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Mexican Ballads, Chicano Epic: History,  
Social Dramas and Poetic Persuasions

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It can be seen that history repeats  
the deep myths of culture, generated  
in great social crisis at the turning  
points of change.

Victor Turner

MEXICAN BALLADS, CHICANO EPIC: HISTORY, SOCIAL DRAMAS,  
AND POETIC PERSUASIONS

If publication dates are an adequate measure, it has been a decade since Victor Turner brought together the key concepts and ideas upon which so much of his reputation shall rest. At the conceptual core of his collection, Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (1974) is the leading concept of drama-social drama - although, of course, the other concepts expressed in his title are by no means subordinate concerns; indeed, they conceptually constitute that of social drama. Derived from his fine fieldwork in Africa, these concepts, Professor Turner believed, lent themselves to the analytical understanding of a variety of geographical and historical cultural settings. His fieldwork among a relatively small group of Ndembu only "convinced" him, Turner tells us, "that social dramas, with much the same temporal or processual structure... can be isolated for study in societies at all levels of scale and complexity," and that "this is particularly the case in political situations..." (1974:33), points which he brilliantly demonstrated in his diverse historical case studies of Icelandic saga (1971), Becket (1974) and Hidalgo (1974).

In what follows I want to bring Turner's ideas to bear on two political and poetic periods in the history of the peoples whom Americo Paredes, one of their foremost scholars, has called "greater Mexico," referring to those people of Mexican descent on both sides of the border. In my analysis I will lend some emphasis to those on this side, the Mexican-Americans, although national Mexico will by no means be ignored. From one personal conversation with Professor Turner and from occasional references in his work (1974: 211), it is clear that Mexican-Americans were not unknown to

him as subjects of study and, of course, his keen interest in Mexico is only too well known. Hence, I would like to think that he might have especially approved of the particular application of his ideas to this group, one largely unexamined in terms of his ideas.

Within each of these two periods in greater Mexican history, 1890-1930 and 1966-1972, I shall identify a politically keyed social drama or in Turner's words, a unit of "aharmonic or disharmonic process, arising in conflict situations" and structured by a sequence of: a breach of social relations, followed by crisis, redressive action and concluding, usually, with reintegration (1974L 37-40). Following Turner's advice, I shall pay particular attention to the redressive phase, for,

It is in the redressive phase that both pragmatic techniques and symbolic action reach their fullest expression. For the society, group, community, association, or whatever may be the social unit, is here at its most "self-conscious" and may attain the clarity of someone fighting in a corner for his life (1974: 41).

The first social drama I have in mind is the dualistic international "disharmonic" social process that, on the Mexican side of the border, reaches its utmost clarity in the extended event we call the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and, on this side of the border, although with less clarity, consists of an extended radical questioning of Anglo-American political authority, particularly in Texas. This combined social drama - for I will argue later that they are of a piece - is "resolved" by 1930. The second social drama emerges between 1966 and 1972 and also consists in part of a radical Mexican-American political critique of Anglo-American authority although encompassing an extended Southwestern regional zone. Yet we will not forget Mexico in this second social drama, particularly the fateful year of 1968. While I shall say some things about "pragmatic techniques" in these two social dramas, I will lend focused attention to redressive symbolic action

particularly in the form of two kinds of social poetry appearing respectively in each of these two historical dramas. In the earlier case I refer to the folk genre of Mexican ballads, or corridos, and, in the second, I shall be examining a self proclaimed "Chicano epic", a major early example of the plentiful Mexican-American poetry appearing in this period. I refer to I am Joaquin (1967) by the social activist/poet Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales.

If Victor Turner's ideas served only to lend theoretical interest and clarity to these two time periods, they would serve well enough by shedding light on a dualistic history largely unexamined in conceptual terms. However, I am certain that Professor Turner would have firmly encouraged a critical revision and expansion of his ideas lending them even greater theoretical range and flexibility. To this end, I want to use these data to critically explore certain aspects of Turner's sense of social dramas in history.

I refer principally to the dynamic relationship between temporally distinct social dramas within the same field of historical cultural meaning. For example, he tells us that the Hidalgo Insurrection, the first social drama in the movement for Mexican Independence, was a failure, but one which "had potent" effects on subsequent dramas and revolutionary processes"; that it established "a new myth containing a new set of paradigms, goals, and incentives for Mexican struggle" (1974: 102). [emphases mine] In his later study of Becket Turner notes that social dramas in one period of time can "become objectivated models for future behavior in the history of collectivities such as churches and nations" (1974: 96). Finally, returning to Hidalgo, we learn that Professor Turner was engaged in "Studies of the relations between processes and symbols at any given time and in their cumulation over time ..." (1974: 154). [emphases mine]

I want to pursue Turner's lead to this question of relationships between social dramas over time by suggesting that such relationships may be open to more rigorous theoretical analysis. I want to argue that the historical repetition of the deep myths of a culture are not of course "really repetitions but rather transformations. Such transformations are the result of the felt influence of an earlier social drama upon a later one with the latter responding creatively to the former.

