

# To Read Chicano Narrative: Commentary and Metacommentary

Those of you familiar with the work of Fredric Jameson will readily recognize the title of this presentation as an intertextual debt to his essay, "Commentary and Metacommentary."<sup>1</sup> In that essay, Jameson argues for a metacommentary, which is to say, an historical understanding of both interpretation and the literary text. Commentary can be loosely described as a problem solving event of translating what is implicit in a text into an explicitly meaningful discourse. For the naive reader, according to Jameson, meaning is already there, perhaps obscured, but, nonetheless, there in the text. On the other hand, metacommentary is a higher level of awareness in which the invention of the problem of interpretation is itself an area of scrutiny for the reader. In semiotic terms of the signifier-signified relationship, metacommentary can be defined as the momentary postponement of the search of meaning in order to examine the underlying pre-conditions necessary for the production of the signified. This presentation is a tentative and modest effort in that direction. I would like to address the issue of metacommentary as it relates to the critical reception of contemporary Chicano narratives. My comments are informed by the dialectical criticism of Jameson, as well as by Northrop Frye's work on narrative genres and Wolfgang Iser's theoretical speculations on reading.<sup>2</sup>

Following Jameson, I conceive of interpretations as a movement away from what is an otherwise private event, the act of reading, towards wide ideological, political, and historical horizons. J. L. Austin's performative speech act model can serve as a useful analogy for the successful reading of narrative fiction. Austin distinguishes between two forms of speech acts: constative and performative.<sup>3</sup> The constative utterance makes statements about facts, and must be measured against truth or falsehood. On the other hand, the performative utterance produces an action in the recipient to be measured against standards of appropriateness, of success or failure. Performative utterances occur within highly conventionalized contexts and are governed by procedures accepted by both sender and receiver to ensure successful communication. As Iser asserts, the act of reading is a performative situation in the sense that the pragmatic potential of linguistic signs involves some manipulation as responses are elicited by the verbal procedures of a narrative text.<sup>4</sup> Reading fictive discourse is not a constative event in the sense that the signs of a literary text do not denote an empirical referent. Even when a narrative is written in the mode of mimesis or realism, it is still a symbolic act, a fiction, that requires an ideological and a conceptual apparatus about the nature of reality. Like the performative speech act that is structured by accepted verbal procedures, the interpretation of narrative is governed by intrinsic rhetorical structures or strategies, such as narrative

point of view, characterization and dialogue, dramatized readers, plot construction, representation of reality, scenes and settings, and language and style. These strategies establish a ground of relationships, prestructure a role for the reader, and persuade the reader into acceptable responses that will ensure appropriate interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Although the speech act model is a good starting point for an examination of a transactive approach to the literary text, it excludes what we have all come to accept in this increasingly politicized world: that all meaningful linguistic communication is situational, which is to say, that it is historically conditioned, culture bound, and ideological. In other words, there are certain limits imposed upon interpretation and the literary text by culture and class. Though in our shared day to day cultural practices there are still residuals from an indigenous oral past, in the rarified atmosphere of Chicano literary production and reception, the text as a cultural artifact is a Western conception, be it in the form of Anglo-American, Hispanic, Latin American, or Mexican traditions. Although every narrative from throughout the world may contain those verbal procedures outlined above, the invention of these as problems of writing and interpretation is historically Western.

We can begin to make our way out of the individual text towards an understanding of the historicity of Chicano narrative genres, the tautological relationship between intrinsic rhetorical structures and the ideology of the reader by examining our shared conceptions of the term "novel." Outside the literary context, the term has real sociological meaning as a commercial ploy to encourage readers to purchase the newest novel by the latest award-winning novelist. In our society, probably no other creative writing act ensures more prestige than being a novelist. In a literary context, the word is used to distinguish longer narratives from the short story, otherwise it is almost meaningless. Practically all writers, regardless of what narrative tradition they align themselves with, say they write novels. Most reviewers use the word to describe any narrative longer than one hundred pages. If we took stock of all the narrative genres published within the last two centuries, the novel would probably outnumber all others. However, contrary to what most Chicano critics and their Anglo counterparts may believe, the novel is not the only narrative form.

