

**John Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1974).
The View from Within and/or the View from Without?**

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In their introduction to the bibliography *Chicano Perspectives in Literature*,¹ the critics Francisco A. Lomelí and Donaldo W. Urioste distinguish Chicano literature from *literatura chicanesca*:

... the uniqueness of Chicano reality is such that non-Chicanos rarely capture it like it is. For this reason, we propose the latter's efforts to be termed *literatura chicanesca* because it only appears to be Chicano. Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the perspective is from the outside looking in. This perspective loses the spontaneity of a natural outpouring of a people's subconscious through the writer's creativity; instead, it becomes a calculated object of study which is valued from a relative distance, that is, not lived.²

This definition combines the boldness of the explorer of an unknown territory with the caution of the experienced scholar who reserves the niche of the exceptional for the potential text defying the newly established categories. Lomelí's and Urioste's only seemingly unambiguous declaration that "Chicano literature is written by Chicanos. Any limitations put on these literatures should be recognized as impositions"³ and the unnecessary opposition between the spontaneous and the calculated provoke the testing of these classifications with the help of John Nichols' *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1974). This novel irritated some of its readers because it possesses Chicano qualities in spite of the fact that the author is a non-Chicano. The opening and closing remarks of Lomelí's and Urioste's summary demonstrate this uneasiness:

Perhaps the most convincing chicanesca novel. Written after Nichols studied his subject matter extensively, thus capturing local color, customs, legends, beliefs and geographical particularities with the insight of a keen eye... Makes entertaining reading and proposes a good example for non-Chicanos to follow.⁴

In his chapter on "Literatura Chicanesca" in *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970–1979)*⁵ Antonio Márquez derives his basic term in contrast to Lomelí

and Urioste from Cecil Robinson's *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature*⁶ but runs into the same difficulties with John Nichols:

... reveals a remarkable knowledge of the Chicano experience in northern New Mexico, and offers an acuteness and sensitivity that are extraordinary when compared to the general product of literatura chicanesca ... Nichols lives and works with the Chicano people that he represents in his fiction; he knows and shares their needs, fears, aspirations and dreams. One can even quibble that Nichols' work in one important aspect circumvents the category of literatura chicanesca; his point of view is not from without but from within the Chicano experience. The quibble aside, Nichols' point of vantage informs his fiction with authenticity and a compelling rendering of the Chicano.⁷

I want to concentrate on some of John Nichols' memorable characters which have inspired gross misunderstandings among prejudiced readers.⁸ To see the novel in the context of the Chicano experience I shall also study its particular and universal messages. The results of this investigation will hopefully suggest new critical reflection on the nature of Chicano literature.

The Milagro Beanfield War is set in a North New Mexican small town whose socioeconomic situation is determined by the pressure from the Ladd-Devine Company and its local development project which involves the appropriation of land and water rights. This divides the community into winners and losers. Besides Ladd Devine the Third and his Anglo tools we are introduced to a group of profiteers, both Chicanos and Anglos, such as the real estate agent Bud Gleason, the town mayor Sammy Cantú, "the town's only rich Chicano rancher" (36)⁹ Eusebio Lavadie, and the sheriff Bernabé Montoya. The realization of the Devine Project also depends on the state authorities whose reactions are dominated by political opportunism.

John Nichols attaches great importance to the fact that most of his Chicano characters are caught in a double net of control mechanisms, thus indicating the actual political background and the representative quality of his novel. Local events are also described as another battle in the general war against the ideology of growth which Ladd Devine the Third defines as "to keep growing, building, expanding and absorbing and accumulating things and power and making money, and making more money on top of that" (434). The ruling class is well aware of the historical and cultural dimensions of the Beanfield War as statements like "The war never ended in 1848, you know." (68) or "Those damn old-fashioned people are a real thorn... They have strong roots." (613) prove.

From the Chicano majority the author selected a group of rather burlesque figures. Joe Mondragón is the person to start the war when he decides

to irrigate the little field in front of his dead parents' decaying west side home... and grow himself some beans. It was that simple. And yet irrigating that field was an act as irrevocable as Hitler's invasion of Poland, Castro's voyage on the *Grandma*, or the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, because it was certain to catalyze tensions which had been building for years, certain to precipitate a war. And like any war, this one also had roots that traveled deeply into the past (28).

