

## EXCERPT OF *ARS POETICA*

### Ricardo Sánchez: *Ars Poetica*

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*To neither act against nor  
condemn oppression is  
also to oppress...*

Ricardo Sánchez

In a time of professional specialization where analysis is reduced to highly technical and narrow frameworks, a symptom of today's society and an outcome of Western fragmentary vision, there is currently an attempt to bring back the unity that has long been lost in a rational/linear and segmented world. Culture and art are inextricably tied together, and as such, the latter is an expression of the cultural context in which it is conceived. Literature and art are a reflection of society, and by extension, its critical methodologies. The problem, as Bakhtin observed, is one of definition of the epoch; there exists narrow historical horizons of our literary scholarship:

We explain a phenomenon in terms of its own present and the recent past (within the limits of that "epoch"). What we foreground is the *ready-made* and *finalized*. Even in antiquity we single out what is ready-made and finalized and not what has originated and is developing...We are suffocating in the captivity of narrow and homogeneous interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

Literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside of the total cultural context. The language of the critic must move away from the fixed tendentious arenas of language; it must go beyond the limitations of abstract science in both the human and natural sciences and become dialogic and polyphonic in its discourse. In viewing the totality, the whole, the critic can experience the synthesis of unity, go beyond the parts and textual level to the contextual whole, where extra-artistic and extra-verbal context within a dialogic framework operate. It is synthesis, unity and interplay that transcend

linear, fragmented and mechanistic notions of reality. It was Newman that once stated that truth can only be found after the utilization of all of the disciplines, ergo, a unified vision of the whole. Ricardo Sánchez, the *barrio* Chicano poet, belongs within this framework. He is a rebel amidst the maze of Chicano academicians that canonize according to their restrictive literary schools. Ricardo Sánchez is not just another *barrio* poet, a "*bato loco*", although he has this aspect to his background. Rather, he is a perspicacious multi-leveled individual who is not only well read, but who understands the socio/political historical framework of cultures. He is a poet that feels the urgent need to express his most profound emotions often linked to socio-political-historical conceptual reference. From his early writings in the *pinta*, to his most recent poetry, there is an evolution of the writer and his poetics. As a poet he is prolific; he is, in many ways, like the medieval bard who composed poetry for the occasion and who provided important social and historical ideas relevant to the times. But unlike the medieval bard, he calls for a revolution of ideas and society.

Sánchez' poetics transcends boundaries of poetry. There is within his poetics a dialogue, not only between poet and heroes/heroines, poet and audience, but also between form and content. It is Bakhtin that first developed a philosophy of language grounded on the interplay of communication. In Sánchez' poetics there is, moreover, interplay among genres. Was it not Cervantes that first used dialogic interplay of genres in his *Don Quijote de la Mancha*? Did he not use both vulgar and romance discourse providing the potential through dialogues and plot movement for internal dialogic discourse?<sup>2</sup> In Sánchez, there is an interplay and linking of poetry and essay, heteroglossia through a multifaceted projection of languages; here the poet is transformed to commentator critic and poetic voice while as prime author he contextualizes the history of his people vis-a-vis the rest of humanity. Sánchez' poetics, thus, is unique within Chicano literature. His is not as concerned, as he says, with the "furry noun" or the resilient verb, as he is with thought, meaning and statement. It is his technique, however, that distinguishes him from the single voiced poet as he attempts to express the dialectics of historical multi-tonal cultures, the meeting of two consciousnesses within an existential world characterized by pragmatism and utilitarianism where xenophobia and racism are rooted in Western thought.

The poetry of Ricardo Sánchez is inseparable from the man; the poet is transformed into commentator moralist and critic but his work evolves along the lines of his personal struggle in a series of critical movements in his life. They are: **the *pinta* period**, his early formation and period of discovery, **the period of *canto y grito***, of cultural and historical affirmation, the quixotic period, **the period of sojourns**, from Milwaukee to Amsterdam, from Amsterdam to Alaska, in which the poet poses important questions in dialogic form, and **the nascent period**, where the poet arrives at the outposts of academia, and reflects on humanity with a more mature and confident voice, with historic and universal implications.

### **The *Pinta* Period: Awareness and Discovery**

The poetry of Ricardo Sánchez begins with *Soledad*, both with the penal institution as well as the concept of solitude that it represents. On another level, *Soledad* is the female, the image that surges within the context of aloneness. Metaphorically, *soledad* is a womb that is gestating, a feeling of "aloneness" projecting to "different levels of interminable deaths". Here the pain, the turmoil, the hatred haunt the poet in his personal hells and dreams.<sup>3</sup> Here these "deserted ovens of sham and thoughtlessness" guard you losing one's identity. Only the basics matter as the poet breaks the chains recalling his *barrio*/Chicano life.<sup>4</sup>

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