Some examples will illustrate the confusion. A recent bibliography, *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970-1979): Critical Essays and Bibliography*, lists some 35 narratives, as different as Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), Orlando Romero's *Nambé—Year One* (1976), and Edmund Villaseñor's *Macho!* (1973), under the heading of "NOVEL."<sup>6</sup> The editors also make the unfortunate mistake, in obedience to the novel-centered view of narrative, of calling two autobiographies, Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* (1971) and Anthony Quinn's *The Original Sin: A Self-Portrait* (1972), "BIOGRAPHICAL NOVELS." Acosta's book has not fared any better in established journals; it has been

reviewed under biography, anthropology and sociology. As I will try to demonstrate, a more appropriate term is satire. Another recent reference volume, *A Bibliography of Criticism of Contemporary Chicano Literature*, lists a section for "PROSE FICTION."<sup>7</sup> This is a more satisfactory term. However, as I have tried to stress, I am opting for "NARRATIVE" because of the emphasis on the storytelling aspect of the genre, to distinguish it from poetry and drama, and because it includes empirical forms, such as the autobiography, the journal or diary, and the memoir. These are self-conceiving forms and therefore may have an imaginative or fictional element.

On the whole, the interpretation of Chicano narratives revolves around the term novel and the ideological pre-conditions necessary for novelistic discourse, such as a realistic representation of reality, a presentation of character that highlights the problematic of self and other, and a well-constructed plot. This state of affairs has led to a broad range of judgments based on one narrative form. For example, Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973) have been criticized for being digressive, self indulgent and lacking structure.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, if one values the norm-breaking aspect of fiction in both form and content, then his books would be "the most concerted attempt by a Chicano novelist to create a truly 'radical' art."<sup>9</sup> Acosta's books are truly radical, but in the sense that he reinvents another radical narrative genre, the satire. Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamazunchale* (1975) has been hailed by one critic as the Chicano novel of the new reality.<sup>10</sup> Its dream-phantasy narrative reality, its parody of characters and situations from cultural myths, Cervantes' Quixote, Goethe's Faust, as well as Michelangelo's David and García Márquez' short story "El ahogado más hermoso del mundo" make it, like García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad*, a rare combination of romance and satire. To add to the confusion, readers of Rudolfo A. Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) and Romero's *Nambé—Year One* have detected in these texts narrative elements from the romance form, such as stylized magical figures, unmediated or idealized visions of nature, an ordering of events according to cyclical, mythical, or archetypal patterns, yet still use the term novel.<sup>11</sup>

Though Chicano literary criticism is still in its initial stages, we should begin to distinguish between narrative genres and establish structures of dominance within individual texts. In the history of narrative forms, the novel is a latecomer; it should serve us well to recall how long writers had to wait before the historical and ideological conditions were met for the possibility of the novel. Novels are still written, but for the most part they are formula narratives confined to best-seller lists and television mini-series. The present status of the novel as Jameson points out, certainly has to do with the handling of concrete historical events.<sup>12</sup> It would be naive to think that a writer today could have the same grasp of history and events, the same conventional vantage point of his or her nineteenth-century

counterpart. Another factor important to contemporary narrative was the rise of modern psychology—Freud and Jung, and now Lacan—which destroyed the commonly held ideas of human nature that gave the novel realistic characterization. As we shall see below in the case of Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, Jungian psychology has bequeathed to modern narrative archetypal characterization and plot. We should admit and try to constate in our readings, that although the novel is not dead, writers have always had at their disposal pre-novelistic narrative strategies.

Let me now sketch out a tentative proposal for the genres of Chicano narrative. With some modifications, I am following Frye's classifications outlined in the *Anatomy of Criticism* in the section "Rhetorical Criticism: Theory of Genres." Three major divisions can be detected from examples of recent narratives: the empirical, the mimetic, and the imaginative genres. To the empirical classification belongs the autobiography, to the mimetic, the novel, and to the imaginative, romance and satire. I will deal briefly with the autobiography and the novel. The autobiography is a self-defining empirical narrative. My conception of the novel will take form in relation to romance and satire.