These comments of the third-person omniscient narrator suggest that Joe is not fully aware of the implications of his act, though his emotions and attitudes cannot be separated from the local resistance against the manifold manifestations of colonialism:

He was tired, like most of his neighbors were tired, from trying to earn a living off the land in a country where the government systematically gathered up the souls of little ranchers and used them to light its cigars... tired of spending twenty-eight hours a day like a chicken-thieving mongrel backed up against the barn wall, neck hairs bristling, teeth bared, knowing that in the end he was probably going to get his head blown off anyway. He was tired of meeting each spring with the prospect of having to become a migrant and head north... where a man groveled under the blazing sun ten hours a day for one fucking dollar an hour... And he was damn fed up with having to buy a license to hunt deer on land that had belonged to Grandfather Mondragón and his cronies, but which now resided in the hip pockets of either Smokey the Bear, the state, or the local malevolent despot, Ladd Devine the Third (26).

Joe's sentiments are part of a collective weariness originating from Milagro's historical experience since 1848, specifically the seizure of the Spanish-Mexican land grants by "those democratic and manifestly destined sleights of Horatio Alger's hand (involving a genteel and self-righteous sort of grand larceny, bribery, nepotism, murder, mayhem, and general all-around and all-American nefarious skulduggery)..." (29).

At the outset Joe refuses to become a leader, he is one of the last to sign the petition against the Devine Project, to fully integrate his individual act into the collective history. Later he will feel the rightfulness of his revolt and attempt a vague classification:

He felt truly tough and arrogant, indestructible and happy. His bean-field, purely and simply, was beautiful. And for a few seconds he experienced an almost embarrassing and awkward sensation of well-being and importance. Like he was the King of the Castle. *Number One - El Número Uno* (162).

The switch to Spanish signifies his newly acquired sense of belonging:

... suddenly he held a profound tenderness for his people ... His people. His gente. His bunch of inbred, toothless, tubercular, flea-bitten, illiterate vecinos, sobrinos, primos, cuates, cabrones, rancheros, and gen-

eral all-around fregado'd jodidos. Suddenly he loved the people he lived with, he cared about their lives. And this feeling, this *tenderness* oozing throughout his body, made him almost weak (163).

These feelings blend into nostalgic childhood memories when Joe was herding sheep with his father moving self-sufficiently through the country. Much later in the book he will be able to relate his father's story to the context of local history without sentimentalities. Joe will sketch his father's economic and psychological collapse caused by the Devine Company and the Milagro prairie dog war, an effort to prevent nature from reclaiming the arable land. The war served as an example for the Smokey the Bear Santo Riots about ten years ago, and the present Beanfield War trying to restore the old land and water rights.

Joe's initially fairly undirected protest stirs up the spirit of rebellion inherent in the Chicano community, though an actual war will never break out. His fight for a decent survival for himself and his people is later on evaluated in a night scene, when Joe and his wife are listening to the Mesa coyotes

singing, calling each other or challenging the moon... No matter how much you poisoned them, shot them, scared them, trapped them, hated them, caged them, or generally raked over their habitat, you could not entirely kill all the coyotes, Joe thought. And the cottonwood leaves were so still... They could even hear the jukebox music at the Frontier Bar in town, the music remote like a fiesta memory from the old days (617-18).

The preservation of Joe's integrity depends on his acceptance of the productive tension between his own insignificance and significance, between the individual and the group experience.¹⁰

Part One of the novel introduces 94-year-old Amarante Córdova who "all his life... had lived in the shadow of his own death" (15-16). This miracle of survival is the first villager to join forces with Joe Mondragón. After having made reusable his 1914 sheriff's Colt Peacemaker and purchasing a box of shells on food stamps, Amarante takes his post at Joe's beanfield where he has a vision:

... he realized that, even though no rain had fallen at all for the past few days, the arching vision, shining faintly but unmistakably over Milagro, was a rainbow... that queer rainbow appeared in his dream ... and a few minutes later an angel showed up to complicate the miracle... a half-toothless, one-eyed bum sort of coyote dressed in tattered blue jeans and sandals, and sporting a pair of drab moth-eaten wings that looked as if they had come off the remainder shelves of a disreputable cut-rate discount store during a fire-damage sale, appeared (78-79).

When Amarante asks him to explain the rainbow sign, he mumbles: "Who knows, cousin... Maybe it's because for once in your lives you people are trying to do something right" (79). Notwithstanding this unglorious angel and its rather reluctant, cynical recognition of the Chicano efforts, Amarante succeeds

in envisioning himself as a proud rider in the high open country around the Little Baldy Bear Lakes.