"Influence" may be a rather commonsensical notion for most of us who move at some distance from literary criticism. However, within literary criticism these days, the concept of influence, specifically poetic influence, has become inseparably linked with the name of Harold Bloom who has been elaborating a theory of poetic creativity based on Freudian thought, also of course influential in Turner's work (Turner 1978). At some risk for one not a literary critic, I want to reach across this disciplinary boundary and appropriate Bloom's concepts to the service of anthropological analysis in a Turnerian style, that is, by engaging them in the study of symbolic action in society.

Later in this paper I shall offer a critical explication of Bloom's ideas; for the moment, I want to propose a thesis concerning a relationship between my two social dramatistic periods. The Chicano epic poem I am Joaquin and its concomitant political culture of 1966-1972 constitute a redressive symbolic action and social drama manifesting what Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence" in creative response to the social drama of 1890-1930 and its central redressive poetic/symbolic action, the Mexican ballad or corrido. That is, in Bloom's terms, the later social poetry is produced in creative struggle with the dominant persuasive influence of the earlier period of the corrido (Bloom 1973).

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Borders and Bullets: The First Enactment, 1890 - 1930

I spoke earlier of the bi-national character of each of these historical dramas. Let us begin by briefly and analytically reviewing the well known events in Mexico that constitute its share of the period 1890-1930.

By 1890 the autocratic dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz had been in power for some fourteen years and would continue for another twenty. Yet 1890 can be taken as a beginning point for the years of disharmonic social process that we call the Mexican Revolution and whose aftermath lasts until the 1930s. For, in 1890, according to Americo Paredes, one "Catarino Garza, native of the Brownsville-Matamoros area [at the mouth of the Rio Grande] led what was probably the first rebellion against Diaz ..."; he "organized his force in Texas and crossed into Mexico from Zapata County" (1971: 136). In Turnerian terms, Garza, a journalist, becomes a predecessor for the several and later liminal thinkers and socio-cultural actors (Madero, Zapata, Carranza, Villa, etc.) who, following a "breach of regular norm-governed social relations..." publically signaled by acts such as the Manifesto of San Luis Potosí, enter into a period of spreading crisis in the Mexican social system, a crisis which enters its redressive phase as these various actors attempt to articulate their revolutionary paradigms with that of the other side and with each other (Wilkie and Michaels 1969; Womack 1969). We find here Turner's "pragmatic techniques and symbolic action" emerging in the redressive phase in the form of various speeches, announcements, threats, parliamentary moves, etc. Eventually, of course, such redressive action fails, there is regression to crisis and violence and finally the social drama ends by the 1930s with the partial reintergration of the disturbed social actors (Turner 1974: 41).

In talking this way about the Mexican Revolution, I may be critically diverging from Turner's predominant sense of the fundamentally peaceful char-

acter of social dramas as well as from his clear distinction between pragmatic and symbolic action. For him disharmonic processes where redressive action has failed seemingly cannot be construed or analyzed as social drama; social violence seems to lose the textuality implied by drama. We find this clear suggestion in his discussion of the Hidalgo Insurrection which he thought "fruitful as providing a sort of intermediary form between a social drama (with its conservative implications...) and a revolutionary process" (1974: 102). But, of course, he finally does treat this "intermediary form" with its rebellion and violence as a social drama and implies the same treatment for the Mexican Revolution of 1910 (1974: 113). I opt for the less conservative Turner who might perhaps have accepted an understanding of the Mexican Revolution as an embedded and heightened social drama, a play within a play. The point is important to the interests of this paper, because such a "textualization" of this event by participants and observers seems prerequisite for its later availability as "poetic" influence as I will suggest later. Textualization also is at issue in my second critical point, namely the seemingly too clean distinction between pragmatic and symbolic action. Here, I think, Turner would have no difficulty accepting the proposition that for all of its pragmatic character, social violence can be nonetheless richly and simultaneously endowed as symbolic action. Pragmatics can be dramatic as Paul Fussell has demonstrated for the Great War of 1914-1918 which became richly multi-vocalic for its participants and observers, a multivocality captured in the expression, a "theatre of war" (1977).