The autobiography, like other empirical narratives—chronicle, history, biography—stresses the veracity of fact and concrete historical events. However, of special interest to the literary critic is the imaginative aspect of this form. This genre, which can be traced back to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, usually assumes the form of a personal spiritual crisis and an inward journey towards maturity. "Most autobiographies," writes Frye, "are inspired by a creative and therefore fictional impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build an integrated pattern."<sup>13</sup> We can point to three Chicano autobiographies: Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* Anthony Quinn's *The Original Sin: A Self-Portrait*, and Richard Rodríguez' *The Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodríguez* (1982). Quinn's book still bears the stamp of St. Augustine in its Christian orientation of guilt and turning away from sin towards God. Galarza and Rodríguez seem to follow in the Anglo-American tradition of *The Education of Henry Adams*. The autobiography is partially didactic and it would be interesting to study this genre and understand why these writers, who all share the experience of recent immigration and who have achieved success in the United States, think themselves worthy or exemplary. All three books would yield ideological insights into the problematics of assimilation.

To the imaginative classification belong the romance and the satire. Relations of similarity and difference should emerge between romance and satire, and the mimetic form, the novel. Although I am emphasizing the imaginative genres, the majority of Chicano narratives, such as José Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* (1959), Richard Vasquez' *Chicano* (1970), Tomás Rivera's *. . . y no se lo tragó la tierra* (1971), and Nash Candelaria's *Memories of the Alhambra* (1977), are novels.

Oscar Zeta Acosta's books *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* and

*The Revolt of the Cockroach People* should be read as satires.<sup>14</sup> The satirist can adopt the extreme position that society is a collection of irrational human beings and institutions. The satirist uses the free-play of his intellectual wit and fancy to persuade the reader that if anything can go wrong with society, it already has. If successful, the satirist will produce in the reader not only amusement, but also contempt, disgust, and bitterness. Irreverence defines the tone and attitude of the satirist towards his world. Satire has nothing to do with the transcendental or the ideal like the novel and romance. It is probably the most social of forms, part politics, part invective, part humor, and part art. It is in general an urban form, probably the first narrative genre about city life, practiced since Antiquity by unattractive, alienated figures, intellectuals, and pedants who feel they have the right to expose the truth at any cost.<sup>15</sup> Much of the misunderstanding of Acosta's misanthropic, egocentric, name-dropping image of the Chicano lawyer, the Brown Buffalo, is due to the misdirected readings of his books. I will limit my comments to his first book. Acosta's satiric vision in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, formed out of the sixties counterculture, focuses on the American ideological solution to the problem of ethnicity, the metaphor of the melting pot. Acosta's political strategy is to emphasize the ethnicity of all his many characters in both rural and urban settings, from Riverbank, California, to San Francisco. Acosta persuades the reader to accept that ethnicity is incompatible with "American" culture. Acosta registers at least seventeen ethnic types and nationalities—Mexicans, Native Americans, Blacks, as well as Europeans, Latin Americans, and Asians—that middle class, white, Angle-Saxon, Protestant society has relegated to subordinant or marginal status. This is pointed out for the reader in a most dramatic fashion in Acosta's own rural community, Riverbank, where the city is sectioned off, sharply divided, into the Mexican (Catholics, peach pickers), the Okie (Holy Rollers, cannery workers), and the American (Protestants, clerks) sectors.

While the novel may hold up a mirror to life, the satirist uses the mirror to distort. Like the romance, satire may contain fantastic or marvelous devices, but only to produce outlandish or grotesque transformations in settings, scenes, and characters. In Acosta's book, the modern equivalent of the marvelous, the hallucinogens of the sixties drug culture—grass, peyote, cocaine, and acid—are used not to produce any cosmic vision, but to distort and create caricature. That distortion will play a central role in the book, is foregrounded for the reader in the opening scene. Acosta invents his literary persona through satire directed inwards when he stands naked before the mirror. Satire deflates in rank and status, and shows up for us that despite spiritual aspirations we are animals. Acosta observes his "two large chunks of brown tit," his "brown belly," and his "little bugger," though he assumes a macho image and identifies with tough guys like Charles Atlas, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, and Humphrey Bogart. This scene must in turn be interpreted in relation to his unheroic efforts with women, his ineffectiveness as a Legal Aid lawyer, and his

suicidal tendencies (on July 4, 1967, Acosta falls asleep at Ernest Hemingway's grave). The dehumanizing aspect of this genre is evident in the emphasis on bodily functions in the first scene, belching, farting, defecating, and masturbating. Acosta hurls a critical comment at himself when he observes his face, his identity, in the toilet water, where his ass should be.

