pepe Delgado, a wandering drunk who still has ties with the farmworkers despite his regular job in a cannery. The prune compound acts as a magnet, drawing Delgado into a labyrinth crowded with elements that deaden his nerves – liquor and prostitution. By choosing the name “Pepe,” Barrio refers to

Everyman, and he embodies a defeated and morally emaciated man in his last name, "Delgado." Being the first person Mr. Quill sees in this pre-dawn setting, Delgado essentially reflects the substance of both Quill's dreams and his awake state. These two form a symbiotic relationship of victim and accomplice, two persons on the same path of nothingness but heading in different directions.

Despite his almost lifeless condition, Delgado confirms a series of ironic circumstances at the outset of the story. Both he and Mr. Quill inhabit the middle ground between sleep (either regeneration or nightmare) and work (either hope or exploitation). The contrasts between darkness and dawn are immediately established as opposing forces. Delgado states an unintentional truth by associating these bizarre early morning events with the devil, thus pointing to the insidious origins of the place. He also functions as an interpreter, foreshadowing Mr. Quill's fate when he deciphers a scribbled message on a piece of paper that simply says "Joaquín M." The emblematic script, a form of writing on the wall, prophesizes Quill's downfall as a result of a popular revolt inspired by the likes of the social bandit Joaquín Murieta. The numerous ironies and double meanings in this first scene help establish the bitter and sarcastic tone in the novel, which is reaffirmed by the narrator in describing the setting as "The Western Grande Compound, the pickers' paradise, the migrants' home away from home.... Mr. Turner's guidance was truly a godsend.... Would they or would they not pick prunes, all the prunes, and nothing but the prunes, those pious and pretentious prune pickers?" (32). With the final mocking of the legalistic phrase to speak the truth "so help you God," what was initially humorous becomes rhapsodic bitterness.

The "Joaquín M." script demands further discussion because it highlights the double meaning of outlaw and social bandit, setting up the dichotomy between evil and insurrection. The ironic twist of Mr. Quill's one eye associates him with both Mr. Turner and Black Bart, two forms of banditry, the real and the make-believe—another symbiotic alliance for controlling and intimidating the pickers. Although Mr. Quill contributes to this underworld of illegality as protector of the peon economy, he is greatly motivated by suppressed hatred of Mr. Turner, the owner. The love-hate relationship is to be understood as parasitic in nature, based on self pity rather than on a redeeming sense of personal dignity. Like the farmworkers, the manager of the compound finds himself in a dormant state waiting for the appropriate moment to unmask his true aspirations, although in his misguided intentions he envisions himself becoming an independent grower like his boss. In his dependency he wishes, above all, to replace his overseer, inspired by envy and an inferiority complex that can only be quenched by gaining full authority.

Outlawry, then, permeates all facets of the administrator's intentions and it is symbolically centered in the straw dummy of Black Bart which dangles from a hangman's

oak tree behind one of the shacks. The effigy's presence offers a number of correlations: it is an image that on the surface could mean an attack on a particular outlaw, but in this case it serves as a macabre reminder against rebellion as well as portraying the consequences of such an act. It embodies both the amoral means of acquiring wealth and retaining it. Also, it "reminds the reader of its true history and the reality of death and unhappiness, however camouflaged, behind the appearance of the Western Grande Compound."⁶ Although originally placed in the middle of the migrant camp as a gag – with poor state and all – the joke assumes the quality of an omen of the last recourse for overcoming the dehumanizing existence. In the end Mr. Quill is hanged in the place of Black Bart, an act of self-fulfilling prophecy which inverts the symbol from fantasy to reality. Thus, poetic justice is accomplished by sacrificing the most immediate offender, and this marks the first purging act against those responsible for the workers' plight. If death at first is a harsh reminder to those who might rebel, in the end it becomes a useful means to undermine the effects of a dystopia.

The origins of the Western Grande Compound are easily traced to Frederick C. Turner's personal background, the place being an extension of himself. Its layout resembles a Hollywood stage with its appropriate props. It was created to imitate the make-believe and Turner proclaims himself the composer of a paradise. The workers, however, perceive this idyllic place in contrary terms and label him with the nickname "El Gusano Verde," a crawling creature associated with evil and with the biological stages of dissolution. "El Gusano Verde" is an appropriate designation for Turner because of the implications of evil and his admiration for Black Bart, thus linking two forms of the same thing: death and the underground. The double meaning of the term "green" is determined by one's perspective, because while Turner himself might assume positive connotations in the term, actually it denotes money and a mercenary function instead of life. The pickers view the owner as a scavenger with sinister fantasies who feeds on greed.

For Turner, the compound represents a dream come true, one realized after having overcome a long history of misfortune and poverty as a cowboy extra for early Western films. Limited in acting ability, he was usually cast in the villains' parts, which coincided with his real-life intentions. He later transposes film roles onto a real-life stage and confuses fiction with reality by applying the same logic to distinct orders. Turner's manipulative aims inspire him to add a touch of quaintness to his little Western town, calling it "Grande" in Spanish to accommodate the migrants it aims to control. By incorporating such a term, he reveals his motivation to create a place that will be enticing to those whose vulnerability is matched by their ambition. By playing on his name, he "turns" their dreams of improving themselves into his profit. Turner's fantasy

then takes shape in prop-like forms called “pseudo shops,” which as Vernon Lattin explains, “hide the reality of Turner’s greed, Quill’s self pity, and the misery and hopes of the Gutiérrezes, Delgados, and other migrant workers living behind this fantasy with their own dreams, nightmares, broken lives, and hopes for a better future.”⁷⁷

Turner exemplifies the Machiavellian motives of an agricultural monopoly personified in a former actor who is driven to expand his stage to encompass his social milieu in order to gain acceptance and exert influence. His sporadic benevolence is nothing more than a temporary role he must act out, a gimmick used to hide his insatiable greed and compensate for his intrinsic depravity. He seeks objects outside of himself to decorate an otherwise empty life, as is the case with his special attraction for Mayan statuettes: “These Mayan statuettes therefore helped buttress his own hypocritical opinion of his stunted inner self” (79). Instead of seeking aesthetic pleasure in these cultural objects, he displays an ingrained paternalism toward those whose culture is represented in the statuettes. Pleasure for him can only be measured in terms of lucrative gain; thus his authenticity as a person is denied because he becomes synonymous with the system he sustains. Perhaps best defined as a form of a technological chameleon, his person is characterized by a constant flux, as in the numerous names used to describe him: Frederick I.C.B.M., Mr. Trueheart, Frederick C. (for Combine), Fraud Turner, Mr. Turpitude Turner, Mr. Friendly Adroit Turner, and others. By use of the numerous identities, it is implied that Turner embodies all and none of these. His slippery quality as “El Gusano Verde” also associates him with a reptile figure that sheds identities to confuse others and imparts evil in an inverted paradise.

It is no coincidence that Turner’s main contractor’s name is Roberto Morales, a man who lacks all sense of morality and, much like Mr. Quill, regulates souls in a pact with the devil. Morales also acquires parasitic qualities in concert with Turner because both consciously condone what is termed a modernized “silver slavery.” That the contractor gains financially from recruiting laborers makes him a traitor, a Judas figure whose ultimate goal is profit at the workers’ expense while pacifying them with deceiving smiles. The philosophical basis for the dystopia Turner and his henchmen maintain is summarized by the following slogan: “How inhumane, how insane, and how immaterial is humanitarianism” (78). Such ideological justifications serve as mild façades to obscure their contempt toward the workers. These remarks divulge a calculated plan to submerge the people they control into a deeper state of entrapment.

Another consort in Turner’s scheme of deception is his wife, Jean Angelica, whose primary purpose is to project an almost celestial image to promote the couple’s benevolent intentions for the sake of charity. As part of a larger design to make the couple a household name in Turner’s campaign for mayor, her charm and charisma offer

the illusion of noble motives. Being an angel of the underworld, as her name and her associations suggest, she displays the talents of a second-rate actress, but her enviable forte lies in the field of psychology and appearances. Through her apparently non-threatening mannerisms, many people think she is what they see. Her false humility becomes her main weapon to catch people in a web of delusion and dazzle their sense of reality. She soon learns that a well calculated and subtle aggressiveness is instrumental to conquering, to serving her own self-interests among the social climbers in the local ladies' clubs. Her obvious ulterior motive underlies a need to give greater credence to the infra-human social order in the compound, playing down the actual conditions to make the compound seem like a place with opportunity for all. The purpose is to blur the difference between an exploiter and a benefactor. A persistent cough, a symptom of her moral degeneration, is symbolic of the innermost corruption that she cannot hide and for which she can find no cure.