I suggest that the Mexican Revolution in its redressive and violent stages was endowed with such a dramatic quality, although not necessarily for everyone of its participants who, like Clifford Geertz's famous roosters, were perhaps a bit more conscious of their pragmatic situation and only dimly

aware of their participation in a symbolic display. Yet we know that for many such ground level participants there was some such dramatic involvement, and we know this in part through their musical symbolic action, that is, through their composition of ballads (corridos) often on the battlefield as Turner himself has noted (1974: 113). More on this later. More to the chief point of this paper, it is only necessary that later influential actors in same general field of cultural meaning see such processes as symbolic and dramatic and clearly this has been the case for the Revolution at a variety of levels ranging from my peasant grandfather's legendary narratives to Octavio Paz and his well known interpretation. For Paz the pragmatic Revolution was also "the brutal, resplendent face of death and fiesta, of gossip and gunfire, of celebration and love..." (1961: 149). Anticipating our later argument we only need to add that in the sixties this dramatic sense of the Revolution came to Chicano College students through native legendry and song but also through Paz and John Womack (1969).

I have already noted the initiation of this revolutionary drama by one Catarino Garza of south Texas who crossed into Diaz's Mexico in 1890. After some initial success he was defeated by Diaz's troops and returned to south Texas. In doing so he unites the two national "halves" of the social drama taking a marginal's role and negotiating the boundaries and "borders" of different orders of social experience (Turner 1974: 233). His return sets in motion a regional part of the Mexican-American social drama of this period. Garza quickly found himself organizing resistance to the hated Texas Rangers thus becoming something of a folk hero for the south Texas Mexican community (Paredes 1971: 136-137). Why should these people have need of folk heroes? Because, as some know, this regional community, along with other Mexican descent communities in the southwest, at that moment found itself in the

almost literal middle of a history of conflict and social subordination at the hands of the newly arriving and increasingly dominant Anglo Americans. Beginning, of course, in 1848 with the transfer of the Southwest from Mexico to the United States, the Mexican inhabitants of the area gradually (and sometimes not so gradually) found themselves dispossessed of social power, particularly in terms of its material base, land ownership (McLemore 1981). Having lost control of the basic means of production, both farmer landowners and their workers were increasingly proletarianized in the more subordinated service of a developing Anglo controlled agricultural capitalism, a process intensified by the addition of thousands of displaced and socially vulnerable refugees from Mexico as a result of the aforementioned Revolution in that country, a Revolution which, of course, failed and continues to fail these masses. Again, the bi-national social drama is united. To this economic and political domination of Southwestern Mexicans native and immigrant, we must add a particularly virulent racism equal to anything in the South which, at worst, in periodic outbursts of mindless violence against them (Acuna 1981; Barrera 1979; de León 1983; Montejano 198 ; Paredes 1971).

Thus, different and conflicting political-cultural paradigms were generated by and grounded in the socio-economic transformation of the Mexican communities in the Southwest, paradigms, which in the concrete arenas of different Southwestern areas, would soon "become transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilized and in which there is a trial of strength between influential paradigm bearers. 'Social dramas' represent the phased process of their contestation" (Turner 1974: 17).

In the struggle for the Southwest between 1848 and 1930 Mexican-Americans brought both pragmatic techniques and symbolic action (again,

the distinction is blurred) into a phase process of contestation which is most clear between 1890 and 1930 but actually begins with individual acts of resistive political violence - our first breaches of the social order - in California, Texas, and New Mexico in the 1850s. One of these, the case of Joaquín Murieta, is both illustrative and highly pertinent to the present argument. During the Gold Rush, Anglo Americans forced Mexican miners, or "greasers" as they were called, out of the area and committed all manner of injustices against them. Soon, according to collective legend, there emerged a Mexican named Joaquín Murieta who seemed to appear everywhere pistol in hand attacking the hated "gringos." We should note a certain irrelevancy, namely that scholars are not sure that such a man ever existed, but we are sure that he had a legendary existence for the California Mexicans and that is what matters (Pitt 1966: 77-82). We are certain, however, of the real and legendary existence of other similar figures such as Juan de Dios Ortega of New Mexico and Juan Nepomuceno Cortina of southern Texas, all predecessors to the already mentioned Catarino Garza also of south Texas; then there is best known of all of these, Gregorio Cortez, who fought and eluded the Texas Rangers in 1901 after being unjustly accused of horse thievery (Paredes 1971). In addition to these individual acts of armed resistance, we may also note widespread organized contestative activity among Mexican-Americans throughout the Southwest as influential paradigm bearers responding with various pragmatic techniques (political organization, guerilla operations, labor unions) to the equally pragmatic efforts of the other side as it increasingly extended and tightened its control over key social resources (Rosenbaum 1981; Zamora 1982).

While all this contestative activity might be characterized as "pragmatic", we can also note the emergence of clearly symbolic actions during the period including journalism, drama, and, perhaps most importantly, narrative folklore, particularly legend and folk ballad. I have already mentioned the role of legendry in the symbolic construction of Joaquin Murieta, but in this next section I will focus on the Mexican ballad or corrido as the major symbolic-poetic form and action of this period.