Some of the most misunderstood elements of Acosta's fiction are his plotting and character development. Unlike the plot of the novel which is united by beginnings, middles, and endings through the laws of rational probability, the plot of Acosta's fictional autobiography is loose, episodic, and disproportionate.<sup>16</sup> No attempt is made to link character to character, nor mainplot to subplot. What binds the multiple episodes in satire is simply the life of the central character. For the sake of truth of the eye witness, the events in satire are presented in an autobiographical form by the narrator who can digress from the main action at any time. Acosta expresses both the spirit and the form of satire when he writes: "I speak as a historian, a recorder of events with a sour stomach. I have no love for memories of the past."<sup>17</sup> Important earmarks of this form are the variety of incident and the transformation of character proceeding from incident to incident. The transformation can be as social as *Lazarillo de Tormes* or as fantastic as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, or incredible as Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, the story of a man who became an ass in order to find out what it's like to be human. Transformation of character as well as digressions, breaks in the narrative, and variety of incident are essential to Acosta's plot. The plot of the journey from San Francisco, through Nevada, Idaho, Colorado, Texas to Juárez, Mexico, is juxtaposed against memories of childhood and adolescence. Depending upon scene and episode, Acosta is an athlete, musician, writer, religious man, lawyer, or laborer. He is a high school football player in Riverbank; a clarinet player in the Air Force Band; a Southern Baptist missionary who finds salvation in the jungles of Panama converting natives to Christianity; an author of a novel, *My Cart for My Casket*; a physical therapist in a mental hospital for the rich in St. Louis; a lawyer in San Francisco; Henry Hawk, a Samoan, in Nevada; a Blackfoot Indian Chief, Brown Buffalo, in Idaho, who had also been a driver for Ernest Hemingway in Cuba; a dishwasher, plumber, and construction worker in Colorado; and finally a pimp in Juárez. And depending upon Acosta's whim, the improbable or unexpected events are either blown up to the level of a scene or relegated to summary narration in a sentence. Acosta's plot is the search for a Chicano identity; however, in reference to the social character of satire, the plot of the Brown Buffalo should also be construed as an occasion to reject the limitations of novelistic discourse, and capture a broad sequential or metonymic representation of social and cultural life in the United States.

The word satire comes from the Latin *satura* which means full, sated, copious, or a dish of various ingredients, a medley.<sup>18</sup> In fact, a stock scene of this genre is the *cena*. The effect of this scene in satire is to reduce an event of companionship and good taste to the level of absurdity through quarrels, vulgarities, and obscenities. Acosta reinvents the dinner scene on the

occasion of his dropping out from straight society. Though the scene recalls the solemnity of the last supper—in his thirty-third year, on July 1, 1967, Acosta will figuratively die and leave San Francisco—the dinner turns into a repugnant affair. Madonna and child roles are reversed, as Acosta's Armenian nurse girl friend holds his head and sucks out mucous from his nose after too much cocaine. In conclusion, satire is the genre of excesses, where anything goes, including decorum. Thus the writer can indulge in slang, colloquialisms, and obscenities.

The romance is the literary form closest to myth and religion. Frye describes it as myth displaced towards the aesthetic.<sup>19</sup> The romance can reduce history to an atemporal present; it is a wish-fulfillment phantasy to free the self from the anxieties of existence, especially death and sterility; it is in terms of a plot, the search in the past and in the future for some imaginative Golden Age. This is the case with the symbolic relationship between the two central protagonists in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*, the *curandera* Ultima and the seven-year-old Antonio Márez. As her name implies—*ánima*—she is a spiritual entity and emblematic of the passing of an age—*última*, the last—when man lived in harmony with nature. Anaya speaks to this symbolic characterization through the concept of the "epiphany in landscape." He writes:

In speaking about landscape, I would prefer to use the Spanish word *la tierra*, simply because it conveys a deeper relationship between man and his place, and it is this kinship to the environment which creates the metaphor and the epiphany in landscape. On one pole of the metaphor stands man, on the other is the raw, majestic and awe-inspiring landscape of the southwest; the epiphany is the natural response to that landscape, a coming together of these two forces. And because I feel a close kinship with my environment I feel constantly in touch with that epiphany which opens me up to receive the power in my landscape.<sup>20</sup>