Whereas the aforementioned agents of dystopia hold firm in maintaining the status quo through a complex network of collusions, numerous alliances emerges from the migrant sector to counteract the manipulations by the growers. The most notable couple who struggles to overcome their squalid circumstances is Lupe and Manuel Gutiérrez. They find themselves forced to exist in a world of dreams and fantasies in order to neutralize the hard life of a relentless bad dream. Each experiences a separate process of awareness and both reach the conclusion that their efforts require more visible results. Anxious to achieve new levels of dignity, they hope to advance beyond a life as modern gypsies in which they feel displaced and hesitant to call a particular place "theirs." Although not completely alone in their quest to alter their social condition, this couple reaches the first stage of collectively realizing the urgency of their situation. They are the first couple to mature to that level of awareness through their restlessness and questioning postures. In effect, they mark the first link in the chain of solidarity that will create the necessary voice to effect change.

Of the two, Lupe stands out as the most could compulsive dreamer with the most lucid notion of how things could be for her family. Her mental divagations can be directly traced to a sense of insecurity and entrapment that becomes reinforced by an inability to escape the labor camps and temporary tents. The constant repetition of the same routine, without evidence of improvement, wears on herself assurance, causing her to feel locked in a system that recycles people like disposable goods. On one occasion she projects part of herself when she describes the poor as "helpless fish trapped in tanks, writhing and helpless, like trapped, turtles in a rocky pool" (185).

As she slowly unveils her own sense of self-discovery, she directs her rebellion inward by internalizing the anguish and recoiling into herself. For example, she is the

first to witness the pre-dawn events of the opening scene of the novel. From this precise moment in the action, she displays a predisposition to exercise clarity of mind: "She stumbled sleepily to the window, shaking the cobwebs from her mind" (37). The gesture herein described is significant, for she makes the important transition between the dream state (symbolically referring to their previous unawareness) and a new state of cognition. In other words, having witnessed this early scene enhances her coming to grips with the sources of her family's plight. Consequently, she is able to proceed to confront her own problems, which linger in both her conscious and subconscious mind. Specifically, she releases her deep frustrations about the instability factor that impedes having a permanent home. Other fears that come to the surface include her disquietude about the Texas Rangers and the threat of being sent across the border, the presence of the diabolical hangman's oak, and the intimidating figures of police and soldiers who represent forms of authority. By facing up to her inhibitions, she becomes the first to imagine and actualize alternatives for change. Above all, she loathes the encroaching filth in which they live, forced to compete with cockroaches and other unwelcome creatures. These living arrangements, together with a complete lack of privacy, are symptomatic of the rampant depravity that is quite contrary to the paradisiacal façade of the compound.

Determined to see her dreams materialize, Lupe depends largely on prayer and on fabrications of fantasy to seek a reprieve from intangible pain. Above all, she strives to have her own home, opportunity for her family, and a real sense of advancement through hard work. Of utmost concern is her attempt to achieve order and give meaning to her life. Yet her nightmarish existence tends to obstruct her incessant dreams, thus augmenting her frustration and fears. Manifestations of idealism, either through dreams or daydreams, are generally weakened by the ravages of a socially ingrained dystopia that sets boundaries and demarcations for the humble laborer. Therefore, her constant battle takes the shape of a struggle between fantasizing and overcoming repeated defeats in a life that is increasingly a self-fulfilling prophecy of poverty. Always on guard, her numerous anxieties range from thoughts for her children's safety, fear of her husband's death, the surrounding filth, possible pregnancy, and harassment or deportation, to a general lack of freedom to work. "Lupe's recurrent daytime nightmares kept tormenting her" (187), leaving her with no other options than to ponder the three degrees of a woman's plight as mother, prostitute, or wife. She is unable to see beyond these three options because her function in this society is already prescribed. Forced to resign herself to limiting roles, she transforms religiosity into a source of strength and determination, praying to the statuette she keeps of the Virgen de Guadalupe, her namesake who enhances her identity and worth as an individual.

Whereas Lupe's character at first displays signs of weakness and abnegation, she manages to mature quickly and recover her senses to better assess her situation. As is perhaps expected, her awareness leads her to denounce those who keep her family down. This early transformation allows her to become instrumental in the latent movement of rebellion. This is only possible because of her clearing the cobwebs from her mind, that is, having distinguished between appearances and reality, between a dystopia and a cornucopia.

Lupe's character offers a diversity of dimensions. Some readers might criticize her portrayal as being submissive, thus confusing her repeated appeals in prayer with resignation. These actually represent personal forms of regrouping and reinforcement, as becomes evident when she lashes out at the agents of her misfortune. While working in the strawberry fields, she assumes the qualities of a martyr-figure, dragging her child on the ground and praying as in a bad dream. She imagines the field a cathedral and takes on a semblance of a fallen Christ figure, spurring her husband Manuel to clench his fists. Her outcry then becomes contagious and stirs others into examining truthfully their complacency with the status quo.

On a larger scale, her quest to locate the appropriate place for her avocado tree parallels her ultimate dream to establish roots for her family – and by extension, her people. The tree serves a double function in that it reminds Lupe of the cross the farmworkers must bear and their potential to overcome that burden. It embodies the subconscious desires for herself in addition to representing her past memories of a verdant Mexico. The avocado tree thus serves as the unifying link; first, ironically, it contrasts with her rooted past and expresses a wish to begin anew in a new locale, and, secondly, it serves to associate a cultural artifact from Mexico with a new type of tree, the prune tree, which brings to mind economic survival or exploitation. It acquires the symbolism of her Mexicanness, which she is attempting to implant in the new country but which is rejected and expelled from the inverted Garden of Eden.

Chapter 11 highlights Lupe as a cultural figure, a type of *llorona*, but one who protects her two children from a threatening tractor that is likened to a technological monster, capable of mercilessly devouring those close to the land. Because her dreams are confronted with relentless obstacles, her alternative is to assert herself against the dehumanizing elements. On the one hand, she declines the temptation of purchasing a statue of a Greek maiden, which is associated with her past self-denial and with the Anglo world: “She dreamed of a paradise where she might hold herself slim and erect and virginal all over again.... But these thin lipped goddesses, these blood blond tresses caused her to wonder what kind of poison was darkening her mind.... Suddenly, she felt a surge of wanting to smash them all.... What could she, a mere woman, do? Pray?

More? Pray more? Pray what? *Ay Dios de mi vida*" (109). She somehow senses having lost her virginity while at the same time she realizes that she is an object of the myths imposed on her by Anglo society with all their alienating effects. This marks a key point in her development, and shortly afterwards she explodes violently in response to Jean Turner's goodwill package of used clothing, throwing it away defiantly. She finally reaches a complete awareness of her person and her place in a society that tries to prescribe her role.

Lupe's husband, Manuel, takes a bit longer to gain full awareness of the degradation to which he is subjected. Primarily dedicated to his work and his shortsighted dreams, he does not share his wife's impulsive character, preferring instead to have his work speak for him. More a realist than an idealist, he is completely engrossed in finding work and carrying out his duties in order to be able to feed his family. A simple man, he soon realizes the discrepancy between his labor and the compensations involved, a situation which remains the same despite his increased efforts.

Early in the novel he has the revelation that the shack functions as a place of his imprisonment: "A sudden fierce wave of anger made him want to cross the shack with this fists. There had to be some way to cross the unguifable bridge. Why was necessity always the bride of hunger?" (88). Although his rebellion is in gestation, he delays manifesting it overtly because of the possible repercussions that could hurt his family. As a way of understanding his anger and frustration, however, he makes a noteworthy connection with his ancestors, specifically with Gaspar de Portolá, considered to be one of his forebears two centuries before who crossed the same region where Manuel is currently working. The link associates two men who supposedly involve themselves with heroic deeds but who have been set apart as opposites. The author here attempts to amalgamate myth with popular history at the same time that he demythifies history and ennobles a humble worker. The irony remains that Portolá has been elevated to the level of a romantic figure, while the farmworker has been lowered to the lowest level of oblivion by a society insensitive to historical facts. In this way, the author proposes that the worker be recognized for his noble origins as well as his admirable contributions to the economic system.