The imagination has still the lifting power to elevate the reality of such run-down but tough people like Amarante, though they can only conjure up a sad, shabby figure as their angelic messenger. The coyote very well compares with the name given by the Chicanos to Ladd Devine the Third, "the zopilote." When Amarante encounters "his second angelic apparition" (415), the link between the Anglo despot and the angel becomes even more evident as the feathers of his wings "rattled obscenely like those of a zopilote" (415-16). Amarante again inquires about the rainbow and this time the "disgruntled coyote figure" (416) retreats into sarcasm: "Jesus Christ... Three hundred years, and just about all you old farts got to show for it is seventenths of an acre of frijoles... You people don't deserve a gold star, let alone a rainbow" (416).¹¹

In spite of the denial of the spiritual authority to provide the grand historical perspective, Amarante does not feel discouraged. He will have his finest hour actively defending the beanfield against one of the Devine Empire's agents. Immediately afterwards he meets Snuffy Ledoux, the local santero, who has returned to Milagro after a 10-years' absence following the Smokey the Bear Santo Riots. Ledoux carries the exhausted old man across the mesa:

Amarante began to sing in a high hoarse voice, a song with no notes, really, it was more of an Indian-style chant, high and sing-song wonderful, with no words anyone could understand, his radiant face tilted to the blue sky, shining like the face of a little boy or of an old old being as powerful as God, and his eyes were fixed on the permanent rainbow he could still see arching delicately over his hometown. And although blisters formed on Snuffy's feet, and although they began to bleed, he found himself marching farther between rests, the old man growing lighter with this triumphant outpouring of song; and by the time they reached the deserted west side beanfields the sun was hanging like a fiery orange in the west, and Snuffy Ledoux had also broken out into victorious song. (532)

Their common defiance of Anglo authority has created a deep feeling of brotherhood and native harmony with the universe which is extended to mythical dimensions in this St. Christopher scene. Under the impression of these emotions the two rebels try to design a pastoral future contradicting the pessimism of the coyote angel: "... not a vision of the future as totally unknown, but rather a vision of the future as composed, in part at least, of what had been okay about the past ... And people would return from faraway places, and chilies and pumpkins would grow in the cornfields, and you would be able to smell bread baking ..." (581-82).¹² Snuffy wants to destroy this vision by rational argument but is interrupted by the howl of the coyote, the symbol of survival. Amarante's and Snuffy's reflections refer to the night scene with Joe and Nancy Mondragón listening to the mesa coyotes. Nichols carefully links the two separate moments

of experience with the final victory celebration of Milagro, when the Chicanos are "happily firing bullets at the general cosmos, or aimed more carefully, trying to perforate the moon" (627). Amarante Córdova, the coyote angel and the coyote itself represent the deplorable part of the Chicano experience but, at the same time, its powers to dream up "the flight to the sun," to communicate with the past, and to maintain an identity against all odds.

The narrator frequently comes very close to the commenting function of the coyote angel when he creates an emotionally ambiguous atmosphere round his characters by his selection of the incongruous detail. Amarante, the pathetic figure, goes on the warpath, he accepts the duties set to him by his heritage, projects himself out of the daily routine, fights the windmills and exposes himself to the laughter of the townspeople and, of course, the readers. His story began right after two Milagro miracle tales which document the importance of the storytelling tradition and the single-mindedness of the residents, their will of survival and their sense of the past. The Beanfield War and Amarante's personal involvement are destined to add another episode to the considerable record of miracles which identifies the place.

Joe Mondragón and Amarante Córdova were quite unable to directly relate their mental growth. With the Massachusetts lawyer Charles Morgan Bloom, Nichols introduces the eloquent intellectual who honestly tries to immerse in the regional culture, but fails because of circumstances and his "puritan New England upbringing" (111). After his divorce "Bloom had come out West in order to begin a new life" (108). "He worked in Colorado for a while, in Alamosa, in the Legal Aid program up there" (65). Gradually he developed "honest attachments... for the poor people in general, whose rights he was defending, and eventually for one of them specifically, a gentle skittish woman named Linda Romero" (113). She serves as an embodiment of the intellectual's longing for untainted reality thus becoming a mere object: "He sincerely believed that by marrying this good woman, the product both of a tough lower-class upbringing and of a rich communal culture very unlike his own, he was breaking with an establishment past, a liberal-conservative tradition that had always hung him up. Already he felt almost self-righteous about his new life because it was going to be Down to Earth, Humble, Unpretentious, *Real*" (114).¹³ Bloom starts to write articles for *The Voice of the People*, not only on legal problems but also on Chicano culture, e.g. on the "feeling of uninterrupted history" (223) in a "people who refuse to die" (223). Bloom's one-sided embrace of the immediate exotic does not provide a firm basis for his marriage and his quest for a new identity. He is shocked when he discovers that Linda "almost hysterically wanted out of her poverty-stifled past" (114) which to her means "Guns, hunting, death, car crashes, frustration... Always talking, shouting, laughing, crying, bitching" (579). She denies the Chicano heritage and strives for the Anglo values Bloom wanted to leave behind. This irritating experience keeps