In his writing about the poetic symbolism of romance, Frye too addresses the notion of epiphany. He writes: "One important detail in poetic symbolism remains to be considered. This is the symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment, and which we propose to call the point of epiphany."<sup>21</sup> The term epiphany, whether it is used by Frye or Anaya, signifies a human recognition or scene of illumination where the cyclical forces of nature are aligned with a metaphysical or spiritual world. Ultima can, thus, be interpreted as Anaya's romantic vision of a *genius loci*. An ideal scene of recognition, dramatically different from Acosta's initial scene, unfolds for the reader in the opening paragraph as the young Antonio is awakened to consciousness through the vision of nature presented by Ultima. Antonio narrates:

Ultima came to stay with us the summer I was almost seven. When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of

childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mysteries into my living blood. She took my hand, and the silent, magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sun-baked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun's home. My bare feet felt the throbbing earth and my body trembled with excitement. Time stood still, and it shared with me all that had been, and all that was to come. . . .<sup>22</sup>

It will serve us well to realize to what extent Anaya's vision of nature is determined by the ideological conception of landscape. Although he invokes Mexican culture's ties to raw nature, *la tierra*, the idea of "epiphany in landscape" is an aesthetic rendering of natural forces. As Raymond Williams points out, in the Western tradition the idea of landscape in literature, painting, architecture, and gardening implies that nature has been imaginatively reordered, reorganized, redistributed not for production, but for consumption.<sup>23</sup> It is a fact of literary history that nature undergoes a transformation in Romanticism; mere geography is lifted to an aesthetic that inspires awe and feeling in the observer, to a "sense of place" where the individual might find solace and comfort.

Anaya's confidence in nature is due to the historical context out of which his book emerges, the "back to nature" cultural movements of the sixties. Antonio is forced to choose between the plain and the valley of his ancestors. These two places portray both a spiritual sense of place and two pre-capitalist ways of life and work free from alienation and in harmony with the natural world: the *vaquero* way of life of the Márez family and the farming life of the Lunas. However, this romance still includes historical events, and history accounts not only for the confidence in nature, but also for a sense of loss. The vision of some utopian Hispanic past must be interpreted against those events historically significant because Anaya has chosen to recall them, and which have drastic consequences for the unity of life. These events are World War II which disrupts the unity of the Márez family, turning children against parents and older ways of life, and the advent of the nuclear age which presents the possibility of the destruction of both man and nature.

The romance, which deals with attractive, stylized figures, is midway between the novel with mediated characters and myth which deals with supernatural agents and gods. Unlike the novel where the conditions of human action are prescribed by verisimilitude, logical probability, and observable phenomena, the hero of romance, or in our case, the heroine Ultima, moves in a world where the ordinary laws of nature have been suspended. As in pre-literate fairy tales, Antonio's psychological distance between thought and deed can be rendered unproblematical by Ultima's assistance. Like other romances, Anaya's book presents a world of antagonistic spiritual forces of good and evil where events are the products of magic and curses, as in the struggle between the good Ultima and the evil Tenorio Trementina. Thus in the romance, good and evil are coded not in existential terms, as in the novel, but in abstract or absolute categories. Ultima is central to the plot as a mediator between the world of men—

society, culture, and history—and the cyclical world of nature. She is a reinterpretation of myth, the archetypal or symbolic representation of matriarchal lunar cults, the pre-Oedipal fertility and agricultural deities of world mythology. And like the Greek Diana/Hecate relationship she is both goddess and sorceress. In terms of Antonio's religious quest, Ultima can be for him the answer to the solar, masculine, anthropomorphic Christian god of Western culture.

Like other romances, the plot of Anaya's book depends upon patterns of recurrence: plots of sacrifice, death, and resurrection; the Liturgical Calendar; the natural cycle of the seasons. The writer of romance, unlike the novelist who structures his plot according to linear time, needs the security of knowing that time is cyclical, that sterility and death will be followed by physical and spiritual renewal. Other books whose rhetoric is structured according to romance are, for example, Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamazunchale* and Orlando Romero's *Nambé—Year One*.