Generally brutalized by physical work, Manuel's entrapment becomes more unbearable under the supervision of Roberto Morales, and it leads him to defy Morales by kicking over a bucket of apricots to protest the latter's intent to collect a commission of two cents for every bucket. Despite his previous reticence, Manuel at this moment regains what Portolá once claimed to have: a certain sense of honor and pride, which he sees as a human necessity, "Or else they are dead before they die" (94). From this point, he feels compelled to solve the question that haunts him: "Am I not a man?" (160). Such

questioning allows for inner examination of the self and leads to philosophical postures similar to the Quinto Sol concept of awaiting the appropriate time to realize one's dreams under conditions that are conducive to fundamental change. From the question emerges the idea of the sacrifice necessary to alter their hand-to-mouth existence. This also marks the transition from passivity to action. Manuel is later reminded in numerous scenes of his current alienation, especially by the four migrant workers who parallel the four horsemen of the Apocalypse and who serve notice to Manuel of the useless death that awaits the lifestyle they lead. Though it is unintentional, these four migrant workers, carry two others to their deaths in a car accident.

Parallel to Lupe and Manuel's process of rediscovery and protest is that of a younger couple, Ramiro Sánchez and Margarita Delgado. They essentially embody the ideals of the other couple except that, being younger, they are less trapped by the hang-ups and self-indulgence that plague Lupe and Manuel. Ramiro and Margarita exemplify the newer generation that learns from past experience and the mistakes of the more resigned older couple. It could be said that they are the reason the novel was written, that is, to provide an ideological thrust advocating farmworkers' rights as well as to raise them to mythic proportions. Whereas Lupe and Manuel represent a latent protest that begins to manifest itself, Ramiro and Margarita advance a Chicano Movement ideology of rekindling past Mexican symbols and incorporating them into a civil rights social framework. Ramiro definitely stands out as the leader of a vanguard, one whose revolutionary zeal is seeking to find a niche where change is possible. He reaches the height of the almost mythic figure portrayed in Rodolfo Gonzales' *Yo soy Joaquín*, who, inspired by Padre Hidalgo, Emiliano Zapata, and other Aztec idealizations, was elevated into the realm of the legendary. As the narrator states: "At least he owned his cloud of dreams" (p.135). More self-assured than Manuel, Ramiro speaks directly for the author by editorializing on the farmworkers' conditions, on the urgent need to restructure capitalism, and on the notion of finding refuge in one's past, namely Aztec Mexico. As the proletarian leader of a revolution, he feels he has made contact with the cultural glory of Mexico, thus experiencing the sensation that he is "a god again" (135). As a mythic figure who is reinforced by the workers' acquisition of a new consciousness about their plight, Ramiro experiences rejuvenation, for his mission is to present a threat to the dystopia and its agents, who are regarded as perpetuators of slavery.

Ramiro's valor in fact seems nurtured by an Aztec sun, one which had remained dormant and is now beginning to rise again. The metaphor coincides perfectly with the imagery propagated by the Chicano Movement of the late 1960s in terms of returning to the place of origin, even if the transition is only made spiritually. It is in this context that poetry by writers such as Alurista can best be understood when the latter promotes

his poetics of *flor y canto*. Ramiro, then, is driven by a sense of his people's rebirth in order to regain their rightful place in history. For example, he enthusiastically claims that the land and what it produces should belong to those who work it. Like Lupe, who looks for a place to plant her avocado tree, the young farmworker longs to own a clod of dirt: "He carried his lump of dirt in mounting fury.... Where would he hide it? In the crotch of a dead plum tree.... He smote the hard dry clay clod with all his might and sent the gritty particles flying all through that rich man's richly manured orchard, making it richer still. The dumb laws of nature. The dumber laws of man" (132). Ramiro's defiance of society culminates when he blurts out: "I spit on your civilization" (211).

His union with Margarita, the female counterpart of the ensuing generation, represents the aim to redirect the American dream into a viable realization by making the "American system a human system, to grow, to save, to plan, to plant, to buy, to invest" (219). In other words, the two strive to make a society that is accountable to the needy as well as put into effect what a large social sector envisions as its right to better opportunities. Ramiro views the whole process as a return to his place – and his people's – which might be termed Aztlán in Chicano philosophy: "I am back. This is where I came from. Right here. And here is where I'll stay. I'll starve. I'll take it. I'll be an Indian again. I can still laugh" (219). These alternatives are presented as an escape from the man-made dystopia which Ramiro and some of the other farmworkers see as a distortion and contradiction of the richness of the land. They believe that if a cornucopia like the state of California is to exist, it should not thrive at the expense of those who work the land. Whereas Lupe and Manuel initiated their protest through subtle forms, Ramiro and Margarita are willing to build on those bottled up dreams and go one step further to achieve change despite the odds.

A series of parallel processes of *conscientização* occurs with the two couples which is made manifest in a crescendo at the end. No one person is identified as the one responsible for hanging Mr. Quill in the place of Black Bart above the shacks. In this final macabre scene, it might be assumed that Ramiro becomes the instigator of the collective act because in the previous chapter, which resembles a theatrical piece, he angrily defies a cross-section of society's authority: "May all you gringo bastards rest in peas" (221). The play on words touches a sardonic note between "urine," "peace," and "piece." The situation for the exploited lot has become unbearable and, consequently, they resort to purging themselves of the death Mr. Quill represents to them as the immediate administrator of their plight. The hanging, then, becomes a new type of reminder, but in this case it is meant to warn the Turners as well as the inhabitants of the dystopia in Drawbridge.

With the novel ending at night, just the way it began, a cycle has been completed through the nightmare of starting anew with the disassembling of the slavery system. At first the night symbolized exploitation; at the end, it marks regeneration. If dreams were at first associated with negative elements, they now acquire a sense of restructuring a society that has somehow gone astray. While death was originally present to intimidate and oppress, it is now used as the means with which to purge an antiquated system and achieve new forms in a better society. The changes that have occurred show that sacrifice led to protest, protest caused death, and death helped create a new life, a calm after the storm. The implication is such that the last scene marks a final return from hell in order to recover human dignity. Thus, the repetition to the word “plum,” which is transformed to “plump” when said in a phrase, suggests the notion of sacrificial lambs. The characters’ dreams and aspirations, rather than being useless, constitute the important stages of discovering self-worth at the same time that they learn to reject the institutionalized dystopia.

The “*loco sueño*” of Lupe and others gains a substance of reality without confusing it with an idealistic usurpation of utopia. It turns out that the dreams that motivate these migrant workers are not composed of unrealistic expectations, but rather of a profound and instinctive urge to overcome their squalid circumstance, to break the vicious circle in which they find themselves in order to begin to reap some benefit of their labor. Though the final scene culminates in Mr. Quill’s death, indeed an ominous sign of subsequent events if the novel had continued, the prunes continue to ripen relentlessly, symbolizing hope beyond the newly acquired level of maturation. The future for the humble workers, then, is to be sought in nature, but it is up to society to determine how it plans to relate to nature and its workers in a wise and judicious manner. As a final lesson, the novel suggests that respect be given to those who labor, inspired by nature, and that a just punishment should be applied to those who abuse the relationship between man and nature.

NOTES

¹ See Adorna Walia’s review of Raymond Barrio’s *The Plum Plum Pickers* in *Bilingual Journal* (Fall 1982): n.p.

² For further information on the documentary novel that came into vogue in the 1960s, it is worthwhile to consult such works as *Die Ermittlung* (1965) by Peter Weiss, *In Cold Blood* (1965) by Truman Capote, and *Redil de ovejas* (1973) by Vicente Leñero, which together offer a varied picture of this contemporary subgenre within the novel.

³ *Symbols, Signs and Meaning and Uses in Design* (London: Leonard Hill, 1971: xxv).

⁴ Barrio, R. *The Plum Plum Pickers* (Binghamton, NY: Bilingual Review / Press, 1984: 31). Subsequent

quotes from the novel refer to this edition and page references appear in parentheses.

