

The Chicano Renaissance

Identities: Chicano/Latino

Definiton: Rebirth in Art and Literature

History. During the sixties and seventies, when the United States was experiencing profound socio-political changes, Chicanos experienced a rebirth in culture, the arts, literature and language. Chicanos, long exploited and discriminated and awaiting their turn for recognition and justice explode into the scene creating authentic Chicano artistic and literary works. Heretofore, Chicanos had been deprived of publication within mainstream America. Now Chicanos create their own presses, journals, and Chicano literature. It was Professor Philip Ortego that first labeled this new rebirth of creativity as the Chicano Renaissance in conjunction with the publication of Tomás Rivera's *Y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971)The Youth Liberation Conferences held in Denver in 1969 and 1970, moreover, gave impetus for the creation of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (1969),which outlined structures and goals for the creation of Chicano Studies that probed into the historical and cultural distortions within academia.

Creativity. Students now were encouraged to write Chicano literature for submission to literary contests sponsored by Chicano presses (Quinto Sol [1967], Pajarito Publications [1970]). Moreover, annual national art and literary festivals were created modeled after Aztec festivals known as Flor y Canto (1973-77). Canto al Pueblo [1977-80] continued the tradition seeking a new political consciousness beyond the art for art's sake in the poetry, muralism, sculpture and the prose fiction of its participants. Concomitant to the Chicano creative explosion was the creation of new Chicano student organizations and journals. Each organization created their own newsletters and spoke through activist newspapers and publications such as *El Grito del Norte*, *El Gallo*, *Con Safos*, *El Grito* and *El Chicano*. Early anthologies on Chicano literature included *El Espejo* (1969, Quinto Sol Press) and *La Cosecha* (1977, Pajarito Publications).

Themes. Chicano literature during this rebirth was concerned with the plight of the Chicano, the minority experience vis a vis dominant Anglo-American society. The early works of the

seventies were to a great degree written in Spanish while the eighties and nineties were representative of works written largely in English. This was probably due to writers of a younger generation writing for an English reading public. Thematically, it was concerned with man's inhumanity to man, death, *curanderismo*, Aztec heritage, a reevaluation of Catholicism, machismo, racism, exploitation, , feminism, the handicap Chicano and the resilience and tenacity of the Chicano family (Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Rudolfo Anaya, Ron Arias, Alejandro Morales, Jim Sagel, Sandra Cisneros). In poetry, the seventies are headed by Ricardo Sánchez, Alurista, Raul Salinas, Abelardo, José Montoya and Antonio Burciaga. Among Chicanas, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Bernice Zamora, Alma Villanueva, Angela de Hoyos, Pat Mora and Evangelina Vigil represent some of the principle poets of the seventies and eighties. The modern Chicano theater originates with the Teatro Campesino (1965) of Luis Valdez who won critical acclaim in Paris, France. His *Zoot Suit* both as theater and cinema were successful in bringing into the mainstream the Chicano culture. Following Valdez is Carlos Morton in his *Johnny Tenorio and Other Plays* (1987).

Music and Cinema. In music, the Chicano brings in the traditional conjunto music and integrates it into the big band sound of the seventies exemplary of Little Joe y la Familia (*Nubes*). New instrumentation and styles create a unique Chicano/Tejano sound that began with female vocalists like Laura Canales that continue with the international heights of Selena. Currently, there is a plethora of creativity among Chicano/Latino (Mestizo-American) artists; new styles and forms are being created both in Spanish and English reaching national and international audiences. Chicano conjunto music additionally becomes popular across social and cultural lines, reaching as far as Japan. Finally, the creativity enjoyed during the Chicano Renaissance is being felt in the new Chicano cinema as seen in *La Bamba* (1987), *Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), *Zoot Suit* (1980), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *American Me* (1992), and *The Earth did not Swallow Him* (1995). In the film documentary arena, Robert Rodríguez (*The Mariachi*, 1993) and Hector Galán (*Songs of the Homeland*, 1994) represent a new breed of Chicano film-makers that promise to promote the next wave of young *nueva onda*

film-makers. Thus, the Chicano/Latino cinema is the next and most promising field for Mestizo-Americans.

See also: Chicano identity in literature; Bilingualism as a cultural experience.

Suggested Readings

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Modern Chicano Writers: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979) About Chicano authors, culture and criticism.

Juan Bruce-Novoa, "History as Content, History as Act: the Chicano Novel", *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 24:1 (Spring, 1987): 29. A creative look at implications of History and Content.

José Saldívar and H. Calderón, ed., *Criticism in the Borderlands : Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture and Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

Intellectual Life, Criticism and History.

Dianne Klein,

"Coming of Age in Novels of Rudolfo Anaya and Sandra Cisneros", *English Journal*, 81 (September, 1992): 21. A critical look at two important writers.

Raymond Paredes and Ricardo Romo, ed., *New Directions in Chicano Scholarship* (La Jolla: Mexican-American Monographs, 1979). Excellent articles on Folklore, Literature, Chicano Movement, and Politics.

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