#### The Mexican Ballad as Poetic Symbolic Action

The Mexican ballad or corrido has a prominent place in the folklore and cultural history of the Mexican people on both sides of the Mexico-United States border. As formally and thematically defined by its leading students, the corrido is a usually anonymous folk song narrative composed in octo-syllabic quatrains and sung to a tune typically in ternary rhythm and in 3/4 or 6/8 metre. The quatrains are usually structured in an a b c d rhyme pattern and the entire narrative may be framed with formulaic openings and closings. Its most general function is to record and relate those events that have significantly affected the sensibilities of the Mexican masses. These may include social conflict, natural calamities, political changes and inter-personal crisis.

While distantly related to Spanish medieval romance introduced into the New World during the Conquest, the corrido as a distinctive form does not fully crystallize until the second half of the nineteenth century; and, it seems to do so not in Mexico per se but among the people of Mexican descent in the United States. Or so Americo Paredes, the leading contemporary scholar of the genre, suggests as he goes on to argue that the corrido may actually be a creation of the Mexican community

in the U.S. This folk form later diffuses southward as the stimulating events of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 provide new narrative themes. While corridos of the Mexican Revolution are much better known throughout the greater Mexican world, nevertheless the oldest known corrido of competition and conflict between Mexican and Anglo cowboys appears in south Texas in the 1860s. Some years before the ballad heroes of the Mexican Revolution seized the Mexican folk imagination, the Mexican descent community of south Texas was composing ballads about local heroes like Gregorio Cortez. Paredes is not dogmatic on this question.

That the Mexican corrido went through its first stages on the Lower Rio Grande Border - under the impulse of border conflict - is a thesis that could never be definitely proven (1958: 104).

But, he maintains, as yet, no one has identified any older corridos in internal Mexico.

Of greater pertinence to the issues of this paper is the way that the corrido formally and thematically responds to the bi-national social drama of 1890-1930. Whereas before the Mexican-American community had a variety of active song forms dealing with a variety of themes, by the early 1900s, according to Paredes, this song repertoire begins to focus "...toward a single type ... one form, the corrido; one theme, the border conflict ... one concept of the hero, the man fighting for his right with his pistol in his hand" (1971: 149). While we know less about the history of folksong in Mexico, it is clear that the corrido on that side of the border also acquires parallel characteristics and a symbolic centrality in response to the Mexican Revolution (Mendoza 1954; Simmons ). With increasing immigration to the U.S. during this period, the two corrido traditions really became one for the greater Mexican community. (According to my father, one could hear both the ballad of Gregorio Cortez and that of

Pancho Villa at the Battle of Celaya in any cantina in San Antonio in the 1930s).

The corrido, then, emerges as a dominant poetic form for the Mexican masses on both sides of the border, a dominance resulting from its powerful formal and performative poetic properties as recently analyzed by its best young scholar, John H. McDowell (1981). This powerful and engaging social poetry is pressed into active service between 1890 and 1930 as symbolic action for a people in struggle, a struggle which the Mexican masses on both sides of the border would eventually lose by the 1930s both pragmatically and symbolically.

The loss is certainly clear on this side of the border. Severe economic deprivation, racial discrimination, and political powerlessness would be the lot of Mexican-Americans until very recently, and many would intelligently take issue with my slight note of optimism. As for the other side of the border, it would appear that the objectives of the Mexican Revolution were thwarted to preserve the hegemony of a ruling elite in that country (Cockcroft 1983; Hansen 1971). And, if pragmatic techniques failed in this struggle, the same might be said of the Mexican corrido. As I've suggested elsewhere, following Paredes, after 1930, the corrido as a critical folk poetic form enters a long period of decline in both countries, a victim of a new advanced capitalist cultural re-organization of both areas (Limón 1983). Yet it does not disappear altogether; it becomes a residual tradition (Williams 1977: 231), an expressive potentiality.

After an intense structural competition for social resources in the arenas of the Southwest, the first social drama came to a close in the 1930s. While Turner tells us that social dramas usually end with

reintegration or irreparable schism between the contesting parties, I'm not sure that either broad option wholly prevails in greater Mexico after 1930. The greater Mexican masses are neither fully and equitably integrated into the social order nor can it be said that there is a state of irreparable schism. In my view what actually seems to happen for these masses is better described as a prolonged continuation of the third stage of the social drama with no clear fourth stage resolution. Or, in Turner's words, where "the disturbed community is small and relatively weak vis-a-vis the central authority, "the social drama may result in a "regression to crisis" which "tends to become a matter of endemic, pervasive, smoldering factionalism, without sharp, overt confrontations between consistently distinct parties" (1974: 41). As such, Turner's formulation also clearly implies that conflictually conditioned social relationships which are left unclear and where at least one of the parties is "smoldering" can "flare up" and take on sharper clarity; in short, we can have a new social drama set in motion but one indebted to and conditioned by a previous processual action. I believe that such socially unclear and "smoldering" relationships between Mexican masses and central authorities characterize the history of greater Mexico until the 1960s (Acuna 1981: 121-298; Cockcroft 1983; Hansen 1971: 173-208).

