

MILHUAS BLUES AND GRITOS NORTEÑOS

RICARDO SÁNCHEZ



INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

I would like to first thank Ricardo Sánchez for his warm, compassionate and loyal friendship over a period of nearly twenty years. He was a complex person that many have misunderstood over time. Through the years we worked together to keep the arts, poetry and literature alive in the Chicano Movement, particularly via the creative expression of the *Canto Al Pueblo* art and literary conferences. After his untimely death, his wife Maria Teresa Sánchez was particularly helpful in supplying useful works of Ricardo Sánchez and to date continues to stay in communication. I would like to also thank Ricardo's sons, Rikard and Jacinto Sánchez for their assistance in providing materials and photos.

Sánchez, as the forerunner of Chicano protest poetry set the tone for self-realization and cultural affirmation for all raza as mestizos of the coming age. His *Canto y Grito mi Liberación* not only foreground the new selfawareness but defined our reality in terms of freedom, respect, dignity, justice and social equality. His "canto" was the life force and his "grito" the outcry for freedom. He saw the movimiento priorities as one that "encapsulate a bilingual/ bi-cultural world" where the Chicano and Chicana (the new Mestizo/Mestiza) must resist false identities, "bow or bend in their expression." He called for the realization of one's human cultural, social and linguistic totality. To Sánchez, the writer must offer "the sated reading public" new parameters and dimensions. Experience, he said, could only be lived.

Constricting academic formats, therefore, are inadequate for capturing the total personal experience. It is with Mictla that he brings death to the stereotypes and racist attitudes of society. His criticism was not levied solely at "gringo" society but also to Chicano leaders, academicians and presses. Few were spared of his criticism. Sánchez' stance was uncompromising. One had to be truthful, have dignity and respect not only for oneself but also to all people. It was not that life was bad, but rather "our societal notions and constructions which debase us"(Interview, Leal). Sánchez noted that "no one should be forced by convention or tradition, to live in the shadows of someone else's success or style of life" ("On being..." Hechizospells). Sánchez felt you must be your own person liberating yourself from dehumanization and exploitation: He saw in society a people "encaged in the neo-

serfdom of chattel-peripheral/mental laborers in a complex technocratic system bent on profiteering via dehumanization and exploitation” (“On being...Hechizospells). The Western world was fast becoming more anti-humanistic, “a sordid world of anomies, plasticity and insensitivity.” Sánchez, in effect, was calling for a new social/political realignment in which humankind’s highest ideals (love and humanness) were the guiding principles, much like Vasconcelos had called for in the mid twenties in Mexico. Thus, love and humankind’s vital humanity is the central messages amidst his confrontational posture. To Sánchez, Love is defined as “positive and creative but only when love is a sharing process and not a bartering of dignity for material ends” (“Questions..” Sojourns). Here, the central focus is sharing for the natural resources of earth belong to everyone equally: “To exploit the environment and other people is to act wantonly and inhumanely, for the world’s riches belong in equal portion to all human beings, not just to the swift and conniving” (“On being..” Hechizospells). Humankind was becoming robotic and insensitive and as such, was dying a slow death, a death “gestated by menticidal politics and birthed by expediency and bureaucratic obfuscation.”(Questions-Sojourns) Sánchez saw liberation not solely in a political sense but within a social/philosophical context. A champion of human rights, Sánchez underscored the rights of woman but warned they must resist the “emulators of media chic.” As a carnala, she must also seek her own liberation (“Coyúntate, mujer,” (Hechizospells). His poetic aesthetic forges a new expression that blends various languages and dialects (English, Spanish, French, and Caló). His word play and double entendre create compounds, puns, combos and neologisms with a new fresh and creative expression (Hetherington, Bilingual Wordplay). His language is a metalanguage in which there is a dialogic discourse. The poet is at once the experimenter and the observer. His creativity is expressed in a total cultural context, often unconscious, polyphonic and supplemented by a multiplicity of meanings. Within his dialogic language, there is reification, hybridization and the mixing of genres. He is the poet that destroys the Idyll, a place where people are egotistical, greedy, labor differentiated and mechanized (Vento, *Ars Poetica*).

In the end, this highly perspicacious and confrontational voice, at once a rebel, bard, victim, critic, oppressed, and experimenter, represents truth, integrity, humanity and love. He is a voice that goes beyond the particular and the regional to the universal. A migrant within the walls of prison, he rose to great heights. Like the “Birdman of Alcatraz”, he attained great

knowledge as a Chicano pinto poet in Ramsey and La Tejana. His tour de force is seen in his ability to synthesize the pachuco/pinto activist platitude with the universal (social and cultural) liberation of peoples. After a life of struggle sacrifice and pain, he attains a tenured Professorship. He arrives at the post where much of his criticism was directed. But unlike his detractors, he becomes a positive and futuristic model for the academic student body. In his unpublished work, *Sojourns*, he ponders if his work has condemned him:

Es posible
que mis palabras
me condenen
a morir,
que en buscar dignidad y verdad
he cometido tonterías a denunciar
ambiciosos agresivos
hambrientos que no comen ni dejan comer
movimientistas muy listos
para asesinar y aplastar ideas...
("Seis piensasentimientos" (*Sojourns*))

As we enter a new era in the new millennium, there is no question that the new generations will revise the stagnant social and political agenda of the past decades (López, *Poetic Presence*..). I think that it is also altogether fitting that we see Ricardo Sánchez, as Prof. Luis Leal asserts in his Introduction, as the inheritor of Walt Whitman. A champion of the underdog and the poor, Sánchez writes the following in one of his last poems referring to the campesinos in Chiapas:

The world stands awed
By humble people arising
To reclaim the earth...
("Canción Chiapaneka",
Amerikan Journeys::Jornadas Americanas)

While Ricardo Sánchez may have been a persona *non grata* to the mainstream, he possessed, like most geniuses, an unconventional approach, a resistance to the status quo but likewise created the new, the novel and the futuristic. His creative work in the end will provide a forum in this next millennium for analysis as well

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