

## Luis Leal Introduction to *The Ricardo Sanchez Reader*

### INTRODUCTION

Pioneer Chicano poet Ricardo Sánchez (1941-1995) was one of the leading writers of *El Movimiento*, the social movement initiated by Chicanos and Chicanas during the middle Sixties. This group of poets which included, among others, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales, Raul R. Salinas, José Montoya, Abelardo Delgado, Alurista, and Angela de Hoyos, was the first to contribute to the defining of Chicano/a contemporary literature with works of high aesthetic value incorporating social subjects and themes with personal expressions of their attitudes towards life and the nature of *Chicanismo*.

Born in El Paso, Texas, March 29, the son of Pedro Lucero and Adelina Gallegos and raised in the South-Central Barrio Del Diablo (Devil’s Ward), Ricardo dropped out of Jefferson High School to enlist in the U. S. Army. He spent some time in California and Texas prisons, but upon his release he earned a certificate equivalent to a high school education and went on to obtain a Ph.D. in American Studies from Union Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1974, with a dissertation dealing with poetics. He began to publish and teach even before he completed his formal education. As a poet Ricardo began his career in El Paso in 1971, where his first book, *Canto y Grito*, was published by Mictla, an editorial house he co-founded in 1970. From 1976 to 1981 he had several positions as Instructor, poet in residence, and visiting professor in several colleges and universities across the country, among them the University of Utah at Salt Lake City from 1977 to 1980.

From 1979 to 1983 he was a member of the National Endowment for the Arts, and from 1982 to 1985 a member of the Texas Commission for the Arts. In 1986 he was the only Latino poet invited to attend the First Meeting of the Poets of the Latin World. By 1981 he had left academia to become a free-lance writer but, attracted by the lure of the university, he returned to teaching in 1991, joining Washington State University as Associate Professor with a joint appointment in the Departments of English and Comparative American Cultures. He returned to academia because he believed, as he said, that “The university represents quest, critical dialogue, learning, creativity and intellectual entelechy for me. I returned to university teaching, after an eleven year hiatus as a freelance writer/poet and performer, because I felt a great hunger for the classroom, for that dialogue with young minds who also question the foundations of their lives and society in order to grow and become self-actuated and creative.” He remained at Washington State until his death of cancer at a hospital in El Paso on September 3, accompanied by his wife of 31 years, María Teresa Silva, his sons Richard and Jacinto, and his daughter Libertad Yvonne Jones.

His personal papers form part of Stanford University Libraries Mexican American collections. Sánchez’ first book, *Canto y Grito Mi Liberación* (1971), stands out as a key work not only in the appearance of a major Chicano poet, but also in defining an important trend in the history of contemporary Chicano poetry. In this first book he defined *movimiento* Poetry, which is characterized by the harmonious blending of aesthetic elements and social protest; in other words, by giving expression to the problems, longings, and aspirations of the Chicano people in aesthetically satisfying forms. His *Chicanismo* partakes of a philosophy based on the respect due to all human beings. In some of the essays included in this book, as well as in some of the poems, the poet reiterates that to be a Chicano one must act like a humane person, a theme that contributes to the book’s permanent value.

The social aspects of Ricardo's early poetry are very well expressed in *Canto y Grito*, now a classic in Chicano literature. The aesthetic aspects are no less important: the appropriate blending of English and Spanish; the declamatory nature of his discourse; and the use of images, symbols, and metaphors taken from barrio culture. These are the elements that help the poet to forcefully present his ideas and emotions. In the prose essays we find the best definitions of *chicanismo*, *carnalismo*, *pachuquismo*, and other aspects of the Chicano culture of *El movimiento*. And in the Preface he tells about all the problems he encountered in his hometown, El Paso, when trying to establish Mictla Publications and publish his book, and he asks the question: Why this book? The answer he gives us is as valid today as it was when he asked it twenty-four years ago. He says that the book is a "response to the growing menace of a dehumanizing society that is now worldwide, for conflict and racism are rampant throughout the world," and that "it is against the madness of those who want to become masters" that he flings out his anger, that he therefore dedicates his book not only to *La Causa*, but also to all human beings. He finishes his Preface by conveying a message worthy of stressing: "If we fail to find meaningful areas of commonality, then we shall doom ourselves and turn to hate and total destruction." Thus we can see that Ricardo's concern is not only for Chicanos, but also for humanity at large. As Philip Ortego says in the Introduction to the first edition, "One cannot help but conclude, as one reads *Canto y Grito*, that only one who has suffered the whips and scorns of life could emerge with so much concern for his fellow man."

