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TOWARD A DIALECTIC OF CHICANO LITERATURE

The creation myths of ancient Mexican and Asian peoples posit an arbitrary moment in space at which the line or the dot, which in themselves represent pure being, are drawn, and reality is separated. At that moment in space "this and that," "here and there," "you and I" are created. As philosopher and historian, Hegel and Marx attempt to describe the processes of progress in thought and deed. After the first assertion, that of being, is made, the resultant contradictions become assertions, or theses, which each must face its own "otherness," its antitheses, and somehow, in the border areas between them, in those areas of conflict where nothing is purely "this" or "that," the synthesis are created. Sometimes a synthesis, one of those borders, is powerful enough to destroy the elements that created it; sometimes it is not.

In the 1960's, the reality called Chicano was recognized and asserted. It was created by and out of historical fact, and was as inevitable as any of the essential assertions of the great human social entities. Chicano is a synthesized reality that had to be recognized and affirmed by those who were aware of living it. Furthermore, it is a synthesis which, because it was created, brought forth as a new entity, in the unidentified zone between two world powers, it was itself powerless. Chicano reality cannot, by itself, destroy the antithetical elements which created it. Chicano reality must continue to relate to that of Mexico and the United States, while affirming its own, unique existence.

Chicano literature is always, in some manner, concerned with the dialectical relationship between a border people and the other two peoples which are, at once, its creators and its antagonists. wherever national borders have been created, a like people exist. The historical and cultural processes are different, but the basic human relationship, which Chicano artists express through symbolic words, the myth, is essentially the same. Chicano literature, then, refers to the historical, cultural, and mythic dialectic of the Chicano people. In its historical and cultural sense, Chicano literature is specific and unique; in its mythic sense, it is general and universal.

It is no wonder that, when Chicanos got together at the Crusade for Justice Chicano Conference of 1969, they elaborated a *Plan espiritual de Aztlán*. The Aztlán of the Chicano artist is, like the La Mancha of Cervantes, the Macondo of García Márquez, the Troy of Homer, or the Omeyocan and Yóllotl of Netzahualcōyotl, a mythic place in time, a mythic timespace, a symbolic elaboration of a basic human relationship. Aztlán springs out of the process of history and the process of myth. Alurista, who discovered the symbolic word, Aztlán, and added it to the Chicano conceptual vocabulary, was first known as a political activist. Yet, he was then, and is now, creating artistically. He was structuring his thought rhythm into images with symbolic words that could give others insights into a basic human relationship. Can there be moments when the specific historical data and the universal mythic situation, when the individuality of an event and its collective relevance, come together into the truth? Aztlán, as discovered by us upon reading the work of Alurista, Miguel Méndez, Sergio Elizondo, Rudolfo Anaya, and so many other Chicano artists, is that kind of special experience. As literature, Aztlán in all its facets initiates a process which begins each time that that symbolic word is experienced within the contextual structure of an image, expressed in thought rhythm, and making reference to the basic dialectical human relationship in which Chicanos find themselves thinking and acting.

The process that we call literary art makes reference to that which is morally good and morally evil, historically accurate and historically inaccurate, politically correct and politically incorrect, for it deals with the whole reality upon which it focuses its critical eye. Religious and socio-political puritans have always attempted to censor art. Yet, censorship has never worked for very long because the artistic process is one way of pointing out the real contradictions which human beings find all around them, and the need they have for participating in the process is simply too pressing to be ignored. It is not just a way of imitating reality. It is a way of creating it.

The Chicano mythic dialectic, the literary dialectic of Chicano writers, is then, based upon the historical dialectic of the Chicano people and their relationship with Mexican and North American realities. The discovery of the complexity of paths and bifurcations within this

apparently simple relationship, of the web of relationships implicit in each of the elements of that relationship, is as staggering as the discovery of a galaxy. Chicano art is, like any art of the twentieth century, surreal and superreal. That is, it is consciously and unconsciously aimed and perceived. Chicano literature, like any literature, helps make us aware of and participants in the dialectics of reality. The artistic process only begins with the artist. The reader and the critic help to complete the process, to carry it on to the infinite number of times that the work of art can begin the process of creating mythic timespace.

Many of us have experienced art within the Chicano Movement. We have discovered our personal truths about the meaning of art, and history, and poetry while working in the historical process on picket lines and in demonstrations. We discovered universal meaning when we were most ourselves. Some of us are turning that kind of experience into literature, and in that way we are in communication and communion with Russians, Native Americans, Englishmen, Asians, Africans, and all the other *batos* and *rucas* around this flimsy planet. Aztlán is as real as the United States of North America and México. It is a synthesis of the two, and, simultaneously, an unique entity. Chicano literature is powered by this dialectic.

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ORÍGENES

I

En la unidad
del Todo
se encuentra la nada
y en la nada
bailamos tú
y yo
la eterna
conjugación
del verbo
ser.

II

Vibración
en infinita
figura vuelas
y en cíclica forma
el viento eternamente
besas.

—Alejandro Nassíf-López
School of Law, UCLA