#### Tlatlelolco and Denver, Colorado: The Second Enactment, 1966-1972

As Octavio Paz has noted, "1968 was a pivotal year" (1972: 3) marked by student organized and led rebellions, if not revolutions, erupting throughout the world, an international rebellion, he believes, against "a strange ailment" of our post modern condition, "one that condemns us to incessant development and prosperity - by means of which we multiply our contradictions, inflame our sores, and exacerbate our tendencies toward

destruction" (1972: 7). Mexico was certainly no exception to this youthful pattern and social condition and neither was the Mexican-American community relative to the United States. Given the continuing contradictions in Mexican society and the refusal of its government to accommodate dialogue and change, left of center student protests occurred in Mexico City culminating in the now famous massacre at Tlatlelolco on October 2, 1968. Once again, leading cultural actors were coming into conflict over the distribution of resources both material and cultural, and both sides turned to combinations of symbolic and pragmatic means to make their case before Mexican society. Paz has suggested that the students made their case quite well, largely through their own symbolic display of themselves as youth demanding a future, well enough to enlist the support of the people and well enough to ultimately cause the government to shed most of its symbolic form and rely solely on bloody pragmatism (Paz 1972: 3-19).

The student movement leading to Tlatlelolco responded to the failure of the Mexican government to live up to the promises of the Revolution. However, as a political movement, I suspect it also responded to the social drama of the Revolution as a model for its own processual drama. I will not attempt to make this case completely since there is much that we don't know about these 1968 events, but it certainly is clear that the slogans and visual reproductions and folksongs of the Revolution did emerge during this second Mexican drama (Poniatowska 1975: 121). As one wholly ignorant of Mexican poetry I will not attempt to make a parallel case for "influence" here. A firm interpretation awaits a more focused historical ethnography of these events in Mexico City. However, as a participant and one of its ethnographers (Limón 1981; 1982a; 1982b), I am more prepared to argue for this relationship between social dramas within the Mexican-

American community with, as noted earlier, a focus on poetic symbolic action.

As I have suggested throughout, we must not lose sight of the relationship between these two national experiences. In his commentary on the events at Tlatlelolco, Octavio Paz notes "the rebellion of Blacks and Chicanos: ... in the United States during the 'sixties and while cautioning against blind imitation of this rebellion in Latin America, nonetheless suggests that "it would not be an error to take note of the capacity for criticism and self criticism that is unfolding within them ..." as well as other American dissident groups (1972: xi). That a world intellectual such as Paz took such note of the Chicano movement in the 'sixties is testimony to its historical presence in the United States, a presence which, for a variety of reasons, has largely escaped focused scholarly notice with one distinguished exception (Gomez-Q 1978).

By the mid-sixties a sufficient critical mass of Mexican-American students had gathered at colleges and universities mostly in the Southwest but also in lesser numbers at Midwestern and Ivy League institutions. While a few Mexican-Americans had attended such institutions since the late nineteenth century, this gathering in the 'sixties was quite simply larger and had more of a working class background, both characteristics as a result of the unprecedented federal financial aid that became available to low income families in this period. Yet even as more Mexican-Americans appeared in university settings, other sectors of Mexican-American society continued to experience a second or even third class status in the United States, a status most evident in the farm labor force. Older issues also continued in the Mexican-American relationship to the dominant society including de facto discrimination, police

brutality in places like Denver, an alarming school drop-out rate, and unresolved land claims, the latter having a particular force in New Mexico (Knowlton 1970). To consciously exploit a relevant common cliché, the stage was indeed set for the opening of a new social drama featuring the same arena and old paradigms but new actors and requiring only a major perceptible breach in the social order to set it in motion.

The first signs of such a breach appeared in the well known farm labor unionization activity led by Cesar Chavez beginning in 1964 in California. This California activity was paralleled in Texas in the fall of 1966 and in both regional cases, the result was a series of strikes and boycotts. In the Texas case, as if on cue, the then Governor John Connally, drawing on his own historical deep myths of culture, ordered the Texas Rangers once again into south Texas to assist local authorities in bringing "order" to the area, events, by the way, immediately recorded in balladry. While we see here the opening of a breach in social relations, such a breach, Turner tells us, often involves a clearly illegal act which, in its performance, both dramatically discloses and motivates the competing political cultural paradigms historically given and latent in the field of social relations (1974: 38); and, such a sharply clear socially motivating breach occurred on October 15, 1966 when, in New Mexico, one Reis López Tijerina and three hundred followers,

...occupied the national forest campgrounds known as the Echo Amphitheatre and asserted the revival of the ejido rights of the Pueblo de San Joaquin de Chama, whose 1,400 acres lay mainly within the confines of the Kit Carson National Forest.