The most striking formal characteristic of *Canto y Grito* is the use of prose and poetry in both English and Spanish. This mestizo structure lends itself well to the expression of the social and political ideas of the Chicano writer. There is also an echo of Prehispanic poetry in the resonance given the book by the repetition in verse form of the images and concepts previously expressed in prose. This parallelism gives the book an added aesthetic dimension. A study of this process would without question illuminate Ricardo's creative process. Thematically, he is preoccupied with his own people, as we can see in the poem "In Exile," which can be considered as his literary manifesto, not too distant from that of Walt Whitman:

i write of my people --LA RAZA!--  
with pride, love, and out of need ... for  
i am indelibly CHICANO.

Ricardo's second major book, *Hechizospells* (1976), is a collection of poems, stories, vignettes, articles, and notes on the human condition of Chicanos and *pícaros*. As Miguel López has observed, a great change in Sánchez' attitude towards life and society can be observed in this book when compared with *Canto y Grito*. Here Ricardo's vision is much more comprehensive and rounded out. The book includes 97 poems with notes providing information about each one. The title, a bicultural image (Spanish *hechizo* and its English translation *spell*), symbolizes the enchantments of contemporary life with which, he tells us, "everyone must grapple with in order to live and define the world." The inclusion of a variety of literary forms and subjects, as he also tells us, is done to present "a series of glimpses at a multifaceted world seething with anger and discontent, pulsing with love and hate, and inspired by the humanity of those who have shared moments with me." His principal themes in these poems are a universal one, freedom, even at the price of violence, and, a more personal one, coming of age in the barrio. The vivid experiences he had in El Paso are expressed in a very complex style, a style reflecting great originality, a dominance of both English and Spanish, and a rich imagery. All these poems denote a search for freedom in all aspects, from the political to the linguistic and the literary.

After *Canto y Grito* and *Hechizospells*, Sánchez published several collections of poetry. These books, however, do not compare in richness with the earlier two. Yet, each one of them offers something new worthy of examination. In *Milhuas Blues and Gritos Norteños* (1980), written when he was a Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, he

collected eleven poems and an essay critical of the direction *El Movimiento* was taking. As in his previous works, some of the poems are written entirely in Spanish, as in "Escritura" (Writing), in which he criticizes the literary trend which gives emphasis to a style in which words have no vital meaning, since they are only "palabras que no son vividas" (words not alive). This criticism of Chicano/a literature has been interpreted by Joel Hancock as directed against the poets who read their works at the 1976 Floricanto Festival, whose works, together with the artists' paintings, Sánchez considered to be "escritura/pintura/ba ba sura" (writing, painting/ Gar Gar Garbage). Although critical also of the Chicano leaders of *El Movimiento* for the lack of visible accomplishments, in one of the poems "re-encuentro" (re-encounter), dated June, 1977, he realized that there is no easy solution to the problems faced by Chicanos and Chicanas. In the last stanza he says: "pero solución en total / no parece / que alguien la tiene / por lo menos / yo no..." (but a total solution / it doesn't seem / that anyone has it / at least / not I...).

In 1981 Sánchez published *Brown Bear Honey Madness: Alaska Cruising Poems*, which are reflections about his experiences when he was a poet in residence at the University of Alaska in Juneau between May and September of 1979. However, one of them, "& would that I could," deals with Mexico. It was written in El Paso in June 1979 at Hotel Del Paso, apparently after having attended the Metropolitan Book Fair in Mexico City that year. It deals with the political and cultural relations between the United States and Mexico, and also compares the problems of the poor people of Mexico with those of the Chicanos. All the other poems, however, deal with life in Alaskaztlán, as he calls that region.