him on the fringe of the native community. When he addresses a protest meeting, he fails to relate to his audience: "Their faces seemed so old, so dark, calling forth overworked clichés about the earth and the sky and the wind. Old, wrinkled, simple, profound. Bloom was afraid of these neighbors, feeling simultaneously superior and less of a man" (206). He cannot communicate by conscious, self-directed effort, rather "He was simply caught, trapped, wishy-washy, doomed" (207). Recognition requires a mutual romanticizing, an act of image-making: "Looking at them, he translated their faces into a strength he had once hoped somehow to marry into" (207). Paradoxically enough Bloom commits himself to the cause by temporarily abandoning his analytical faculties, the very prerequisite of his profession, *and* by offering his professional services to his fellow citizens.

In Milagro strong, undefined forces miraculously guide the actions of people; forces they never fully understand but accept as part of their common reality. This humbleness causes their resignation but also the regular cycles of rebellion, both signifying a deep trust in the continuation of life in dignity. These same forces keep Linda from falling into a void: "The Chicano roots she had rejected had refused to shrivel and die; the culture she had hoped to adopt had refused to compensate. Her true language kept twirling into her head unannounced, replete with an arrogant dazzling laughter, boisterous, obscene, illiterate, tickling her mind on twinkletoes of murder" (449). Bloom's eastern roots cannot resist the strong pull of Chicano culture, because it promises to satisfy basic human needs. This is clearly demonstrated by the imagery of fertility and growth used in the Chicano context of Linda whereas her desire for Anglo values is described in death metaphors.¹⁴ Bloom's position among the people remains rather unstable as he occasionally falls back into the pose of intellectual and cultural superiority. In many passages his detachment resembles the aesthetic distance the narrator or author has to keep up to fix and interpret reality.

Looking back on the four characters and keeping in mind all the others, we can conclude that the socioeconomic situation, the fight for land and water rights,¹⁵ the defense of one's native place, triggers off an individual act of protest which becomes a collective effort within the historical framework of one hundred years of Anglo colonization in the Southwest. Joe's move makes the Chicanos aware of their handicaps and strengths. As a result they assert their heritage via memory, attitude, gesture, and ritual in various degrees of intensity. In the novel they succeed in their struggle against the Devine project though, in the end, merely political opportunism in the governor's office tips the scales. It is another bitter victory like in the Smokey the Bear Santo Riots which delayed progress slightly, but did not seriously threaten Anglo domination. These Milagro rebellions cyclically inspire the Chicano will of survival by stressing the uniqueness and integrity of the group. The most obvious unifying value of the community is distrust of worldly, visible authorities, including the Church. In his novel John

Nichols argues that the people of Milagro believe in natural wisdom, in "An aura of mystery and of knowledge" (89), in storytelling, "strange doings and bizarre myths, legends, and fairy tales" (10), in omens and signs, in miracles and visions, in dreams of the past which can be projected into the future as an ideal state to strive after, in a set of inherited attitudes and in native institutions like the santero, the suspicion of the intruder, the basic wholeness of the family, in celebrating the day of San Isidro, the patron saint of the farmers, in the natural order of the animal world, in the sanitary effects of places like the Rio Grande gorge and the high country of the Little Baldy Bear Lakes.

At first sight this list seems to consist of the stereotypes we are all familiar with from literatura chicanesca. But John Nichols proceeds to an affirmative reinterpretation.¹⁶ *The Milagro Beanfield War* advocates that the Chicano way of life in this particular rural community is valuable in itself because there is always the potential of breaking up the tedious daily routine. Even the return to a more relaxed state after the acts of rebellion and cultural reassurance is presented as a basic human necessity.

