

(PUBLISHED ORIGINALLY BY *EDICIONES NUEVO ESPACIO* IN A TWO VOLUME E BOOK ENTITLED *THE RICARDO SANCHEZ READER: CRITICAL ESSAYS AND POETRY* (2000) BY ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO, PH.D.

THE RICARDO SANCHEZ READER

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARNOLDO CARLOS VENTO, PH.D.

The birth of *The Ricardo Sánchez Reader* took place in the early nineties. Ricardo Sánchez was at that time a professor at Washington State University. It was a special session on the poetry of Ricardo Sánchez at the NACS Conference in San José, California that led to a collection of essays by Emeritus Professor Luis Leal in 1993. It is about this time that Professor Luis Leal wrote to me to suggesting and acting on the recommendation of Sánchez that I collaborate with an article on his *obra completa*. By 1995, I began to discuss with Prof. Sánchez the importance of having his poetry, bibliography and unedited work next to the critical essays. In this manner, the student, the teacher or the public could have access to his most important work after a careful reading of the criticism. Elated with the idea, he asked me to approach Prof. Leal who in turn expressed his approval of the extension of the manuscript. On February 2, 1995, Prof. Leal sent me the collected essays stating additionally the bad news of Ricardo's cancer.

The second stage in building this manuscript begins with this writer shortly thereafter. Early phases of Part II included (a) the selection of the most important poems in each of his books beginning with his *Canto y Grito Mi Liberación* and ending with *Americkan Journeys: : Jornadas Americanas* including, notwithstanding, selections of unpublished works, interviews, bibliographies, and testimonies by close friends. (b) Scanning, correcting, and formatting of poetry in an effort to retain the original structure and style intended by its author, (c) editing of the standard Spanish particularly with respect to orthography and accentuation. Here, much care was also taken not to interfere with intentional dialectal spellings, and (d) final proofreading. Much like Sánchez' poetry, the manuscript took on a Sanchezque sojourning in view of the massive amount of poetry that most publishing outlets were not willing to finance. It is not until April 2000 that it finds a home with a publisher that publishes both academic and creative literature with the additional advantage of global cybernetic literary accessibility.

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 in addition to Roberto Mora for availing me the use of his scanner in 1995-96. My thanks also to Professors Ben V. Olguín, Leonardo Carrillo, Jesús Rosales, M. Sue Hetherington and Miguel R. López for their critical contributions as well as Abelardo, Nephtalí de León and Phil Durán for their personal and moving

testimonies on the life and work of Ricardo Sánchez. Additionally, I would like to personally thank Prof. Luis Leal who placed trust in me to complete the voluminous second part of *The Ricardo Sánchez Reader* and for his collaboration and contribution with his introduction and interview of Ricardo Sánchez. Finally, I wish to express my thanks to my wife Beatriz Ramirez Vento for her unending patience and compassion during the countless hours spent by this writer through the years in bringing this project to fruition and termination.

I would be remiss if I did not thank *Ediciones Nuevo Espacio* for recognizing the value of Ricardo Sánchez' work, notwithstanding the manuscript as not solely a learning tool but also as an important document from the point of view of Chicano history and literature. I am certain that the spirit and thought of Ricardo Sánchez will serve as an inspiration for generations to come. It lays the foundation in many respects, for the changes needed in the building of the next society, one which will strive to eliminate the political and ethical degeneration not only in the educational institutions but in all facets of American and Western society as noted by Ricardo Sánchez.

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 self-awareness 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 bi-lingual/ 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 *Micla* 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-menial 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 *carñala*, 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 as for choices as one ponders one’s reality and the world around us.

| Arnoldo Carlos Vento
June 19, 2000

(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.

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