Between September 8 and 26 of 1978 Sánchez made his first trip to Europe to participate in the One World Poetry Festival in Amsterdam, Holland. But it was not until 1983 that he published in Austin, Texas, *Amsterdam Cantos (y poemas pistos...)* (Amsterdam Cantos and Drunken Poems), a book edited by James Cody with a Foreword by Paul Christensen, who, among other things, says that all of Sánchez' texts "are ambitious, overlapping versions of a new *Leaves of Grass* that may one day be regarded as the rightful heir to Whitman's original. Indeed, both texts grapple with the fundamentals of an American democracy." The poems, however, are mostly dedicated to document his travels in Europe, with a few reminiscent of his youthful days in El Paso and one dedicated to his wife Tere. Among his experiences in Amsterdam the presence of Hispanic culture (Spanish and Mexican) have a prominent part. Here and there the theme of freedom appears: "feel freer here / than ever before." On the 16 of September he wrote a poem glorifying the Independence of Mexico. In short, the contents of this collection can be summarized by saying that they document, in verse, Sánchez' experiences in Europe in 1978. In "Regreso" he states: "that short sojourn to Amsterdam was freer for me than anything else ever experienced." Two years later, that is, in 1985, he published in Austin his autobiography *Perdido. A Barrio Story*.

Five years after publishing with Arte Público Press the book *Selected Poems* Sánchez came out with a new collection, *Eagle Visioned / Feathered Adobes: manito sojourns & pachuco ramblings, October 4<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 1981* (El Paso, 1990), a collection of fourteen poems with a Glossnotes, that is, a "Regional Spanish Vocabulary and Notes on Allusions in Eagle Visioned/Feathered Adobes" compiled by M. S. Hetherington in which translations and definitions of words are combined with notes to clarify citations of names and people. In the same characteristic style, Sánchez criticizes people and customs of New Mexico (and some of Texas), in what he calls "a collection of sketches." The fourteen poems were written, as indicated in the subtitle, in October of 1981. In "The why of adobes & feathers: a foreword five years later," the author says that the poems were written as "a response to the empty-scapes of arts and letters by raza in New Mexico," and that although "There were many artesans working, as well as journeyman writers, but few were those involved in questioning the very fabric of life in that enchanted land." Not only does he criticize the Nuevomexicanos' complacency and indolence, but also that of the tejanos of San Antonio and El Paso. According to him, in both places "The promise of the movement had been subverted, its values perverted, and its future almost cast

asunder.” Nor are critics in academia overlooked, as they are accused of writing only to obtain promotion and not for the common people of the barrio. Since he himself had an academic position, he explained that: “before being a professor and before having a Ph.D.” he is “a person hungry for that moment when our raza will have truly lived up to its promise, its beautiful potential.” In the poems he criticizes the tourist-pleasing artists of New Mexico, the writers who deform the reality of the place and its people to please the readers, and in general the accepted practice of modifying the true nature of the culture of the native people to please the visitors. The general tone that prevails in these poems is that of disillusion with what could have been a cultural paradigm for a truly representative Chicano culture.

en esta tierra  
vive hueca  
nuestra historia.  
(In this land  
hollow lives  
our history).

Ricardo’s last collection of poems, *Amerikan Journeys :: Jornadas Americanas*, appeared October 1, 1994, in Iowa City, Iowa, with a Preface by Rob Lewis, a Foreword by the author, and illustrations by Jesús “Chista” Cantú. According to Lewis, the birth of this book took place one day when he and Ricardo met on the campus of Iowa State University during the autumn of 1993. He recalls that when Ricardo was in Ames to give a speech, he requested permission to publish “a limited edition chapbook of the single poem ‘Orale, Don Cristóbal, or Rapine et Colombine,’ a poem of which I had had some hope of publishing since I had first read it in 1992.” The project grew, and finally Lewis included 16 poems, two of which came from earlier sources, “Orale, Don Cristóbal” from the review *Fugue* (1992), and “Dream(s): hacia lo sensual” from *Hechizospells*.