The closeness to the stereotypes is, of course, also due to Nichols' choice of the comic as his literary medium which forces him into a balancing act between superficial caricature and profound tragicomedy. In many places the author applies the folk humor of the oral tradition, ridiculing and affirming at the same time. There is the idea of grotesqueness as a typical human condition. People need the pompous, the blowing up of minor incidents to mythic proportions, the dreams of the wholeness of life, the nostalgia of the idyllic past as strategies of survival. In this respect Milagro serves as a universal example.¹⁷

Nichols' novel is a plea for the small identifiable community with strong ties to the larger cultural unit. This links him with the notion of minority cultures as preservers of the best American traditions. The novel is also a defense of the grown culture against the artificiality and inhumanity of the Anglo apostles of growth, exploitation and progress. In this respect it relates to the American small-town literature, the statements of the conservationist Edward Abbey, and the convictions of the anthropologists, ethnologists and ecologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries exploring the multicultural Southwest. *The Milagro Beanfield War* even shares the escapist tendencies of these writers.

John Nichols provides the reader with a cluster of perspectives. If we take the Chicano community for the center of the novel, the group round Ladd Devine the Third, the agents of the political authorities would provide the view from without, while Amarante Córdova or Joe Mondragón speak from within. We would have to distinguish another small group of intermediaries, e.g. the sheriff Bernabé Montoya, Linda and Charles Bloom, all of them articulating or acting out culture clashes. The narrator would figure as another outsider who has the necessary distance to evaluate and to transport reality into the sphere of art.

With this ensemble of various degrees of detachment and the claim of universal significance Nichols opens the Chicano experience up for the non-Chicano.¹⁸

The Milagro Beanfield War tells a story "in relation to its cultural ambience."¹⁹ This "aggregate reflection of numerous people and places"²⁰ is nourished by a "distinct cultural and historical regionalism"²¹ which Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer identified in the work of Tomás Rivera and Rolando Hinojosa. Nichols surely defends the idea of 'chicanismo' as e.g. defined in Lomeli's and Urioste's "Glossary": "a concept of life style or a system of values which provide a platform of survival,"²² though it does not predict an all-splendid future for the cultural revival, at least on the level of the rural New Mexican community. Nichols' characters search for "lugar, modales, relaciones personales, conversación"²³ to establish community, an aim Tomás Rivera considers a constant motif in the major texts of Chicano literature.

The Milagro Beanfield War even gives affirmative answers to most of the questions specified by José Armas in "The Role of Artist and Critic in the Literature of a Developing Pueblo."²⁴ By focusing on the themes of discontinuity and revitalization of the cultural heritage through image retrieval the novel helps to expand the space of Chicano literature which Juan Bruce-Novoa tried to locate in 1975.²⁵ He understands this literature as "A Response to Chaos,"²⁶ thus indirectly acknowledging the aesthetic distance between the artist and his material. Distinguishing the artist's detachment from the notion of being out of touch with the people, he contradicts the idea of "a natural outpouring" presented in my introductory remarks. Juan Gómez-Quirón plainly states in his article "On Culture":²⁷

Culture is learned rather than "instinctive" or biological. Genetic inheritance may be separate from culture. Ethnic characteristics are meaningful culturally only when expressed in relation to other individuals of a person's own group and/or in relation to other groups. Identity involves a cultural framework. An individual consciously identifies with the culture and practices the sum of it.²⁸

These lines present a theory of culture distinct from Nichols'. Many of his characters act through conscious effort only after feeling the necessity of emotional release. In a way, the story of Charles Bloom seems to support Lomeli's and Urioste's definition of literatura chicanesca though, as we have seen, Bloom's situation remains a paradoxical one, suspended between success and failure. In the case of John Nichols the detachment of the artist more likely ties the author to his Chicano fellow writers, than his non-Chicano identity separates him from them.

Once again, the biological argument proves its inferiority to the laborious task of deriving criteria from the textual corpus itself.²⁹ Such an approach would liberate *The Milagro Beanfield War* and its author from the undeserved position

of the reputable but distant relative and, at the same time, would not dispute the substantial sociopolitical relevance of Chicano literature.

