



Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos

Juan Bruce-Novoa

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Alurista. Gary Soto. Bernice Zamora. José Montoya. These names, luminous to some, remain unknown to those who have not yet discovered the rich variety of late twentieth century Chicano poetry.

With the flowering of the Chicano Movement in the mid-1960s came not only increased political awareness for many Mexican Americans but also a body of fine creative writing. Now the major voices of Chicano literature have begun to reach the wider audience they deserve. Bruce-Novoa's *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*—the first booklength critical study of Chicano poetry—examines the most significant works of a body of literature that has grown dramatically in size and importance in less than two decades.

Here are insightful new readings of the major writings of Abelardo Delgado, Sergio Elizondo, Rodolfo Gonzales, Miguel Méndez, J. L. Navarro, Raúl Salinas, Ricardo Sánchez, and Tino Villanueva, as well as Alurista, Soto, Zamora, and Montoya. Close textual analyses of such important works as *I Am Joaquín*, *Restless Serpents*, and *Floriscanto en Aztlán* enrich and deepen our understanding of their imagery, themes, structure, and meaning.

Bruce-Novoa argues that Chicano poetry responds to the threat of loss, whether of hero, barrio, family, or tradition. Thus José Montoya elegizes a dead Pachuco in "El Louie," and Raúl Salinas laments the disappearance of a barrio in "A Trip through the Mind Jail." But this elegy at the heart of Chicano poetry is both lament and celebration, for it expresses the group's continuing vitality and strength.

Common to twentieth-century poetry is the preoccupation with time, death, and alienation, and the work of Chicano poets—sometimes seen as outside the traditions of world literature—shares these concerns. Bruce-Novoa brilliantly defines both the unique and the universal in Chicano poetry.

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