In his Foreword to this collection, under the title “the word writ / the writ word,” Sánchez makes a statement that defines his poetry. According to him, “Whatever it is results in poems, it simply is a natural response to awareness, to experience.” The experiences, which resulted in the poems of this slender volume, could be as simple as a ride in an Arizona bus, as serious as grief for a dead artist, or as recent as the news about the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. This book is a departure from earlier ones. Gone is his strident use of language, imagery, and references. Here the style and subject matter, when compared to earlier works, seem quite unlike that of Ricardo Sánchez. What does not disappear is his love of humanity, which pervades his entire poetic production and which is often overlooked because of the defiant nature of some of his statements. But if we read him carefully, we discover that Ricardo is conscious not only of the hostility against Chicanos, but also of human values. Alongside this appreciation of those values, we find - in his poetry as well as in his prose essays-- a powerful denunciation of the antagonistic attitudes he finds in some members of the majority culture, as well as an urgent message to his people to keep up the struggle for La Causa.

Two years after Ricardo’s death, Roberto Bárcena edited *The Loves of Ricardo*, a collection of love poems written by Sánchez between 1963 and 1989 and organized chronologically.

This Reader, the first dedicated to Ricardo Sánchez, includes a statement by the

author, an unpublished interview with the author, critical essays about his works, selections from his poetry taken from his principal books, and bibliographies. The critical essays cover all topics related to his poetry, from his language (Jesús Rosales) to his ars poetica (Arnoldo Carlos Vento), from his imagery (Leonardo Carrillo) to his place in Chicano literature (Miguel R. López), and his ideology (B.V. Olgún). This examination of the most important aspects of Ricardo Sánchez' literary production constitutes a deserved homage to this remarkable writer.

**Luis Leal**

**(For a complete copy of *The Ricardo Sanchez Reader, Critical Essay and Anthology* Search for Ediciones Nuevo Espacio. The Table of Contents is provided for your perusal.) A CD E Book of Sanchez' poetry will be available soon.**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS—ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO .....	x
INTRODUCTION---LUIS LEAL.....	xiii

### PART I : CRITICAL ESSAYS

#### (A) THE POET'S VOICE

MICTLA : A CHICANO'S LONG ROAD HOME--RICARDO SÁNCHEZ.....	3
RICARDO SÁNCHEZ : AN INTERVIEW BY LUIS LEAL EMERITUS PROFESSOR UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-SANTA BARBARA.....	11

#### (B) THE POET'S ARS POETICA

RICARDO SÁNCHEZ : ARS POETICA-- ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS-AUSTIN.....	27
--	----

#### (C) THE POET'S COMMITMENT

<i>ECHANDO MADRES: THE POLITICAL AND SYMBOLIC ECONOMY OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ' POESÍA DE CHINGAZOS,</i> B. V. OLGUÍN CORNELL UNIVERSITY.....	47
--	----

#### (D) THE POET'S IMAGE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

ARCHETYPAL IMAGES AND CHICANO CONSCIOUSNESS LEONARDO CARRILLO, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AT CORPUS CHRISTI.....	67
---	----

#### (E) THE POET'S LANGUAGE

EL USO DEL ESPAÑOL EN <i>CANTO Y GRITO MI LIBERACIÓN</i> DE RICARDO SÁNCHEZ JESÚS ROSALES, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AT CORPUS CHRISTI.....	71
--	----

BILINGUAL WORDPLAY IN THE WRITING OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ NOT SWITCHING BUT BLENDING--M.S. HETHERINGTON, EMERITUS PROFESSOR, COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON-SOUTH CAROLINA.....	79
---	----

#### (F) THE POET'S PRESENCE

THE PRESENCE OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ IN THE NINETIES MIGUEL R. LÓPEZ, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.....	89
--	----