Notes

- 1 (Albuquerque, N.M.: Pajarito Publications, 1976).
- 2 Lomelí and Urioste, p. 12.
- 3 Lomelí and Urioste, p. 12.
- 4 Lomelí and Urioste, p. 110.
- 5 ed. Luis Leal, Fernando de Necochea, Francisco Lomelí and Roberto G. Trujillo (Santa Barbara: Editorial la Cara, 1982), pp. 73–81.
- 6 Cecil Robinson, *Mexico and the Hispanic Southwest in American Literature* (Tucson: Univ. of Arizona Pr., 1977).
- 7 *A Decade...*, pp. 76–77.
- 8 See e.g. "An Interview with John Nichols," *New America*, 3, No. 3 (1979), 28–33; 30.
- 9 John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), p. 36.
- 10 Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.
- 11 An idea which Dylan Thomas applies to the structure of his *Under Milkwood* (1954), where he builds a community from many individual voices. See also Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915), or Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).
- 12 Refers to Jesse Jackson's 'Operation Headstart'.
- 13 They are very close to the world which Amarante Córdova tries to save by assembling his family for his birthdays forcing them to come from two continents.
- 14 In "An Interview with John Nichols" (See Footnote 8) the author made a very similar personal statement: "... longtime local residents still have roots and a language and a unique history to draw from, and people like me, who arrive from outside, may be invigorated by this fact, suddenly, that there's space to move around in and not too much spiritual smog making it difficult to breathe" (33).
- 15 See p. 116, p. 118, p. 121, pp. 360–63, and pp. 482–88.
- 16 A very common theme of Western American literature.
- 17 In this way he repeats a process typical of the early phases of any minority literature.
- 18 In his article on "Chicano Literature: The Establishment of Community" (in *A Decade of Chicano Literature*, pp. 9–17) Tomás Rivera contends "that the more definite and national the person in a literary setting, the more universal the motivation and the more revealing of original elements of human perceptions and motivations he or she possesses. In this manner both place and person exist as primary units that hold basic original elements of humankind, that is, the total crystalization of passions – love, hate, joy, *tristeza*, etc." (13).
- 19 John Nichols' use of this traditional literary technique makes the Chicano experience more easily accessible for the outsider than e.g. Rolando Hinojosa's revelation of the Chicano heritage through the connotative meanings of words and phrases in *Estampas del valle y otras obras* (Berkeley, Calif.: Quinto Sol Publications, 1973).
- 20 Joseph Sommers, "From Critical Premise to the Product: Critical Modes and Their Application to a Chicano Literary Text," *The New Scholar*, 6 (1977), 51–80; 59.
- 21 Carlota Cárdenas de Dwyer, "Cultural Regionalism and Chicano Literature," *Western American Literature*, 15, No. 3 (1980), 187–94; 194.
- 22 de Dwyer, p. 187.
- 23 *Chicano Perspectives in Literature*, p. 112.
- 24 "Chicano Literature: The Establishment of Community," in *A Decade of Chicano Literature*, p. 12.
- 25 *De Colores*, 3, No. 4 (1977), 5–11; see p. 11.
- 26 "The Space of Chicano Literature," *De Colores*, 2, No. 4 (1975), 22–24. To pursue the idea of expansion: If, as some critics have argued, the production of a great comic novel is the measuring stick of the maturity of any literature, we could conclude that

John Nichols broke the path for the prospective Chicano writer who will combine the view from within with the view from without.

- ²⁶ The subtitle of his *Chicano Poetry* (Austin, Texas: U. of Texas Press, 1982).
- ²⁷ Juan Gómez-Quiñones, in *A Decade of Hispanic Literature. An Anniversary Anthology* (Houston: Revista Chicano-Riqueña, 1982), pp. 290–308.
- ²⁸ Gómez-Quiñones, pp. 292–293. In this context we would have to consider the careers and personal statements of John Rechy and José Antonio Villarreal. See also the fate of the Black writer Jean Toomer. With him the discussion about the role of the particular and the universal contributed to the destruction of his art. Cf. my article on “Jean Toomer and the Black Heritage,” in *History and Tradition in Afro-American Culture*, ed. Günter H. Lenz (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1984), pp. 56–83.
- ²⁹ In some critical commentaries I can see a contradiction between the urgent call for good literary critics and a tendency to define Chicano literature as rejecting traditional modes of classification and interpretation. We can find similar ideas in recent Afro-American writing and criticism. See e.g. James T. Stewart, “The Development of the Black Revolutionary Artist,” in *Black Fire*, ed. Leroi Jones and Larry Neal (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968), pp. 3–10, and my article on “Afro-amerikanische Autobiographien von Frederick Douglass bis Eldridge Cleaver,” in *Black Literature*, ed. E. Breiting (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979), pp. 255–94.