⁵ Lattin, V. "Paradise and Plums: Appearance and Reality in Barrio's *The Plum Plum Pickers*," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 19: 1 (January 1977): 50. This represents by far the most in-depth study of Barrio's novel.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*

**III. Interview With
Professor
Francisco A. Lomelí**



**Entrevista con Francisco A. Lomelí,
Profesor del Departamento de Estudios Chicanos
(Universidad de California, Santa Bárbara.)**

Julio Cañero (Instituto Franklin-UAH)

Juan F. Elices (Universidad de Alcalá)

Esta entrevista se celebró en el País Vasco durante la celebración de la II Conferencia Internacional sobre Estudios Chicanos en el 26 de marzo de 2000.

J.C.S.: La primera pregunta es un poco tradicional. Nos gustaría que nos dieras una visión general acerca del estado actual de la literatura chicana y tu opinión sobre si la crítica especializada está teniendo en cuenta el gran impacto que esta literatura está albergando en nuestros días.

F.A.L.: Acerca de la primera parte de la pregunta, parece que el estado actual de la literatura chicana es muy saludable, y sin llegar a catalogarlo de magnífico, sí podemos afirmar que ha tenido un impacto que ni nosotros nos imaginábamos hace treinta años, momento en el que podíamos pensar que el carácter de esta literatura tendería a ser más local o incluso regional, y tal vez sólo de “intra-group”. Sin embargo, ahora ha trascendido, ha salido de los diferentes barrios, comunidades, y estados, e, incluso, ha superado el regionalismo del Suroeste norteamericano, por lo que no sólo se ha convertido en parte integrante de la literatura nacional sino del concierto literario internacional. Por lo tanto, se puede asegurar que la literatura chicana se encuentra en un estado muy saludable, en el que se puede apreciar mayor y mayor diversificación, más y más variedad en términos de producción y temática. Podemos concluir, pues, que la trayectoria de la literatura chicana no es sólo interesante por la temática de sus obras sino también por su componente lingüístico, y, sobre todo, porque nos ofrece un retrato de realidades norteamericanas que anteriormente eran prácticamente desconocidas para el mundo no-chicano. Por lo tanto, parece que lo que antes era sombra ahora se ha convertido en luz y protagonismo. Dicho de otra forma, la parte creativa, y la crítica que la acompaña, se ha superado mucho más allá de la protesta y de la manifestación política que predominaban en los años sesenta y setenta, llegando a explorar y profundizar en asuntos particulares a chicanos mismos, pero que delatan condiciones generales del

mundo norteamericano. A través de la literatura chicana, y en parte debido a otras expresiones latinas en EE.UU., se ha llegado a conocer un mundo de experiencia social e imaginaria que antes no aparecían en las páginas literarias de ese país.

J.C.S.: ¿Y con respecto a la crítica literaria? ¿Ha sido capaz la literatura chicana de trascender no sólo al mundo anglo norteamericano sino al mundo internacional y en qué medida?

F.A.L.: Sin ninguna duda, la crítica misma ha evolucionado en gran medida, por lo que podemos hablar de una disciplina cada vez más sofisticada. Se han recogido y retomado teorías—por ejemplo, postmodernas—que nunca antes nos hubiéramos imaginado, hemos tenido la posibilidad de establecer contactos con otros países y otras teorías, por lo que hemos sido capaces de salir del “grupo.” Todos estos factores han contribuido a enriquecer este ambiente teórico en cuanto a planteamientos y aproximaciones. Es por ello que la literatura chicana se va conociendo de una manera más extensa y profunda porque viene del pueblo en vez de ser de las pléyades literarias. Estamos viendo continuamente cómo hay diferentes acercamientos que tratan lo histórico, lo teórico, cuestiones de género y lingüística. Vemos, por tanto, cómo la crítica chicana cubre todos los ámbitos de la teoría literaria, sobre todo post-colonial, y este hecho se percibe no sólo entre los críticos chicanos sino también entre estudiosos que no pertenecen directamente a estos círculos.

Uno de los mejores barómetros para evaluar la marcha de la crítica chicana es comprobar el recibimiento por parte de estudiosos internacionales, ya que si esa literatura sólo se analiza y discute entre críticos exclusivamente chicanos, su consumo es incestuoso. Sin embargo, podemos observar afortunadamente que va mucho más allá, que el interés de muchos países por la literatura chicana es creciente. Especial mención deben recibir Alemania, Francia y, más que nada, España, país que se encuentra entre la vanguardia crítica en lo que se refiere a los estudios chicanos, al igual que en el interés que existe por la literatura, una literatura que progresivamente va rompiendo estos círculos y barreras que han obstaculizado su desarrollo, según las exigencias de los tiempos actuales. Ahora es parte constituyente de la literatura internacional, como lo demuestra la inclusión de textos chicanos y latinos en la *Heath Anthology* y la *Norton Anthology*, además de la elaboración de antologías exclusivamente dedicadas a la literatura chicana. Esto es sin duda algo inaudito, lo cual pone de manifiesto que el impacto no es sólo nacional sino que el recibimiento internacional es más que reconocido.

J.F.E.: La siguiente pregunta haría referencia a esa dicotomía que siempre ha existido entre la literatura comprometida con cuestiones sociales, políticas y

culturales, y aquella que responde a la idea del “art for art’s sake.” ¿Está la literatura chicana, como la de otras minorías étnicas, únicamente comprometida con cuestiones de esta índole, o, por el contrario, se puede apreciar un desarrollo formal y estilístico en sus autores más representativos?

F.A.L.: Creo que la dicotomía existe todavía en gran medida, y algunos la han acentuado debido a una particular agenda teórica o política. La gran diferencia que existe con respecto a la literatura chicana de los años 70 es que dicha categorización de un ‘dilema’ está mucho más diluida. No resulta tan obvio discernir entre aquellas obras que son comprometidas y obras que son exclusivamente formales. En los años 60 y 70, como la literatura era parte de un movimiento social, resulta evidente pensar que su función era primariamente social, o sea, utilitaria y comprometida. De una manera u otra, resultaba necesario difundir el tema de la posición del chican@ ante una sociedad que había impuesto una especie de terrorismo moral, donde al ciudadan@ chican@ no se le permitía una relativa movilidad social, donde se vivía bajo la constante presencia de estereotipos y estigmas, y una sociedad que habitualmente proyectaba una imagen del chican@ que estaba totalmente distorsionada. Es lógico, por lo tanto, que la literatura que se producía en ese período fuera más agresiva, confrontativa, incluso a veces propagandística con el fin de sacudir, limpiar, y replantear todas esas imágenes que, por lo general, eran muy negativas sobre personas de ascendencia mexicana con sus respectivas figuras nefastas caricaturescas. La literatura chicana, entonces, tuvo que proponerse, en su manifestación militante, el proyecto de recrear su propia antropología y sociología para desmentir el aparato racista de proyectar al mexicano como inferior.

Sin embargo, e incluso dentro de esta primera fase de literatura comprometida socialmente, se podían apreciar ya una serie de obras que son tremendamente sutiles, como por ejemplo, *Selecciones*, de Richard García y *Space Flutes & Barrio Paths* de Alex Kirack, que aparentemente no tienen nada que ver con lo político, salvo una pequeña sección *Selecciones* que dedica a Joaquín Murrieta, la primera figura chicana de resistencia inmediatamente después de la conquista norteamericana en California a mediados del siglo 19. Sin embargo, el resto de su poesía es curiosamente de tendencia surrealista. Por ello, si situamos este libro con los que tenían un cariz más combativo, como por ejemplo “... y no se lo tragó la tierra”, que no es tan combativo como en principio se creyó. No obstante, la publicación de un libro por parte de un autor de raza chicana, a la que se le suponía una incapacidad para leer o escribir, suponía ya un acto de connotaciones políticas. Ello explica que el libro de Tomás Rivera se tomó como una muestra de la habilidad del autor chicano para escribir con profundidad sobre los temas más variados, no sólo con una ambición política sino con el afán de crear un universo estético, de pulir

una expresión de gran sofisticación literaria, de manifestar una serie de sentimientos culturales y de representar a los chicanos en situaciones en los que mostraban toda su humanidad. A veces existen tendencias entre los medios de comunicación de crear una imagen estereotipada de los chicanos como militantes políticos y que la literatura era simplemente una extensión de estas reivindicaciones. Poetas como Alurista practicaban una literatura comprometida y de tintes políticos, pero ello no le hacía descuidar un aparato formal muy bien diseñado. Él pretendía, por ejemplo, que su poesía fuera oral, del pueblo y accesible para todo el mundo. Para Alurista su literatura no sólo debería ser leída sino también escuchada, por lo que trataba, a través de su poesía y su expresión, crear una especie de marco o contexto verbal por medio del cual los chicanos pudieran identificarse con un lenguaje que era propio y nuestro, puesto que, como bien se sabe, un lenguaje define a un pueblo. En esa época, escribir en las dos lenguas se veía como algo horrible y retrógrado, y que encasillaba a esa persona como si de un analfabeto se tratara. Alurista, sin embargo, poseía su don y talento para escribir de esa manera, y *Floriscanto en Aztlán* aparece como una obra de un gran contenido estético, mítico, lingüístico. Por ello, me atrevería a decir que en Alurista, muchas veces, lo estético predomina sobre lo social, aunque, por lo general, la gente sólo se limitaba a escuchar el mensaje social que estas obras contenían, olvidando lo puramente estético.