## PART II: POETRY

### CANTO Y GRITO MI LIBERACIÓN

ONE YEAR AFTER: REFLECTIONS ON/ABOUT/AROUND THE MOVIMIENTO A PREFACE (OF SORTS).....	99
DESMADRAZGO.....	103
REO ETERNO.....	107
THOUGHTS WHILE SIPPING COFFEE AT CITY HALL.....	108
IN EXILE: THE ONLY CHICANO OUTPOST IN THE OLDE COMMONWEALTH..	109
LO HUMANO.....	110
THOUGHT TO A MILLION EXPERIENCES CALLED FROM MY YOUTH. ....	111
STREAM.....	112
JUAN.....	118
MIGRANT LAMENT.....	121
DENVER.....	122
PRESO POLÍTICO.....	123
ALLÍ FUERA DE MI MENTE.....	125
CANTO.....	126
IT IS URGENT.....	127
THE WOULD-BE GODS.....	128
EXISTIR ES.. AN EXPERIMENT WRITING.....	129
DICHOTOMIES.....	134

### LOS CUATRO

INDICT AMERIKA.....	139
CARNAL. TRAS REJAS.....	142

### HECHIZOSPELLS

HECHIZOS: PIECES OF LIFE.....	145
ON BEING. HACIA LA LIBERACIÓN POPULAR.....	147
LETTER TO MELO.....	163



SOLEDAD WAS A GIRL'S NAME.....	165
OTRA VEZ.....	167
THREE DAYS TO GO.....	168
EL HECHICERO.....	170
PEREGRINO SOY.....	174
MISIVA TO A CARNAL.....	178
PIENSO Y CANTO.....	183
BRONCE.....	184
QUEST.....	185
SUEÑO(S).....	186
OJOS.....	187
BARRIOS OF THE WORLD.....	188
GRANO. RANA VOICE.....	190
LATINOS.....	192
EVOLUTION. MADNESS/ UNSANITY.....	194
SANTOS RODRÍGUEZ.....	201
VIENTO; HISTORY AND DRUM: A POETIC EXPERIMENT IN SOUND.....	209
OYE PITO.....	217
TERESA, LAST NIGHT.....	223
JUST AFTER.....	225
NEO'S & ARCHETYPES.....	226
3rd WORLD UMBRAGE.....	228
NI XIPE CHAVITO.....	230
ESE, PUÉS, NICHES.....	232
COYÚNTATE MUJER.....	235
CRÍTICA FOR ARSE POETICUS.....	240
DOS MOMENTOS EN MEJICLES.....	246

## **MILHUAS BLUES AND GRITOS NORTEÑOS**

ESCRITURA.....	251
DAMN, OH DAMN.....	253
ARTE: CUMBRE DE LO HUMANIZANTE.....	254
LA CASI MUERTE.....	256
DENTRO CANTOS DE.....	259
RE-ENCUENTRO.....	261

## **AMSTERDAM CANTOS Y POEMAS PISTOS**

Y CON UN GRITO.....	265
BOATING.....	267
CLUSTERS OF HUMANKIND.....	268
REGRESO.....	272

Y CUANDO SE HACE EL BAILE.....	274
AND WITHIN THE VÍSPERAS.....	275

**BROWN BEAR HONEY MADNESS**

INTERMINABLE.....	283
& WOULD THAT I COULD.....	287
BAR BANTER.....	288
VIDA O MUERTE IN A STRANGE LAND.....	294

**SELECTED POEMS**

SAY, TUSH-HOG CONVICT.....	297
OLD MAN.....	298
AMSTERDAMN IT ALL.....	300
ONCE.....	303
FESTIVAL OF CHILDREN.....	304

**EAGLE VISIONED/FEATHERD ADOBES**

REFLECTIONS.....	307
NOS SENTAMOS.....	308

**SOJOURNS & SOULMIND ETCHINGS**

QUESTIONS . AN INTRO OF SORTS.....	321
MAS ALLÁ DE LOS CONFLICTS.....	323
PERDIDO : A BARRIO STORY.....	329
TRANSITION(S) .A THOUGHT FANTASY.....	334
EL CHOCO. REMEMBERANCE OF A CONFLICT.....	338
OPUS . NO. 3/ 4 . MODUS VIVIENDI.....	340
SO IT CUTS.....	344
EL LENCHO Y LOS CHENCHOS.....	348
CIPRIANO POETICUS IAMBICUS M D.....	350
FUERON OJOS.....	354
MUJER DEL BARRIO.....	355
ANOCHÉ.....	357
HUMO.....	358
MEETING.....	359
VIRILE.....	360
VISION.....	361
LITERATURA.....	362
REDONDAS.....	363
FULMINACIONES: SPIRIT/ MIND.....	364

