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REBEL WITH A CAUSE: THE CONFRONTATIONAL POETRY
OF RICARDO SÁNCHEZ

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Ricardo Sánchez has been characterized as creative, as dynamic, as a sharing individual, dogmatic, a maverick, a *barrio* rebel, a threat, a bato loco, a universal man and a Chicano Walt Whitman. In one interview in the late 70's, he characterized himself, not as a bilingual or bicultural person but rather one with a tertiary approach to life and writing, a triune pyramidal person that had created the third form of his person i.e. the *Mestizo*.

Canto y Grito mi liberación established him as a major artistic voice in the Chicano movement. For Sánchez the *Canto* metaphorically was the song of the breaking of dawn, the gentle song of flowers opening up to the *Padre Sol*: it was the canto of life. His *Grito* was the outcry, the affirmation that one is born to be free, to be oneself in terms of how one is. Together it is the festival of *Chicanismo* and at once liberational. Ricardo Sánchez did not care to change his cultural reality for anyone. What motivated him was a lifetime/struggle pain and confrontation. He knew who he was and thus, he respected himself. He said, "The first obligation is to respect oneself, to arrive at a personal truth [that] one wants to share with one's progeny..." He felt that his worth was determined by himself and not by outsiders. Chicano, then becomes "A definition of action, of realization within all that I am, not some fragmented term of genocide handed me by a system only concerned with digitizing me, amortizing my humanity by numbing me within a stereotyping/statistics driven process of dehumanization." While *Canto y*

Grito mi liberación was the outcry and manifesto of liberation, *Hechizospells* was the philosophical explanation. It is the response to the human condition that is central to all of Ricardo Sánchez's poetry. When he achieves this he releases the slave within and leads him toward his realization as a worthy caring being willing to confront destructive elements i.e. elements that are anti-humanistic. He asserts his right to become himself and the responsibility to do it humanely. His poetry thus was part of the body of liberationist literature which has integrated within it a moral imperative to education. It is through the liberationist literature that we question so that "we may reflect on our humanity and make determinations that are life giving." The poet wants to create a grander sense of our humanity, hoping that in the future we can reflect and state that "we acted ethically, caringly and humanely." Those poets, writers and academicians that work outside the resistance movement are but "commodities that white Amerika can trot out as new tokens...to have deliver the dulcet tones which do not truly offend those whose largesse and power have historically offended humanity..." to those critics who arrogantly postulated that *Aztlan* was in exercise in Romanticism, he responds: "*Aztlan* is more than a mythical notion, more than a moth dream in some cowering poet's trip; it is a land that was stripped from our ancestors, it is our *tierra* in all senses of the word and our *mestizo-Indigena corazones* yearn to recapture a heritage patrimony and destiny brutally taken from us..."

The outcry of Ricardo Sánchez is the anger that still is locked within, "it is the fomentation of outrage in an outcry to liberation" to many, this can be offensive, particularly those who are comfortable or those who want to be allowed to survive; it is unsettling to those from Latin America that come here to be citizens, and to "Mexicans who crave acceptability like some of their ancestors did when they embraced Maximiliano and became mariachis for the *franceses* who were colonizing them."

Ricardo Sánchez while crying out with dissatisfaction with society is a poet that is enamored with life itself. Life is a celebration; he breathes and lives each moment to the fullest. His eyes capture the details one normally takes for granted. This celebration is mirrored further

by *Canto Al Pueblo* where artists and writers celebrate and build new bridges, for art belongs to the people and through it "we can know our feelings and our real past." Art and literature are mirrors of our mindsouls. As *mestizos* by history, we can live in multiple worlds as gente íntegra that we can be." He sees mediocrity throughout society, a humanity that has had plastic surgery, an America that does not change, mass producing the same shapes and types of human beings.

But Ricardo sees beyond national borders for he realizes that the destiny of *La Raza* is tied to the destinies of all the people of the earth "...that our struggle is but another face of universal quest for freedom--that male/female relations must become egalitarian...that we must learn to see beyond the confines and barriers of our *barrios*, states [and] country to a world that is multi-hued and polylinguistic." He calls for taking all the meaning of our existentiality to the world, without losing our identity so that we can broaden our experiences enriching our commitment to liberation, and the total transformation of human society.

The last phase of Ricardo Sánchez is characterized by a mature historically reflective and philosophical voice as evidenced by *Border Bones: Sketches from the Pass*. Sánchez's new voice is not so much a *grito* as it is a new voice which is incisive and flowing projecting a mature confident professional synthesis that is both historically and socially based; it is a macroscopic view of *La Raza* from Pre-Columbian times to the present. It is analytical, honest and engageé. Thus Ricardo Sánchez saw through the process of humanization, the bridging of peoples in a true *carnalismo* or brotherhood. Towards the twilight of his year, he remained positive amidst a world trapped in violence and decadence: "Maybe I no longer have a people or home or *Causa* to look toward because I simply year to arrive at freedom and not a limited notion of humanity." To Ricardo Sánchez, the universe was his world if only there was more time for each of us "There is so little life time for each of us, maybe 70 or so years or even a hundred, and I want to pack the universe into my being, perhaps to give a grander sense of being, to my limited self."

The poet in serious reflection humbled himself as he thought of the moments or years left to him: "And I mean to make what moments or years remain for me to live, count, conquering

my fears and sharing *lo poquito que sé*, for the world is big, beautiful, loving, hurting and in a turbulent process of change--*quiero ser un granito de arena en la playa humana.*" In his last years each day became a struggle, an encounter with survival; here the poet reflects on one's modification in health as well as literature: "I stumble each day trying to make sense and somehow surviving until the next moment, never truly knowing if I shall survive one bout with diabetes to another encounter with diverticulitis. My large intestine is decreased by 18 inches, yet I survive and I wonder about how we modify ourselves as I cut out nouns, adjectives, adverbs and even verbs from my poems and articles."

Where will Chicano poetics be placed in the future? What is the destiny of our efforts? Ricardo Sánchez in his ironic wit reflects on its disinterment in some distant future: "Will the future disinter our bones and sing praises to Chicanosaurian poetics in some distant mausoleum of diversity? Whatever our destiny it will be something that we will have created through the pain of daring to be ourselves at whatever cost."

In the end, Ricardo Sánchez will have a secure place in Chicano history as a forerunner of the late XX century Chicano protest poetry. He will be remembered for many things but his most salient characteristic will be his uncompromising position to be truthful, to be oneself, to have integrity so that we also can be whole, integrated and humanized beings.

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