J.C.S.: Al hilo de la pregunta anterior, nos gustaría saber de qué manera se encuadraría la literatura chicana actual dentro de la corriente post-modernista.

F.A.L.: Esta pregunta no resulta demasiado fácil de contestar, porque la naturaleza del postmodernismo se asemeja bastante a la del mercurio o a la de un espejismo, que dan la imagen de poder ser aprehendidos pero que terminan diluyéndose. Sin embargo, la literatura chicana sí que tiene que ver mucho con el postmodernismo, y esto se puede comprobar en varios sentidos. Cuando se habla del postmodernismo 'tradicional' y lo chicano, se tiende a pensar que lo chicano, de algún modo, se injertó en el postmodernismo. Creo, sin embargo, que el proceso se produjo a la inversa, que fenómenos como la literatura chicana han contribuido al cauce de la creación filosófica del postmodernismo. Si no existieran literaturas como la chicana, o sea, expresiones de orden marginado o periférico, creo que el postmodernismo debería escribirse con una "p" minúscula, con lo que pasaría a ser una pequeña corriente dentro las literaturas, porque a comienzos del siglo XXI todos nos preguntamos que más nuevo puede ocurrir dentro de la literatura. Este es el típico problema que incluso los propios griegos ya se habían planteado. Este estado de ansiedad ha provocado una proliferación de términos y de conceptos que a veces chocan entre sí. La literatura chicana se ha alejado, hasta cierto punto, de esta vorágine ya que nuestra existencia como literatos y críticos chicanos

dentro de los EE.UU. se ha visto marcada por un afán de “supervivencia” dentro de todas estas lujosas teorías literarias. Sin embargo, como los chicanos reconocimos nuestra hibridación y mestizaje no sólo racial y lingüístico sino de otros muchos tipos; lo postmoderno, aún siendo un término mayor, tiene que ver con las diferentes culturas que se han presentado, donde las concepciones monolíticas ya no tienen la predominancia que anteriormente ostentaban, y donde los absolutos del siglo XX ya han desaparecido. Al reconocer esto, la realidad y los referentes son muy relativos, y por lo tanto, lo literario ya no corresponde exclusivamente a los grandes nombres, ya que la literatura es una expresión universal. De este modo, el pueblo chicano se ha impuesto a este ambiente filosófico-cultural de tanta confusión, ya que el pueblo chicano ha vivido dentro de este estado de confusión debido precisamente a ese estado de opresión, de negación. En este sentido, la literatura chicana ha traído aire fresco al panorama internacional, al proponer un sentido de hibridez, que es de sobra conocido por los ciudadanos chicanos a lo largo de sus vidas. Lo híbrido y lo fronterizo (en todo sentido) son, por lo tanto, a priori el estado más normal y habitual dentro del mundo contemporáneo, que es precisamente lo que ha vivido el mundo chicano, acostumbrado a ajustarse, acomodarse y adaptarse según las exigencias externas. Lo literario es un fiel reflejo de este proceso: a mi modo de entender, los chicanos hemos sido postmodernos incluso antes de que este movimiento surgiera o tuviera su nombre, ya que formamos parte de ese ambiente prolífico, polifónico, dialógico, diverso y pluralista. Esta ha sido nuestra realidad histórica. Me atrevería a decir que el ambiente chicano es “pre-postmodernista,” e incluso “proto-postmodernista” porque, como ya dije, ya era postmodernista antes que surgiera el propio movimiento.

J.F.E.: La siguiente pregunta pone en contacto el gran conocimiento que usted tiene de la literatura chicana con su amistad con un gran número de autores chicanos. Nos gustaría saber si estos escritores tienen un público determinado “en mente” hacia el cual dirigen sus obras y si tienden más a satisfacer las expectativas del lector chicano o del no-chicano.

F.A.L.: Al igual que la anterior, esta pregunta tiene una difícil respuesta, debido a la existencia de una gran variedad tanto de autores como de públicos, ya que, de por sí, un escritor puede tener un público determinado para una obra pero otro muy diferente para otra obra. Creo que no es fácil generalizar y decir que sólo existe un público. Sería necesario hacer un estudio para comprobar esta evaluación. A finales de los años sesenta y principio de los setenta, podemos decir que se trataba de un público que desconocía lo literario, y que carecía de conocimiento sobre lo cultural mexicano. Por lo tanto, la literatura trataba de llenar ese vacío, lo que explica que los autores intentaran ofrecer a ese

público imágenes sobre sí mismos a la vez que les recordaban que ellos mismos podían ser protagonistas. Este es, sin duda, el mayor efecto que tuvo el Teatro Campesino de Luis Valdez en el año 1965 al incluir a los propios campesinos como personajes dentro de obras teatrales, llamadas 'actos'. Ellos mismos se sorprendieron al descubrir su capacidad para ser protagonistas, lo cual se convirtió de inmediato en un acto revolucionario para la identidad, la psique y la intelectualidad orgánica de los campesinos mismos.

Ya en el año 1975, la literatura empezó a cambiar sustancialmente ya que, por aquel entonces, lo social no era tan urgente, es decir, la literatura empezó a remitir en los mensajes sociales que intentaban convencer al grueso de la sociedad que los chicanos no eran sólo trabajadores, sino que también podían hacer otras cosas y mostrar otros valores. Desde el año 1975, los escritores empiezan a fijarse en otro tipo de lector, que tenía curiosidad por conocer cuestiones que iban más allá de lo puramente chicano y que tenían conocimientos que se salían de lo chicano. Es una relación simbiótica muy interesante la del autor y el lector a lo largo de los setenta puesto que ambos se desafían para escaparse de ese cauce casi-estereotípico que habíamos creado para protegernos y liberarnos del mundo hostil norteamericano. Cuando hubo más libertad, y cayeron los estigmas de los estereotipos, podemos decir que 1975 fue el año clave en este proceso de liberación. Ya en los años ochenta, coincidiendo con la gran proliferación de autores y autoras chicanos/as, el tipo de público lector también se diversificó, incrementando a paso ligero en la medida que esta literatura empezaba a incursionar dentro del mainstream. Por ejemplo, la llegada de numerosas escritoras para mediados de los ochenta supuso la búsqueda de lectoras, de mujeres como consumidoras de la literatura. También surgieron nuevos temas; comenzó a utilizarse el inglés aun más, lo cual amplió el horizonte puesto que ya se empezó a incluir de manera masiva al lector norteamericano, a veces llegando a mercados pequeños de pueblos aislados. A mitad de la década, también comenzó a gestarse un enorme interés por comunicarse con un público extranjero. Parece, por tanto, que cada diez años ha habido un cambio muy radical e interesante. En el año 95, se mantiene ese gran interés por el público más internacional y los escritores, igual que las escritoras, disponen de mayor libertad de expresión. Autores como Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Rudolfo Anaya, Denise Chávez, Juan Felipe Herrera y Luis Rodríguez ejemplifican muy bien esa variedad, pues demuestran en sus obras su capacidad para comunicarse con una amplia gama de lectores; a veces es una persona de un pueblo, otras con críticos más especializados, y otras con un público más general. La literatura chicana es cada día más universal, aunque esto suene un poco a perogrullo, ya que esto antes era muy difícil de asumir, pero se puede confirmar plenamente, como lo demuestran los diversos congresos y actividades que se realizan en España alrededor de la literatura chicana.