FALCÓN.....	372
YENDO . UN POEMA EN PROSA.....	375
TAMBORAZOS Y GRITOS, SELF AWARENESS.....	383
FUÍ, SOY, SERÉ.....	388
NO, NO FUISTE.....	390
QUÉ SE AMA.....	392
PASARON Y PASARÁN.....	393
SEIS PIENSASENTIMIENTOS.....	399
CASI-GATO AKA CARNEDECHIVO.....	404
LE DISTE AMOR, SO COM(E)PUTA/DORA.....	408
Y FROM HERE, WHERE?.....	411
<b>THE CLARION SOUNDED.....</b>	<b>415</b>
<b>CLEARING THE LABYRINTH.....</b>	<b>425</b>
<b>ÓRALE, DON CRISTÓBAL, OR RAPINE ET COLUMBINE.....</b>	<b>439</b>
<b>PIENSASENTIMIENTO CHICANO</b>	
PIENSASENTIMIENTO CHICANO: POÉTICA DE LA RAZA.....	449
LET ME HAVE .....	452
<b>BORDER BONES</b>	
SCHEMATIQUES & MONTAGES.....	455
JORNADA EN 3/ 4 TIEMPO.....	459
<b>AMERIKAN JOURNEYS: :JORNADAS AMERICANAS</b>	
THERE IS NO TIME.....	471
O YOUTH, O LIFE.....	472
SYMBIONT SPACES.....	473
A DONDE LLEGASTE.....	474
A CÉSAR LO SUYO.....	478
CANCIÓN CHIAPANÉKA.....	481
<b>A SELECTED AND CRITICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>485</b>

<b>A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ' WORKS</b> .....	487
---	-----

## **APPENDIX I**

FRONTERAS : : BORDERS (RICARDO SÁNCHEZ).....	561
CARACOL INTERVIEW: RICARDO SÁNCHEZ, MARCH, 1978.....	565
FLOR Y CANTO AND CANTO AL PUEBLO---ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO.....	569
SELECTED REMARKS OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ ON BICULTURALISM AND BILINGUALISM—M. SUE HETHERINGTON.....	571

## **APPENDIX II**

### **CARTA/MAGDA/CARTA Y OTRAS MISIVAS (UNA OBRA NOVELÍSTICA EPISTOLARIA)**

SEÑORONÍSIMA MARÍA MAGDALENA.....	577
SEÑOR MANUEL ARTE Y COSMOS.....	581
SEÑOR DON MÁSCARA DE TOÑO CARADECHIVO.....	583
DR. JUANDIEGO TORQUEMADA.....	585
DR. EDGAR ALLEN EHITMAN FREUD DE JUNG.....	587
SEÑOR MAMÍFERO MAXIMÍNIMO MARTINEZ O'SHIT.....	589
DOÑA LUZ GABACHA DE COLÓN.....	591
DON QUEJOTO MANCHADO DE PANZAS KLAUS.....	593
DOÑOSOTA MAGDA DE CARTA MAGDA DE MALLI-NALLI.....	595
CHEFINO DEITY DE ULLOA, SECRETARIO GENERAL DI TUTTI MONDOS.....	597
MUNDO DE MUNDO INVENTADOS.....	599

## **APPENDIX III**

### **REMEMBERING RICARDO**

THE MAN, HIS PHILOSOPHY & HIS CONTRIBUTIONS...ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO.....	603
UN AÑO DESPUÉS: REMEMBERING RICARDO.....PHIL DURÁN.....	607
REMEMBERING MY COMPADRE SÁNCHEZ..... ABELARDO B. DELGADO.....	613
BATO LOCO: PH.D..... NEPHTALÍ DE LEÓN.....	619

<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b> .....	625
--------------------------------	-----