What I am trying to argue for with these classifications—autobiography, novel, romance, and satire—is that genres establish a ground of relationships of similarities and differences. Each narrative genre is coded with recognizable family traits that are constitutive of the form. To identify the particular kind of attitude, tone, and voice of the narrator, the formation of character, the distinctive plot structure, the representation of scenes and settings, is also to understand how genres take on meaning in relation to each other. Genre study should be a matter of classification, but more importantly clarification.

Returning to this speech act model of literary discourse, genres are also a particular class of utterance bound by its own rules and narrative strategies which function as verbal procedures; they, thus, also have heuristic value for the reader. These generic instructions should guide the reader's wandering viewpoint into appropriate responses that will ensure successful communication. A far greater heuristic value will accrue to the reader if he or she immediately recognizes generic strategies. To describe or judge a genre by the norms of another is to misunderstand. Though I am distinctly focusing on the notion of genre in the speech act model, we should understand that any reading of a literary text is guided by the notion of genre; genres are an indispensable part of reading. As the novel-centered view of narrative demonstrates, reading without a shared conception of genre and its conventions is impossible. I have yet to read in the literature on Chicano narrative a piece that does not mention the word novel. What this points out is that genres are also social institutions that specify or describe how literature as a cultural product is to be received. The use or consumption of a book is influenced by the cultural and ideological expectations of both critics and reading public. It can become increasingly difficult, as the shared conception of the novel illustrates, to sort out or to exclude from the performative situation inappropriate responses and to guarantee that a narrative will be read according to its own rhetorical strategies.

The reasons for the inappropriate responses to Chicano narratives is, of

course, historical. How is it that a term in English invented by eighteenth-century British readers to mean a realistic prose narrative as opposed to the more imaginative romance, has become so central to literature today that it is now the generic description for any long prose narrative. Some of the misunderstanding is due to our notion that the novel is a mature form that has outgrown romance and satire. Thus, the novel can be a useful indicator of the maturity of a culture. I think, following Jameson, that another root cause is the increased commercialization of literature, the commodification of name-brand labeling that specifies the appropriate social exchange and consumption of a product.<sup>24</sup> The sloganizing trend in various languages—*la nueva novela*, *le nouveau roman*, the new novel—that goes with the literature of the sixties and seventies is another example of this phenomenon. The most dramatic example in Chicano literature is Villaseñor's *Macho!* which appeared in 1973 shortly after the sixties and was hailed by Bantam Books on the cover as "the first great Chicano novel."

Let me conclude by emphasizing that my reading of these texts according to generic specifications is still partial interpretation. What remains to be done is to pursue the intelligibility of these narrative genres according to what can be described as the ideology of form.<sup>25</sup> When we examine the first Chicano narratives after the sixties, Richard Vasquez' *Chicano* in 1970, Tomás Rivera's . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra* and Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy* in 1971, Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless me, Ultima* and Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* in 1972, we find that each writer has chosen a different genre, two novels, an autobiography, a romance, and a satire respectively. All share the common experience of growing up Chicano, all make references to historical events significant for all Chicanos, all come through the sixties, all are professionals, yet each has found a form suitable or adequate for his own specific content. Here, precisely in these first post-sixties narratives would be an excellent occasion to study contemporary Chicano narrative genres not just as formal problems, techniques and rhetorical strategies to be worked out, but also, as I have tried to point out with Anaya's and Acosta's texts, as places where symbolic political solutions will be sought for social and historical contradictions.

Héctor Calderón  
Modern Language Association National Convention  
Los Angeles, 1982

#### NOTES

1. Fredric Jameson, 'Commentary and Metacommentary,' *PMLA* 86 (1971), 9-17. See also his lengthy, expanded version of this essay, 'Towards Dialectical Criticism,' in *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 306-416.

2. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) and Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

3. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 1-7.

4. See Iser, *The Act of Reading*, pp. 86-87.

5. On the interaction between the reader and the literary text, see Iser's major divisions, "The Phenomenology of Reading: The Processing of the Literary Text" and "Interaction between Text and Reader: The Communicatory Structure of the Literary Text," in *The Act of Reading*.

6. *A Decade of Chicano Literature (1970-1979): Critical Essays and Bibliography* ed. Luis Leal, Fernando de Necochea, Francisco Lomelí, and Roberto G. Trujillo (Santa Bárbara, California: Editorial La Causa, 1982), p. 114.