J.C.S.: Hemos conocido que últimamente ha estado trabajando en la elaboración de una lista que recoge las cincuenta obras más destacadas de la literatura chicana. ¿Podría adelantarnos los parámetros seguidos para establecer dicha categorización?

F.A.L.: Aunque todavía se trata de un estudio preliminar, sí se pueden adelantar parámetros como la época en que surgió una determinada obra. En este sentido, me concentro fundamentalmente en las cincuenta obras más destacadas editadas a lo largo del siglo XX. Trato de fijarme también en los géneros, porque, como ustedes bien saben, los críticos literarios nos concentramos mucho más en aquellos géneros que más nos atraen, bien la novela, la poesía, el teatro, o el ensayo. Yo he tratado de presentar una clasificación más equilibrada, utilizando criterios no únicamente personales, sino acudiendo a criterios que pudieran recoger impresiones de otros críticos dentro y fuera de los Estados Unidos, como del mercado donde se producen. He tenido en cuenta, también el impacto que una obra determinada pudo haber tenido en términos cualitativos como cuantitativos. Así, ocurre el caso en se incluyen obras de un contenido literario relativamente escaso pero cuyo impacto ha sido notable, por lo que figuran dentro de las mejores cincuenta. El primer ejemplo que se me ocurre es *Pocho*, una obra cuyo nivel estético no es demasiado sofisticado, y carece de demasiados misterios, oscuridades o barroquismos, y cuenta una historia bastante sencilla y relativamente fácil de descifrar. En la lista que he confeccionado, *Pocho* ocupa el número veintidós. Literariamente hablando, esta novela figuraría en el número cuarenta y dos, pero su impacto ha sido tan grande y ha perdurado, y además surgió en un año tan difícil como el 59, cuando publicar una obra chicana era absolutamente inaudito, o sea, es importante reconocer que se adelantó al contener una mayoría de las temáticas presentes en la literatura producida durante un medio siglo después. Eso merece cierto reconocimiento por su mérito de perdurar cuando en su época existía un absoluto desierto con respecto a lo chicano. Por lo tanto, hay que reconocerle un valor histórico-literario enorme. En esta clasificación, trato de incorporar una multitud de juicios críticos, no sólo el mío, ya que no se trata de basarse única y exclusivamente en lo personal sino de crear una lista responsable y que se ajuste a criterios eminentemente críticos y de recepción comercial como la estética de las obras. La lista que he intentado formular sólo intenta proponer un mosaico general, aunque polémico, y representativo de todas las expresiones -algunas de ellas frecuentemente omitidas- que se han dado cabida a lo largo del devenir histórico de la literatura chicana.

J.C.S.: Al hilo de esta pregunta, ¿no se podría entender esta lista como una manera de canonizar la literatura chicana, de la misma manera que hicieran Bloom, Leavis o Henry Louis Gates Jr. en el contexto de la literatura afro-americana?

F.A.L.: A pesar de que el crítico puede caer en la tentación de, efectivamente, definir un canon literario, parece claro que se puede considerar como una de sus funciones. Lo único que se le puede pedir al crítico es que al formular este tipo de clasificaciones, lo haga de manera responsable y ecuánime, y siempre basándose en criterios científicos razonables, o por lo menos una conglomeración de criterios para eliminar el prejuicio personal del gusto como lector. Creo que dispongo de varios parámetros que, de algún modo, controlan mi propia subjetividad, aunque el conocimiento amplio que tengo de la literatura me permite albergar una visión global para saber dónde ubicar una obra u otra. De esta manera surgen los cánones. En este sentido, pienso que cualquier crítico puede llegar a construir este tipo de lista, aunque yo trato de definir qué tipo de criterios se utilizaron para llegar a esta conclusión. No es, por lo tanto, una clasificación puramente subjetiva -como se pudiera pensar en un principio-, como por ejemplo demuestra el hecho de haber dejado fuera una obra tan relevante como *Caras viejas y vino nuevo* de Alejandro Morales, una obra que, a pesar de su enorme impacto, no fue lo suficientemente bien entendida por el público lector, a la vez que se incluyó a *Reto en el Paraíso* o *The Rag Doll Plagues*. A mí me ha interesado mucho la primera obra mencionada de Morales, pero reconozco que no tuvo el impacto que podría haber tenido pese a su calidad estética, cuyo valor no es apreciado todavía por muchos críticos. Entonces no podía ignorar el hecho de que a tanto lectores comunes como a especialistas les cuesta entenderla, aunque a mí me encanta. Claro, nos falta crear mecanismos para establecer cánones al estilo de Bloom, Leavis y Henry Louis Gates, y creo que todavía sigue el reto. Por difícil que sea, no lo considero imposible ni impertinente.

J.F.E.: **Nos gustaría que nos comentara si usted ha comunicado a la comunidad crítico-literaria chicana de la existencia de este proyecto. Si así ha sido, ¿cuál ha sido la reacción de esta comunidad tras conocer la elaboración de esta lista? ¿Ha recibido acusaciones de arbitrariedad o partidismo?**

F.A.L.: No es una lista que se haya difundido demasiado, solamente entre unos cuantos amigos como proyecto de elaboración, ya que hay que pulsar primero una serie de impresiones antes de divulgar los resultados al gran público. Yo mismo he tenido que hacer unos pequeños cambios, ya que trataba de compensar justamente en momentos en los que lo que estaba haciendo realmente era sobrecompensar. En cuanto a la segunda parte de la pregunta, sí que se ha insinuado que hay elementos de arbitrariedad y que es una lista que no tiene mucho sentido o coherencia, aunque aquí, lo único que se ha intentado es, desde el profundo conocimiento de la literatura chicana, ofrecer una herramienta para la discusión crítica sobre cuáles fueron las cincuenta mejores obras chicanas del siglo XX. No pretendo sólo dar mi lista de lecturas preferidas, sino más

bien evaluar críticamente con cierta objetividad para acudir a una serie de factores intrínsecos, sociológicos, políticos, de mercado y consumo, de recepción, visibilidad e impacto, importancia y relevancia literarias, y sobre todo su aportación e innovación. Al combinar todos estos factores en una especie de crisol de criterios literarios, pronto salen varias obras a la luz sin prejuizarlas.

J.C.S.: ¿Hasta qué punto los escritores chicanos comparten y se involucran en la realidad del pueblo chicano?

F.A.L.: Esta pregunta necesariamente tiene una premisa, ya que si una obra es del pueblo, parece lógico que sea un reflejo de ese pueblo, lo que es esencialmente imposible de conseguir. Hay que tener en cuenta las expectativas que albergan las editoriales tanto a nivel nacional como internacional. Por esa razón, los escritores ya no se centran en sus respectivas comunidades como lo hacían hasta los años setenta, momento en el que incluso se pensaba en crear comunidades a través del hecho literario. Es algo que hicieron autores como Tomás Rivera o Rolando Hinojosa, pero no Alejandro Morales, quien siempre prefirió crear un marco de historicidad para entender mejor la realidad de su pueblo desde el punto de vista histórico, en vez simplemente reflejar ese pueblo como lo hizo Rudolfo Anaya. Por otro lado, Cecile Pineda afirma que la comunidad se ha de buscar a través de la literatura, algo completamente diferente a los planteamientos que se proponían en los años setenta, lo que presupone la existencia de diferentes comunidades, lectores, autores y temas, por lo que ya no se podría hablar de la existencia de un compromiso ni de una sola comunidad con esas comunidades más reconocidas.

J.F.E.: Uno de los factores característicos de la existencia chicana en los Estados Unidos es la realidad dual en la que se encuentran inmersos, realidad que se refleja en la utilización del lenguaje (inglés, español o *Spanglish*). ¿A qué cree que se debe el empleo de una u otra lengua? ¿Hay cuestiones emocionales que subyacen a la utilización del español, o cuestiones profesionales para el inglés?