Within a week, Acuna continues, "state police, sheriff's deputies, and Rangers moved in" arresting Tijerina and several of his followers;

Tijerina was sentenced to two years in the state penitentiary (Acuna 1981: 363).

All of this activity-as-breach when transmitted by the media resulted in an extension of the social crisis when the news reached the Mexican-American university student community which, conscious of its own marginal position in predominantly Anglo upper middle class institutions, joined and amplified the social drama. In addition to lending assistance to the farmworkers and rallying to Tijerina's legal defense, the student sector took some pragmatic/symbolic actions of its own including agitation for increased admission of Mexican-American students, the institutionalization of Mexican-American studies and research, the organization of "walk-outs" in the public school systems to protest inferior and racist educational conditions, and, closer to our own central concern, the intensified production of artistic symbolic activity to assert their identity in redressive response to "Anglo" culture. For our later purpose it is also vital to note that one of the most important sites of this total activity was and continues to be in Denver, Colorado and is centered in an alternative school organized by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, an important social activist/poet of this time. Drawing on deep myth and recent event, Gonzales calls this school Escuela Tlatlelolco.

For the remainder of this essay, I wish to focus on the literary production of this movement, particularly one major poem by Gonzales. I take my charter from Turner who tells us that in a social drama, cultural paradigms may best be captured in key metaphors emerging from that drama (1974: 28-32). Further, if one social drama is influentially related to another in history, that relationship may be most evident in their leading symbolic statements.

Chicano Social Poetics and the Anxiety of Influence

Chicano literature appeared amidst social change and spoke to that change. Mostly the product of youth, particularly university youth, this literature proliferated in all modern genres although poetry was dominant (Ybarra-Frausto 1978). The leading student of Chicano poetry has recently argued that this poetic output is what he calls "a response to chaos", a poetic symbolic effort to forestall or ward off the threat of change and dissolution (Bruce-Novoa 1982). Bruce-Novoa then offers close readings of various poems to show how each is such a response, a function wholly consistent with Turner's sense of redressive symbolic action in a social drama. I do not quarrel with this understanding of Chicano poetry, although I do question its amplitude for fully grasping the genesis of this Chicano symbolic action. In so doing I return to my thesis concerning the dynamic influence of one past social drama upon another.

Like other critics of this literature (Paredes, R. 1982), Bruce-Novoa takes account of the past as a source of themes and images for contemporary literature, but like them, he tends to privilege the present as a more active creative moment while the past recedes into an almost pre-literary background for this present "true" literature. The present is the activating and central source of literature. My contention is quite another, namely that much of the Chicano literature produced during the social drama of the 'sixties is not only a "response to chaos" but, paradoxically, also a response to order, the cultural order represented by the perceived past and most particularly represented by the Mexican corrido as emblematic of that past. At varying levels of consciousness, for these new writers, the corrido is not simply a "background", a pre-literate "folk base" to their own production, but rather a powerful and

dominating stimulus to their own poetic output, an output which is shaped as much in active struggle with the traditional Mexican poetic past as they perceived it as it is with the political present. This past, however, can only be influential if, in fact, these new school educated writers know this poetic past and, based on internal textual evidence, my own interviews and the observations of other critics (Elizondo 1980: 45; Gonzalez-Berry 1980: 45), it is clear that they do. Like James Fernandez's Ceferino Suarez, these versifiers are negotiating between a traditional folk poetic past and a new "bookish" culture (Fernandez, N.D.: 13).

In the remainder of this essay I want to argue for this active historical relationship of struggle between two social dramas in terms of their poets, their deep myth makers, with a particular focus on the major poem of the Chicano movement, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales' I am Joaquín.

Bruce-Novoa has rightly called Gonzales' self styled "epic", "the first major literary work of the Chicano movement" and "an accurate reading of the Chicano spirit at the Movement's outset". We would only add that the poem was widely read, heard, (or seen, for it was made into a film) by thousands of Chicanos during this period. He also correctly notes the poem's simple, uncomplicated language and structure and its highly rhetorical intent and therefore also suggests a close comparison between this written epic and oral tradition (1982: 48), a point I will return to later. As suggested earlier, for Bruce-Novoa, "The poem's main thrust is to rescue Chicanos from an enveloping chaos due to the loss of their land" and this rhetorical thrust structures the poem's chief clusters of images:

The poem begins from the situation of contemporary Chicanos living in the Other's space...within that chaotic space, Chicanos must define - cosmicize - their own area. To do so they must recall the paradigmatic process that defined the culture and renew it; they must rediscover the primordial hieraphany. For this reason, the Chicano Everyman, Joaquin, retreats first into his people, and then into history to seek the essential knowledge. When it is found, the people can move forward in orderly fashion toward a common goal (1982: 49).

