

**In the early part of the Chicano Movement, Chicanas began to make their mark in poetry. It was an outcry for justice, not just from dominant society but also from her own world which had its own male or macho domination. The poetry of the following Chicanas are featured: Emilia López, Josie Mora (Alivia Nada), Inés Hernández Tovar, Bernice Zamora, Gloria Treviño, Margarita Cota Cárdenas, Miriam Bornstein Somoza and Raquel Elizondo.**

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CONTEMPORARY CHICANA POETRY: 1969-1977

by

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Since the birth of the Chicano literary and cultural movement<sup>1</sup>, much has been written on the new Chicano poetry and prose fiction with particular attention to works written by male writers. With the rise of Chicano programs at the University level throughout the United States, a new generation of Chicanos and Chicanas has received degrees and served as models and leaders in a variety of positions.

While Chicanas have in many cases been the organizers and writers of much of the literature that has surfaced since 1969, little or no recognition has been given to the Spanish-Speaking female of the Chicano literary and cultural movement. This paper will survey ten of the most

important Chicana poetesses, their concerns, themes and techniques. Special attention will be placed on how the Chicana writers will differ, if any, from Chicano poets.

Perhaps the desire to be free from the bonds of colonialism and machismo is a characteristic common to all Chicana poetesses. Exemplary of this tendency is Marcela Trujillo, who, in Chicana Themes, speaks to her Chicana sisters to awaken and arise, for revolutions cannot be won by making tortillas forever, lying down, or a life spent on their knees. "It is the Huelga/that needs you, the Causa (cause) that implores you and Education that calls you," the writer asserts. The poem is written in both Spanish and English separately. It is interesting to note that the Spanish version is more emphatic in calling women away from their sexual responsibilities to a choice in their own revolution of action or ideology. In a poem entitled "Los huevos del macho" Marcella Trujillo underscores the problem of Chicano machismo both in Spanish and English as she asserts:

"Machos claim  
they have our 'eggs'  
But the claim they make  
alludes to Chicana robbery  
Thus a macho has to invent  
a false reality  
to see us as 'fertilists'  
and not as 'feminists'  
A machista needs this  
for his male vanity."<sup>3</sup>

The macho attitude as manifested in demonstrations obviates logic and intelligence:

"Machos call on their 'huevos' for action;  
demonstrations and other manifestations.  
They rationalize with their 'eggs' instead of their  
brains.  
Is that a logical solution  
for any revolution?"<sup>4</sup>

Marcela Trujillo's poetry further reflects the double standard applied to Chicanos in matters of politics, language, social mores, and justice,<sup>5</sup> the problem of communication with the bilingual Chicano child,<sup>6</sup> the exploitation by the Church,<sup>7</sup> and racism in America.<sup>8</sup> But her poetry can also have the folk and rural flavor of a Chicano dance in the San Luis Valley of Colorado as the first strophe demonstrates:

"Constant cracking of pinon nuts  
dispersed on the floor, strewn about,  
crunched under the feet of corrido stomps  
and the 'aye aye ayes' of Mexican shouts."<sup>9</sup>

In an interesting poem entitled "The Advent of My Death," she speaks of the curandera (woman healer) arriving too late, one Santa Fe Day in 1848, with the Aztec heart flower cure (Yoloxóchitl), only to find that when she was born in 1933, her "heart/soul murmured once more for the yoloxóchitl flower/and the curandera who never came/that Santa Fe Day back in 1848." The poem obviously alludes to the Anglo occupation of 1848 and the negative impact on the Spanish-Speaking in the Southwest, but in a subtle, poetic and mystical manner.<sup>10</sup>

In one of her best poetic works, "As a Woman Is," she poetically projects the quality of sound, touch and sight through the allusions of the seashell, the bursting volcano and the mountain, as she proclaims:



You are nobody -  
Nothing . . .  
Eres sólo una ceniza  
de historia nunca escuchada  
tu y yo somos piedras,  
papeles de toilet . . .  
Entre suspiros de espacio  
y sufrimientos de piel oscura  
y nariz de águila.  
Estamos marcados por el tío Sam  
con un big sign que dice  
no queremos Chicanos."<sup>13</sup>

Her poetry can immerse the reader into sensual  
labyrinths, with visual imagery in Spanish:

"De la mano juntos  
entre ensueños de mares.  
Insondables como silencio.  
El momento del misterio  
apareció en tus ojos.  
En tus pestañas,  
En tu pelo negro,  
en tu cuerpo.  
Y se fue extendiendo como telarañas  
cautivando el sueño  
de los amores libres  
que tuvimos juntos."<sup>14</sup>

Emilia Anton López is concerned with hunger in this  
world and defines it with colors in a poem entitled "Entresuro...":

"Es verde esperanza  
por que alimenta con sueños?  
Café por que domina  
lo oscuro de lo real  
roja por que llora sangre  
entre retortijones.  
Amarilla, en su espera  
de llegar al intestino.  
Azul, para amortiguan  
entre besos su pobreza.  
Es negra como poesía olvidada,  
por que es muerte,  
que llega despacio  
y lentamente se retina  
entre harapos de recuerdos humanos."<sup>15</sup>

The writer's deep concern for human justice for all  
minorities of the world is seen as freedom for all humanity:

"Cuando el monte hable  
con palabras verdes,  
la opresión de pueblos,  
Cuando el Río lllore sangre  
de piedras,  
Espumas turbulentas  
de miseria y hambre.  
Cuando el infinito  
cante poemas de injusticia imperialista.  
Tal vez el ideal nuestro,  
sea escuchado.  
La minorías han gritado  
los Chicanos han alzado voces  
sin esperanzas de Justicia.

Quando los montes hablen  
los ríos lloren  
el infinito cante:  
La naturaleza entera gima.  
Los dolores del tercer mundo.  
Entonces, nuestra revolución  
será un hecho de libertad  
para la humanidad."<sup>16</sup>

Lorna Dee Cervantes, editor of Mangos, a Chicano poetic quarterly, perhaps can be best described by her "Self Portrait" in which she expresses:

"I melt into the Stone Indian features of my  
face  
Olmec eyes. I am an old brown woman of the  
moon.  
I am the milk raw woman side of Ometéotl.  
Quetzalcoatl has his sex in me. His long cock  
is a soft pink plume of subtle poetry. His face  
is in my dark eyes. Ancient rites on a pyramid  
of small colored stones. We make slow sacri-  
ficial love."<sup>17</sup>

The old and the new, their customs and approaches to reality, are seen in a poem entitled simply "Grandma":

"Mi abuela makes tortillas in the back room.  
Grandma. Her wrinkled brown hands  
pulling weeds before sunset.  
I am a mystery to her.  
I eat her tortillas speaking fragmented Spanish.  
We are friends  
but to her I am a puzzlement.  
Grandma. Chorizo in the morning.  
Breakfast.

'Por qué no te quieres casar?'

Abuelita,  
You don't understand."<sup>18</sup>

Like many Chicano writers, Lorna Dee Cervantes expresses in "Heritage" the frustration of being denied both in the U.S.A. and in Mexico for being Chicana and "puchaseed" as her name hangs about her like a loose tooth. Her protest against Chicano males for their machismo is best reflected in "You Cramp My Style, Baby," in which she expresses disdain for the Chicano who uses Chicanas as sexual objects and shouts "Viva la Raza"; to add insult to injury, the Chicano will mija (like saying child or girl) the Chicana until she can scream and then say:

"Esa, I love  
this revolution -  
Come on Malinche,  
gimme some more!"<sup>19</sup>

In a lengthy but well-written poem entitled "Beneath the shadow of the freeway" the writer sings of days of old with Grandma and mother, the fresh geraniums, the work, the seagulls, the screams, the singing of mockingbirds, and a mother's wisdom. It is the voice of a Chicana that listens to her mother's warning of being too soft, but immerses herself in the ways of her grandma who believed in myths and birds:

"It's summer now. Every night I  
sleep with a gentleman to the  
hymn of mocking birds,  
and in time, I will plant geraniums,  
I will tie up my hair into loose braids  
and trust only  
what I have built  
with my own hands."<sup>20</sup>

Josie Mora, better known as Alivia Nada, was born and raised in la calle del diablo in Lubbock, Texas. Writer of poetry both in Spanish and English, she has a keen sense for understanding and describing her environment. Her poetry is rhythmic and pure, devoid of superficial techniques. In a poem entitled "Por la calle del diablo" (By Devil's Street), she reconstructs in Spanish, almost in ballad style, the folklore of the barrio: the Pepes, los Pongues, the wisdom of grandma, the early dawn pilgrimage to church, the weekend machos, the seasonal work, the broken-down homes, and the many people who are marked in the history of her memory:

"Por la calle del Diablo  
donde yo nací  
con sus historias de espanto  
que yo nunca vi . . .

cada domingo madrugábamos  
para ir a misa,  
en ayunas a comulgar

y en las tardes de verano  
casi al cruzar la calle  
nos llevaba mi abuelita  
al arrollo a jugar . . .

casas todas descompuestas  
una que otra no muy mal  
con mas de una familia  
en cada un hogar

conocí muchas gentes  
que hoy llevo en mi memoria  
que la vida de esos tiempos  
se quedará en la historia."<sup>21</sup>

Like Lorna Dee Cervantes, she is quick to criticize people of Mexican heritage who scorn her because her Spanish is not good. The writer asserts that it was here where she was born and it was the public schools that only taught her English and yet she is called a "pocha." The poem ends

when the poetess addresses herself in first person to her critics by proclaiming "I am but a mere extension of you."

"Pero no me critiques  
fijate bien en mí  
y no me niegues tu cruz  
que so y nada mas  
una extensión  
de ti."22

Alivia Nada, writing in Spanish, creates the freshness and simplicity of nature to express lyrically some thoughts of love in "Eres tu":

"Como una gota de miel clara  
mas clara que una gota de lluvia  
mas tibia que la lluvia en el verano.

Eres como el rocío en la flor  
que amanece en la mañana  
que le da vida y fortaleza  
al extremo mas profundo.

Y al anocheecer  
si no vuelve amanecer  
ha quedado una semilla  
para que brote otro día."23

Inéz Hernández Tovar was born in Galveston, Texas of Indian and Chicano parents. Currently, she teaches at the University of Texas-Austin. In her poetry, we see both the Indian and Chicano reality, her deep feelings toward Death and Solitude, her reflections on love, the injustices towards women, her political convictions and her attitude towards the Chicano male. Her poetry is written in Spanish, English, and in bilingual form. Exemplary of English poetry reflecting her Indian reality is a poem entitled "For Janice, Chillamamook," in which the writer reminisces on the small detailed things of this world that were taught to her by her mother, unlike toys, barbie dolls, monopoly sets or T.V. sets of her Gringa friends.

She learned to see and feel pain not only of people, but for our other brothers:

"You felt pain  
for a cockroach  
trapped by a spider,  
a lame beggar  
who could not walk,  
a child with the  
thought of a tear  
in her eyes"24

Inéz Hernández Tovar pays homage to her Indian mother, mother of the Nez Perce, and becomes embodied in true Indian spirit as she utilizes nature in describing her mother:

"Mother of the Nez Perce  
with the laugh of clear  
mountain streams  
solace for this thirsty  
child's soul

Mother of the granddaughter  
of your father Weukshanat  
of the earth of the chants  
of your heart

Mother with the eyes  
of a doe  
frightened by crowds  
and cowards  
and sham

other of my solitude  
and of my song  
who with a smile  
gave me the world

his poem is from your  
daughter."25

This deep feeling for the pain of others is seen poetically through the peregrino (pilgrim) who places flowers on roads, sings to the wind, discovers humble worlds beneath his tent; he is the Indian of the Mother Earth, the root of the life-sun, the poet of the life-force who cultivates hearts and gives love:

"Indio de la Tierramadre  
árbol de la vidadol  
peregrino de Laredo  
de energía  
y cascarón

poeta por quien  
el polvo conocido  
que mapatas se convierte  
en moviviento  
tanto que la tierra  
te abraza y te aprieta

mesquite seco  
que vives por los poros  
con tus poemas  
cultivas corazones  
y regalas amor."26

Death is a faithful and friendly companion in  
"Realidad I", and solitude, like death, overcomes and domin-  
ates her sensual feelings for her loved one in "Compañero."  
The ability to construct and weave Spanish and English is dem-  
onstrated aptly in "Pensavientos" where the author expresses  
concern for all that is chained as seen through the chained  
dog, yearnings of liberty; her sentiments are with the Indian:

Actually  
the camino de flores  
has many sharp piedras  
es verdad

miedo  
frozen static  
halts abruptly  
and sometimes  
irrevocably

llorar lágrimas  
gotas claras  
de mi pluma  
libre  
de la lluvia  
fresca  
crecen  
flores

con el viento  
nocturno  
acariciándome

no me molestan  
ni las chicharras

pero un perro  
ladrando  
encadenado  
yearnings of liberty  
do  
disturb me

indio  
como te enredas  
en mis trenzas  
mas amanezco  
rebelde el sentimiento  
vuela  
hacia ti!"<sup>27</sup>

In a Spanish poem entitled "Rezo" (Prayer) Inéz Hernández Tovar creates her own "Hail Mary" prayer and pays homage to the Holy Mayan goddesses, Tonantzin, our holy mother earth spirit, la llorona (the legend of the weeping mother), the inferior position in which woman was placed by Spaniards, and asks the mother spirit to liberate minds and put in order our Aztlan-home:

"Ruega por nosotros  
huestra madre de las reinas  
lágrimas diosas mayas . . .

ruega por nosotros  
Santa Madre de los Dolores  
diosas indias  
que vieron la hija Malinche  
acusada, abusada . . .

ruega por nosotros  
querida madre de la soledad  
hijas mestizas . . .

ruega con nosotros  
madre cariñosa  
árbol de la vida . . .

Ayúdanos respetada madre  
de los risas y de la fuerza  
a liberar mentes  
y poner en orden  
nuestra casaztlan

Abuela  
ayúdenos

Madre  
ayúdenos

hija  
ayúdanos

hermana  
ayúdanos

mujer  
ayúdanos,

Por mis padres  
Gracias y Amor  
de su hija  
Amen."28

Bernice Zamora, author of Restless Serpents, is a native of Colorado who has published poetry in Mosaic, The Muse, Sou'Wester, Expression, Anomie Universal, and La Onda Special Edition: Poetry. Perhaps the most salient characteristic of her writings is her skillful manner in handling the English language. This does not preclude writings in Spanish or in bi-lingual form. Restless Serpents covers a variety of perspectives from childhood experiences to the drumming pains of the author.

In the first section entitled "Living in Aztlan" the author reminisces about the first vato that kissed her as a 12 year old girl. The writer adroitly points out that while her mother and teacher said "Shame on you", fostering guilt in the little girl, no one ever even thought of saying "Shame on you" to the young male who instigated the situation. In "Gata Poem" woman is once again seduced by a Chicano who "glistened in the sun like a bronze god" as he beckons:

"Ven, mujer,  
Ven, conmigo . . .

As the writer realizes she is but a cat dressed in black,

" Qué quieres, señor?  
Qué quieres conmigo?"

It is man with his promises of singing eternally in shining  
suns, of living together in nine worlds, that entices

"Ven, gatita,  
Ven conmigo

y me fui."29

It should be noted that apart from the symbolism implied with color and cat, there is double entendre in the dialectal Spanish meaning of "gata". It connotes a female servant, which in this case, follows a pattern for woman.

The author castigates the Chicano male in "Mirando aquellos desde los campos" (Looking at Them from the Fields) as she sets the stage by quoting Edward Dahlberg from The Sorrows of Priapus, "Copulation is a dangerous pastime." Bernice is touching upon a sensitive but true Chicano pattern as she states:

"Yes, one bed, one wife -  
Too much and too little -  
for esos propagators intertwined  
at the rising of the Dogstar - "  
Yes, the marriage beds  
and wives wither, and  
yes, husbands bear their heads  
and divining rods through  
boarhouses and vomitoriums  
yes, whoremongering  
craving, diving ruin . . ."

Yet the Chicano male has a perennial taste for his machismo or his compas (buddies) as the author questions the continuance of these practices, and concludes:

"Que bueno  
que se apuran entonces  
porque querriamos preparar  
los coffins hoy día  
for your senile carcasses  
forty years old and worming."<sup>30</sup>

Bernice Zamora also reflects on the past, an age almost forgotten, and underscores its importance as she listens:

". . . to secrets rolling through tall weeds  
of my abuelos' mountain. I listen to their  
laughter among field mice.