F.A.L.: Existen varias motivaciones puesto que hay varios propósitos para la utilización de un idioma personal-privado y otro público-social, aunque entre los ciudadanos chicanos no es fácil discernir cuál es público y cuál privado. Por una parte, hay comunidades que son monolingües en español y otras sólo en inglés. Críticos como Juan Bruce-Novoa, y yo mismo, han hablado del *interlingüismo*, que queda muy bien reflejado por el término *Spanglish*. Dependiendo del contexto o de las emociones, hay momentos en los que se opta por el inglés y otras por el español. Por ejemplo, en

cuestiones académicas o deportivas, tendemos a hablar más en inglés, y, sin embargo, las cuestiones familiares suelen ser debatidas en español. No hay una manera paradigmática de efectuar esta mezcla, hay tantos lenguajes como hablantes. Aunque pueda sonar como algo anárquico o caótico, esta mezcolanza (o libertad absoluta en la expresión) siempre ha buscado desafiar el “linguistic standardization” tan propio de las sociedades actuales. Después de los años sesenta, y gracias sobre todo a la contribución de escritores como Alurista, Ricardo Sánchez y después Juan Felipe Herrera, ha habido una creciente aceptación de este lenguaje en el que podemos combinar códigos más libremente sin que se tenga que ver con tanto recelo como antes. No se trata por tanto de ser excluyentes sino más expresivos, más bien, incluyentes. Es decir, expresarse en lo que llaman “code-switching”, primero, refleja una realidad social de grupos étnicos y, segundo, significa que se busca crear un nuevo público, el bilingüe que ha quedado fuera de consideración. El Spanglish tiene su función social ya que permite la expresión de un sector malabarista que maneja varios códigos a la vez sin restricciones gramaticales o semánticas.

J.F.E.: Al hilo de esta cuestión, ¿cree que el uso del español esconde alguna intención reivindicativa por parte del hablante chican@?

F.A.L.: A veces sí, y eso se vio perfectamente en la literatura producida en los años sesenta con escritores como Miguel Méndez, Tomás Rivera, Sergio Elizondo, Alejandro Morales y Margarita Cota-Cárdenas. Poco después, algunos de los escritores reconocieron la dificultad de sostener tal postura cuando el lector masiva no salía a comprar sus obras y es cuando empezaron a reconsiderar el cambio al inglés, como ocurrió en parte con Alejandro Morales y Margarita Cota-Cárdenas, sobre todo cuando ellos empezaron a experimentar con obras bilingües. En la actualidad, se ve cada vez menos el español en la literatura chicana, debido en parte a las exigencias editoriales y las presiones por el mayor consumo. No obstante, hay ocasiones en las que el uso del español no tiene una intención reivindicativa en particular, sino que puede responder también a la costumbre o hábito que pueda tener el escritor. Si lo encajamos dentro una política lingüística-social, sí podríamos decir que en efecto existe una especie de reivindicación para que se recuerde que el español existe y se usa dentro de la sociedad monolingüe norteamericana. Por lo tanto, tiene varios propósitos: reivindicativo, disfrutar de la utilización de ese lenguaje y, obviamente, sacar el mayor partido lingüístico a la realidad dual en la que vive la comunidad chicana.

J.C.S.: Pese a que se reconoce la realidad dual del pueblo chicano, los distintos órganos de gobierno estadounidenses promulgan la práctica de “English-Only”, situación que incluso ha llegado al Congreso. ¿Cuál es la perspectiva que desde la

academia se tiene de esta situación y cómo ha tratado la academia de mantener el español como idioma dentro de la comunidad chicana?

F.A.L.: Muchas veces, la academia poco o nada tiene que ver con los gobiernos, porque intervienen factores como las votaciones o el hecho de conseguir un consenso. Por ejemplo, California ha votado por el inglés como el idioma oficial y como requisito, aunque a nivel nacional no se haya hecho, ya que se asume por parte del Congreso norteamericano que el inglés es obviamente el idioma nacional. La cuestión central es que el idioma se vive diariamente y existe por sí mismo y ha tenido que sobrevivir a lo largo de la historia, por lo que ningún reglamento legal lo puede controlar o delimitar. Incluso esa política de “English-Only” demostró que, en ciertos contextos, el uso del español se podía regular, pero, en la mayoría de los casos, era una realidad completamente incontenible. Se ha visto, por lo tanto, como una ley muy poco eficaz y sólo simbólica, como un recordatorio para los nuevos inmigrantes que el inglés es el único idioma en los Estados Unidos. Sin embargo, es casi imposible ejecutar esta ley por completo, ya que “lo oficial” intenta imponer ciertas cosas, pero “lo no oficial” siempre lo rebate. A pesar de que estos intentos por denostar el español han producido cierto resquemor entre la comunidad hispano-hablante, lo cierto es que no ha tenido el efecto deseado. La comunidad chicana es muy sensible a que quieran callar o silenciar su otra voz en español aunque no seamos perfectamente bilingües. Tales intentos nos acosan nuestra identidad por fluctuante o indefinida que sea. No aceptamos esos achaques fácilmente; al contrario, nos aferramos más en nuestra tradiciones y el poco español que manejeamos porque reconocemos que es una parte central de nuestra etnia y nuestro pasado. Eso no lo sacrificamos ligeramente.

J.F.E.: **Uno de los signos más representativos de la comunidad chicana es el barrio. ¿Es el barrio un símbolo de resistencia ante las presiones del mundo anglo-norteamericano o simplemente un reducto en el que el chicano busca proteger y potenciar las tradiciones de su pueblo?**

F.A.L.: Con el barrio sucede algo parecido al idioma, y si situación sigue siendo complicada. No parece que sea un elemento de resistencia, sino que es, a veces, el último recurso de mucha gente, también un depósito de personas que no han podido integrarse en el mundo norteamericano. Los barrios funcionan con frecuencia como islas urbanas donde la gente tiene que ingeniarse la supervivencia como pueda. A veces se percibe como “wasteland” social, pero para la gente dentro del barrio a veces es su única manera de retener y rescatar sus tradiciones. Lo lamentable es que ocurre en forma aislada. Por lo general, es un lugar con escasez de recursos y servicios, con una tasa de criminalidad

más elevada, con considerables problemas sociales y de pobreza. Es una realidad muy descarnada que las altas instancias gubernamentales prefieren no reconocer. Nosotros los chicanos lo vemos como un lugar en el que hemos sobrevivido, que, en algún momento, representa nuestra comunidad, pero de la que, paradójicamente, nos queremos escapar, ya que hace recordar la tremenda opresión social vivida por este pueblo. Yo veo el barrio como algo que he podido superar pero que todavía traigo por dentro (uno se puede salir del barrio pero el barrio nunca se nos quita), aunque también con cierta nostalgia, incluso con una cierta tendencia a romantizarlo. Pudiera verse como un lugar de resistencia si se concibiera como una forma de segregación de lo norteamericano, pero no ha sido voluntario sino totalmente impuesto. Dicho de otra manera: el barrio puede ser nuestro mejor amigo (como comunidad y refugio) pero también como nuestro peor elemento (como ámbito de violencia, mayor disfunción familiar y donde existe mucha auto-destrucción). Tiene un potencial de resistencia, pero lamentablemente nuestra comunidad ha sido tan sufrida por su pobreza y problemas sociales que el barrio no siempre se usa como punto de concientización, con la excepción de escritores como Alejandro Morales o Luis Rodríguez. El barrio, para muchos, es atrapador, un imán, que provoca el auto-consumo y que a veces llega al grado de canibalismo social donde grupos pandilleros, trágicamente, se matan entre sí. La literatura chicana trata de mostrarnos una salida pero los participantes de ese mundo cerrado y cegador no permite fácilmente que podamos comparar el mundo dentro y fuera del barrio y por eso se puede decir que “se los traga el barrio”. No obstante, el barrio es un espacio literario único creado por chicanos que tiene resonancia en un mundo globalizado donde una red de fuerzas sociales y económicas se entrelazan, creando así un cuadro de elementos interrelacionadas. El barrio es la conciencia de la pobreza urbana donde problemas sociales adquieren profanidad gracias a las contradicciones de un sistema económico que no es receptivo a integrar a esta gente.

J.C.S.: Personalmente, he considerado el barrio como el mejor exponente del proceso de colonización interna al que la gran mayoría de los chicanos están sometidos. Sin embargo, la teoría de la colonia interna está siendo reelaborada por críticos como Luis Leal, quien habla de una *colonia porosa* como la mejor manera de denominar la realidad chicana en los Estados Unidos. ¿Hasta qué punto son capaces los chicanos de trascender la colonia y asentarse en la sociedad blanca mayoritaria y qué precio tienen que pagar por esa asimilación?