7. *A Bibliography of Criticism of Contemporary Chicano Literature*, ed. Ernestina N. Eger (Berkeley, California: Chicano Studies Library Publications, 1980), p. 47.

8. In his review article of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* Osvaldo Romero writes: "A veces la narración se hace morosa, se va más de la mitad de la novela en describir cinco días (en los cuales enmarca la mayoría de sus recuerdos infantiles), y en menos de tres párrafos describe los eventos de varios meses." See *Mester* 4, 2 (1974), p. 141. In a similar vein, Arthur Ramírez writes: "Acosta has his faults. At times he might be trivial and trite, banal and boring (rarely), . . . undisciplined, unrestrained and digressive, self-indulgent and unoriginal in both subject matter and style, his language lacking polish, his structure rather formless." See *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 3, 3 (1975), p. 53.

9. See Ramón Saldívar, "A Dialectic of Difference: Towards a Theory of the Chicano Novel," *MELUS* 6, 3 (1979), p. 85.

10. See Eliud Martínez, "Ron Arias' *The Road to Tamazunchale*: A Chicano Novel of the New Reality," *Latin American Literary Review* 5, 10 (1977), 51-63.

11. See Vernon E. Lattin's "The 'Horror of Darkness': Meaning and Structure in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*," *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* 6, 2 (1978), 50-57, and Nasario García's "The Concept of Time in *Nambé—Year One*," *Latin American Literary Review* 7, 13 (1978), 20-28.

12. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, p. 350.

13. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 307.

14. Frye's brief remarks on satire, *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 309-312, remain the most concise, clear, and influential formulations on this genre. Other critics have followed Frye's example—Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Alvin B. Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965); Matthew Hodgart, *Satire* (London: World University Library, 1969); and Alfred J. MacAdam, *Modern Latin American Narratives: The Dreams of Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977)—writing on literate and pre-literate cultures, on European and non-European traditions, on ancient as well as modern satirists. I am indebted to all of these writers for the formal characteristics of satire.

15. The satirist's emphasis on the evil and corruption of city life can be traced back to Juvenal's negative image of Rome. See Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, pp. 3-5, and Hodgart, *Satire*, p. 129. In his *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 46-48, Raymond Williams chooses Juvenal's satires to shed light on the traditional rhetorical contrast, the ideological comparison between rural innocence and corrupt urban life. These comparisons, as we shall see below, are telling for both satiric and romantic visions in literature.

16. Alvin B. Kernan offers the most concise and clear discussion of the distinguishing characteristics between the linear plot of the novel and the loosely-jointed plot of satire in the chapter "The Nature of Plot," pp. 95-104, in his *The Plot of Satire*. If we are to locate the ideological pre-conditions for the plot of the novel in *Don Quixote*, then we should understand their Aristotelian origins. Even in the first part of his novel through all the interpolated tales, Cervantes aspires to verisimilitude and unity in plot development by connecting beginnings, middles, and endings, by uniting characters with other characters, by narrating events

of sufficient length to admit a change in fortune brought about by what is necessary or probable.

17. Oscar Zeta Acosta. *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (San Francisco, California: Straight Arrow Books, 1972), p. 18.

18. Elliott disentangles the origins of the English *satire* from (1) the Latin *satura* meaning a specific Latin literary form, itself derived from "sated" or "full" and "mixture" or "medly," and (2) the Greek *satyr*, a poem or play with a strong critical attitude directed against human vice. See *The Power of Satire*, pp. 100-105.

19. For Frye's specific pronouncements on the romance form that I have used in my definition, see *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 33, 104-107, 186, 203, 304-306.

20. Rudolfo A. Anaya, "The Writer's Landscape: Epiphany in Landscape," *Latin American Literary Review* 5, 10 (1977), pp. 98-99.

21. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 203.

22. Rudolfo A. Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* (Berkeley, California: Quinto Sol Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 1.

23. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 120-141.

24. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 106-107.

25. Fredric Jameson conceives of the interpretation of literary forms not just as an enumeration of stylistic or generic features, but more significantly as a symbolic enactment of the social within an aesthetic realm. Lévi-Strauss' classic account of Caduveo facial art represents for Jameson the symbolic "working out" on a formal or aesthetic level of real social contradictions. See *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 77-79. However, the best elaboration of these ideas is his chapter on romance in the same book, "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism," pp. 103-150.