From tomb to tomb voy andando,  
buscando un punto final  
to an age ya mero olvidado!"<sup>31</sup>

In a sonnet skillfully written in English, Bernice Zamora speaks of weary woman pöndering on masculinity, its realm, bloody passions - only to return "worn, rebuked and spent/to feminity content":

"Do not ask, Sir, why this weary woman  
wears well the compass of gay boys and men.  
Masculinity is not manhood's realm  
which falters when ground passions overwhelm.  
O, no! It is a gentle, dovelet's wing  
that rides the storm and is never broken.  
It is whispered, secret words that bring  
to breath more hallowed sounds left unspoken.  
Men, Sir, are not bell hammers between rounds  
within the rings of bloody gloves and games.  
Men, Sir, ought not rend the mind round square's round  
spent, rebuked, and trembling in fitted frames.  
So I return, Sir, worn, rebuked, and spent,  
to gentle femininity content."<sup>32</sup>

Bernice Zamora appropriately concludes her poetry with a poem entitled "Restless Serpents" in which the theme of restless serpents vis-à-vis the writer is foregrounded in the quote, "The duty of a cobra's master is fraught with

fettered chores." Here the allusion is to the cobra master (author) who is confronted with neglect, spite, disregard, lapses, and other devastating strokes of restless serpents which lyrics alone can only soothe. It is the author who, like the foundling who sees the slithering serpent approaching, and like the master fraught with fettered chores, must perennially soothe the strikes of restless serpents.

"Lyrics -  
lyrics alone soothe  
restless serpents, strokes  
more devastating than  
devastation arrived."33

Gloria Treviño, like Bernice Zamora, is a native of Colorado. However, unlike Bernice Zamora, Gloria Treviño writes almost exclusively in Spanish in a style that is as natural as the author herself. Gloria Treviño's poetry is pure and crystalline as a meadow stream. Her poetry is not one that has been reworked and polished; it flows from the heart in simple but true form. It reminds us of the melodic corridos which are a part of the Chicano's heritage.

Probably her most noted poem is "Quien soy?" (Who Am I?) in which the author, from a Chicana point of view, traces the Chicana female in history. One notes the natural rhyme and rhythm:

"Soy Malinche  
sufri las desgracias del conquistador  
Soy la Virgen María  
sufri los dolores del castigador  
  
Soy la Adelita  
sufri las batallas de la revolución

Soy la llorona  
sufri la venganza de la superstición

Soy la mujer Mexicana . . .

Soy la mera sangre . . .

Soy la historia Mexicana!  
Soy la historia Meshicana!  
Soy la historia Americana!

Mírame bien  
Escúchame bien  
Yo soy la mujer Mexicana."<sup>34</sup>

Gloria Traviño is not concerned with man/woman confrontations but rather with dealing with the struggle together with her fellowmen as expressed in "Sí, venceremos." Her thoughts are of death, solitude, history, the underdog, the migrant, love, injustices and the identity as a person. In a poem reminiscent of a ballad, with internal rhythm and rhyme entitled "Lloro, sí lloro," Gloria Treviño shows how drink is used differently by the Anglo, the Mexican and the Chicano:

"Dicen que el Anglo  
toma para olvidar  
y el Mexicano para recordar  
pues, yotomo para llorar.

Lloro por mi raza . . .

Lloro por mis padres . . .

Lloro por los migrantes . . .

Lloro por las Chicanas . . .

Lloro por mi lengua . . .

Lloro, sí lloro, y aunque digan  
que el Anglo toma para olvidar,  
y el Mexicano para recordar  
pues, yo tomo para llorar.

In a historical and philosophical poem concerned

with suffering and discrimination and injustices, entitled "No llores niño, yo sé", (Don't Cry, Child, I Know), Gloria Treviño develops the aforementioned themes in a complete cycle of man from birth to death as we see him as a child ashamed of the color of his skin, the mocking of his native language, the denial of society, the drugs, the effort to become equal by going to Vietnam to return content to rest finally in peace in the hometown cemetery - "Don't Cry, Child, I know."<sup>36</sup>

Solitude as a recurrent characteristic among Chicana poetesses is aptly handled by the use of the future tense for rhyme and the use of antithesis for thought reminiscent of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz:

"Nací en una soledad intensa  
y moriré en una soledad imensa

Aunque penetras mi alma  
nunca espantarás mi tristeza

Me oyerás hablar  
Me oyerás cantar

Pero nunca mirarás las lágrimas  
escondidas en mis entrañas

Me desearás  
Me abrazarás  
pero nunca jamás  
en mi soledad entrarás

Porque nací en una soledad materna  
y moriré en una soledad nocturna."<sup>37</sup>