F.A.L.: Podríamos decir que vivimos en una colonia interna, aunque la mejor definición la ha dado Luis Leal con el término de “colonia porosa”. Es un ente muy

fluido, aunque algunos hemos podido cruzar esas fronteras. Y hablo de fronteras, ya que la colonia interna implica la existencia de muchas fronteras: físicas, simbólicas, lingüísticas, psicológicas o sociales. La colonia dentro de la que vivimos se maneja de maneras muy variopintas, dependiendo de la persona, de la clase social en la que se viva o de la educación que se haya recibido. Algunos se quedan en un estado de colonia interna para siempre y lo aplican a su familia. Otros logran cambiar el estatus social y conseguir mejor nivel de vida. Algunos nunca sienten los tentáculos de una colonia porque viven con la ilusión del sueño norteamericano. No se puede decir, por lo tanto, que todo el pueblo chicano comparte las mismas condiciones. Lo que sí se puede decir es que hay un sector del pueblo chicano que vive en un estado inferior desde un punto de vista social y económico, lo cual no se corresponde necesariamente ni a una colonia interna o porosa, sino que se complica con temas relacionados con la inmigración o la creación de estereotipos o estigmas. No es fácil, por lo tanto, categorizar los parámetros a los que pertenecerían unos u otros, ya que nuestra gente se moviliza en diferentes direcciones y formas. Otro factor es que nuestra comunidad ha progresado en cuanto a movilidad social en las últimas décadas, algo que no se tenía en los años sesenta y setenta. Por eso, la 'colonia interna' sigue como concepto intelectual de chicanos cuando reconocieron que nuestro estatus social era de índice paupérrimo, pero esto ha cambiado considerablemente. Hoy se habla mucho más de fronteras que de colonias porque los obstáculos o barreras van cambiando substancialmente en su forma pero ya carecemos de esa homogeneidad que teníamos antes cuando estábamos marginados en barrios, colonias urbanas o sectores rurales. Nuestra comunidad ahora se encuentra en todas formas y lugares de este país y así hemos logrado, poco a poco, a derrumbar una sola colonia. Cargamos las fronteras con nosotros mismos, pero no nos dejamos fácilmente engañar por las barreras impenetrables de la colonización de antes. Hemos socavado los tentáculos de dicha situación mediante nuestra versatilidad y capacidad de adaptarnos a cualquier ambiente por limitador que sea.

J.F.E.: Como bien sabe, Estados Unidos puede ser considerado un crisol de razas. ¿Cuál es la relación de la comunidad chicana con el resto de minorías étnicas? ¿Cree que todas ellas comparten los mismos objetivos y aspiraciones, o si, por el contrario, se pueden percibir disputas internas entre estos grupos?

F.A.L.: Ideológica e idealmente, nos gustaría poder decir que nuestra gente tiene una relación estrecha con estos grupos, aunque la realidad demuestra lo contrario. Existen tensiones y pugnas que desembocan en problemas realmente considerables que no permiten que se consiga una cierta armonía social. Lo que a veces les ayuda es la separación, ya que cuando están juntos la situación es realmente muy conflictiva. El

caso de Los Ángeles, en el que conviven grupos de afro-americanos, latinos, o asiáticos, es un buen ejemplo para demostrar estas dificultades en la convivencia. Deberíamos haber superado muchos problemas sociales, pero es que se reciclan y la historia se repite. El problema actual es que la discriminación, que bien pudiéramos llamar *apartheid*, es mucho más diluida que hace unos años, en los que era mucho más visible. Actualmente, la sociedad es mucho más fluida, como se demuestra por ejemplo, en el alto número de matrimonios entre miembros de la comunidad chicana y angloamericana, o blanca y negra. En el caso particular de los chicanos, es un pueblo que no se cierra a la integración, sino que acepta a otras gentes con relativa facilidad, y no así como otros grupos, a quienes se les ha impedido integrarse de la misma manera. Las barreras funcionan de manera distinta dependiendo de la minoría étnica: así, por ejemplo, el afro-americano experimenta muchísimas más dificultades que el asiático-americano para encontrar su sitio dentro de la sociedad angloamericana. Como latinos quisiéramos ser ejemplos de la convivencia armónica pero la verdad es que existe mucha competencia desde los estratos sociales más bajos y eso produce tensión. No obstante, considero que el latino tiene más potencial para un futuro esperanzador con respecto a las relaciones inter-étnicas en EE.UU., pero es que otros tendrían que seguir nuestro ejemplo y creo que esa oportunidad se está malgastando.

J.C.S.: Tradicionalmente, la política del grupo dominante ha estado basada en la idea del “divide y vencerás”, no sólo creando enemistad entre las minorías sino, incluso, dentro las propias minorías. Tras el Movimiento, ¿sigue el pueblo chicano tan fuertemente unido como en los años sesenta?

F.A.L.: Es difícil dar una respuesta nítida a esta pregunta ya que no existe un solo pueblo chicano, aunque muchos compartíamos esa fantasía en los setenta con términos como “chicanismo” y “carnalismo”. Antes había un espíritu de cooperación. Creo que no existe tanta solidaridad como imperaba en los años sesenta, donde, gracias al Movimiento, se creó un espíritu de solidaridad y colaboración que empujó al pueblo chicano a trabajar conjuntamente. Yo mismo llegué a palpar ese ambiente, aunque sólo en ciertos círculos, ya que desde otros se acusaba al Movimiento chicano de ser un foco de comunismo o terrorismo y de promover entre la juventud ideas descabelladas e irresponsables. No se entendía que se trataba de un movimiento por los derechos civiles, ya que mucha gente conocía la realidad en la que vivía y no deseaba remover más esas aguas. Si comparamos el momento actual con esos años, podemos decir que, por una parte, hay menos solidaridad, pero, por otro, somos más conscientes de las estrategias utilizadas por el poder establecido. Es por ello que ahora tenemos más claro cuándo juntarnos para defender un propósito común, por lo que es más fácil crear una base de

apoyo, ya que en el pasado era un grupo mucho más reducido, cuya actividad social se centraba en marchas o manifestaciones.

Hoy en día se puede encauzar esta unión a través de otros medios como el poder económico o a través del voto. Sin embargo, se puede dar la impresión de que, como el grupo es tan numeroso en la actualidad, que este sentimiento de unión se ha perdido, lo cual no es totalmente cierto. Sí que es cierto que puede haber ciertas disensiones entre los ciudadanos chicanos que llevan más tiempo como residentes en los Estados Unidos y los inmigrantes recién llegados. El ejemplo más claro se produjo en la votación a favor o en contra del “English-only”, en la que, curiosamente, la gran mayoría de los latinos votó a favor, lo que para mí es totalmente absurdo y misterioso. De alguna manera socavaron su poderío político. Creo que muchas de nuestras comunidades votaron a favor pensando que así podrían comprobar a la sociedad mainstream su deseo de asimilarse, sin entender en términos políticos lo que eso representaba en las urnas a largo plazo. O sea, en vez de aprovecharse de una gran oportunidad para proyectar un mensaje de contenido político, optaron por la conveniencia del momento. Así, muchos sacrificaron su verdadero sentimiento para demostrarle a una sociedad mayor que como latinos no buscan la segregación social y cultural, sino más bien la integración. Existe, entonces, una gran contradicción debido a una ingenuidad política con el fin de llegar a ser aceptados. El resultado ha sido una verdadera farsa porque los latinos en general no ignoran la importancia que tiene el español en sus vidas, pero muchos quieren dar la impresión de no querer incomodar al sector social monolingüe que usa el inglés como arma de doble filo para un patriotismo hueco y como látigo contra los ‘inasimilables’. Pese a nuestras muchas diferencias como comunidad de procedencias variadas, creo que todavía existe la posibilidad de crear mayor solidaridad debido a nuestros números y, sobre todo, si reconocemos nuestros puntos de contacto en común. Yo presiento más y más que puede haber una conciencia social que va a tener repercusiones en el campo político, educativo y social, y la literatura es uno de los medios más eficaces de llevar la batuta.