I agree that there is such poetic retreat, but I submit that it structures the poem from the very outset and throughout and that its deeper purpose is not to seek essential knowledge but to struggle with and defeat that history, particularly its poetic representative, the Mexican corrido. It is a struggle which our poet ultimately loses. To make sense of these notions of history, struggle, defeat, and loss, I will bring Harold Bloom's ideas to bear on this explication, ideas themselves requiring at least a brief summary explication.

For Bloom, great or "strong" poems are produced largely through the influence of stronger precursory poems. (The question of what constitutes "strength" is left unclear, or Bloom apparently thinks it to be self evident.) Yet this relationship among poems and their makers is not a happy one. The genesis of a later poem lies in the later poet's act of struggle and rebellion against the precursory poem which he must overcome even as he senses his deep indebtedness to it. This attitude is the anxiety of influence.

Freud informs Bloom's analysis throughout. Indeed, at times, Bloom broadly hints that his own critical writing is a creative struggle with Freud; the anxiety of influence is not limited to poets and can structure the relationship of all manner of discourse (conversley it suggests that all discourse is fundamentally poetic, a point I will exploit later.)

The earlier poet/poem is as\_ a father who dominates the son and stands creatively in the way of the latter's original creativity in the way of the latter's original creativity dialectically inhibiting and stimulating it. Yet the poetic son or ephebe, to use Bloom's term, knows that original creativity is impossible, that to a fundamental extent, it has all been done before, and that creating is necessarily and paradoxically borrowing from that which one is trying to overcome. Poetic life is the continuous overcoming of the poetic father; poetry is the continuous effort to produce a different and better poem.

In an effort to escape and clear his own imaginative space, the ephebe engages in what Bloom sees as a flexible sequence of poetic defensive strategies. Bloom identifies six such strategies, and I shall deal specifically with some of them later in my analysis. Initially, these serve in avoiding the precursor's influence, but later lead to acknowledging the precursor's influence without wholly negating the ephebe's own poetic existence. These strategies, or what Bloom calls revisionary ratios, find their analogues in Freudian defense mechanisms, although Bloom parts company with Freud at a critical point. For Freud, these defenses against the father usually result in a well-adjusted personality and are valuable and necessary in this respect. For Bloom, however, such poetic strategies seem to ultimately end in defeat for the ephebe and the paradoxical result is a series of strong poems, but always relatively weakened in relation to the master of the poetic household.

These poetic defenses against the precursor are interpretively found in the series of poetic images themselves, which together yield a whole poem. Any single major poem and its distinctive images can, in prin-

ciple, be analyzed as a series of defensive revisions of a precursory poem within the same linguistic cultural tradition. For Bloom, the history of Anglo-American poetry can be read as a series of such major revisions always defending against a past and ultimately leading back to a wholly dominant master poet - Milton. Since Paradise Lost, the poetic history of this particular tradition consists of a series of artistically profitable, but nevertheless weakened, attempts to deal with stronger precursory poets like Milton. And, indeed, Bloom's applications have been largely confined to the Anglo-American male poetic tradition and to relationships between written poems (1973; 1975; 1976; 1982). While continuing his emphasis on patriarchal relationships, in what follows I shall critically apply his ideas to the relationship between Mexican oral tradition and Gonzales' written epic.

In his extended analysis Bruce-Novoa finds the following structured argument in I\_\_am Joaquín, an argument intended to save the contemporary Chicano world from chaos by appealing to the cultural resources of history.

- I. Present. Lines 1-37. Lament and retreat into the Raza.
- II. 1. Past. Lines 38-252. Development of Mexican mestizo culture, from pre-Columbian to twentieth century (subdivided into historical epochs.)
  2. Present. Lines 253-287. Community split and branded inferior by Anglo Americans.
  3. Past. Lines 288-334. Chicano history as blood sacrifice.
  4. Present. Lines 335-359. Chicanos united to protest injustice.
  5. Past. Lines 360-406. Flashback to Anglo American invasion.
  6. Present. Lines 407-441. Joaquin's determination to resist assimilation.
  7. Past. Lines 442-462. Nine hundred years of mestizaje and survival.
- III. Present. Lines 463-502. Rise of people's revolution and future projection.

My plan is to revisit this argument in Bloom's analytical terms to propose: (1) that the appeal to history is found throughout the poem, (2) that it focuses on the Mexican corrido, and (3) that the epic is at the same time an effort to acknowledge the corrido's historical power while trying to evade its influence in the interests of writing a better "corrido".

For Bloom, this inter-poetic dialectic of erosion and confrontation often begins with a cluster of images, a poetic movement, which he calls a clinamen. In the clinamen the new poet quite unconsciously perhaps takes account of the past great poem but only to unconsciously evade its influence thematically and formally. From the formal beginning of this poem, namely its title, we can suggest the new poet's consciousness of the corrido in his use of Joaquín implying the California Mexican Joaquin Murrieta (noted on p. 10), who was the subject of corridos, and, in his quite self-conscious labeling of his poem as an epic. There can be little doubt that any literate Chicano would not know of the existence of a previous Chicano semi-epic, namely the corrido, and later, we shall see that this poet is indeed quite aware of the corrido. Yet in the poem's beginning through line 38, there is a total evasion of this prior poetic presence, an evasion suggested by a number of features beginning with the use of English, the irregular metre and rhyme, the almost total lack of any concrete setting and fixity in time and space, and, perhaps most importantly, the assertion of the self in revealing ways. In contrast with the traditional corrido performance, we find the total lack of any collective responsibility to the audience. Instead of the corrido's traditional opening in which the singer asks for permission to sing,

Para empear a cantar,  
 Para empear a cantar,  
 Pido permiso señores  
 (So that I may sing,  
 So that I may sing,  
 I ask your permission, gentlemen.) From the Corrido,  
 "Arnulfo González".

our poem simply begins in brash self assertion before the audience "I am Joaquin." This self assertion is very important in another respect, for the corrídista (folk poet) never sings about self; he sings about others. While Joaquin may be a "Chicano Everyman" the point remains and takes on wider social meaning; namely, the poet and his generation take the presumption (in corrido terms) of singing directly about themselves. Finally, after describing a concrete setting, the corrido typically will narrate a series of concrete experiences in tangible imagery by way of developing the audience's admiration for a folk hero. Here, our "hero" is rendered in rhetorical abstractions in which he is "lost," "confused," and "destroyed."

Once the poetic epebe has taken this initial evasive action, this swerve away from the influence of the master poem, he may begin to acknowledge and directly deal with the master poem, always trying to do so on his own terms. This next poetic strategy Bloom calls the movement of the tessera. This too is a revisionary strategy of struggle but one in which the poet acknowledges the master poem but at the same time implicitly points to its limitations and equally implicitly suggests how the master poem might be improved. "In the sense of a completing link," Bloom tells us, the tessera represents any later poet's attempt to persuade himself (and us) that the precursor's word would be worn out if not redeemed as a newly fulfilled and enlarged word of the epebe" (1973: 67).

I submit that in the entire section of I am Joaquin comprising lines 38 to 334, the ephebe begins a return to a sustaining tradition, but it is a return which implicitly acknowledges the corrido but is at the same time and more obviously his "attempt to persuade" that the form can (and should) be "newly fulfilled and enlarged" in the hands of the ephebe. How does he do this? If a typical Mexican corrido focuses on a single, specific historical event in a fixed temporal moment in Mexican culture, (the killing of an Anglo sheriff, a victory on a Revolution battlefield), this Chicano epic has far greater ambition. Like the corrido, our ephebe narrates history, but he takes a further completing and enlarging step, namely the whole of greater Mexican history. Further while the corridos usually speak of limited social conflict, this epic thematically proposes to address a fundamental problem of conflict in the Mexican historical psyche. Sounding like Octavio Paz, our poet speaks of the ritual sacrifice as the motivating force in this history.

The movement of tessera ultimately fails. In his effort to enlarge upon the thematic scope of the corrido, the ephebe may have gained one kind of truth - the knowledge of ritual sacrifice - but at the loss of another, the need for community, a need which is necessary to fulfill the Mexican people's best interests are to be served. The effort to write a larger epic while admirable in its formal scope has gained nothing for this poet, nothing which would save him from the chaos and loss of modern society; indeed, historical knowledge has only added to the chaos, including the final knowledge that Mexican history ends and Chicano history begins in conquest (lines 288-344).

Once again, the poet must return to tradition but this time with less ambition and more focused concern. Beginning with his implied

identification with the figure of Joaquin Murieta in line 335, the poet is renegotiating his relationship with the past and with the corrido, this time in the poetic strategy that Bloom calls kenosis. For Bloom

Kenosis is a more ambivalent movement than clinamen or tessera, and necessarily brings poems more deeply into the realms of antithetical meanings. For, in kenosis the artist's battle against art has been lost, and the poet falls or ebbs into a space and time that confine him, even as he undoes the precursor's pattern by a deliberate willed loss in continuity. His stance appears to be that of his precursor...but the meaning of the stance is undone; the stance is emptied of its priority, which is a kind of godhood, and the poet holding it becomes more isolated, not only from his fellow, but from the continuity of his own self (1973: 89-90).

This ambivalent relationship of acknowledging the master poem directly while denying it, the corrido, is in effect in lines 335-406. While acknowledging the heroic quality of the past, such as Joaquin Murieta, it is nevertheless the case that Murieta and his community lost in their struggle against the Anglo American invader, and the result is the present chaos. We must acknowledge this past, learn from it but ultimately also depart from it. The Anglos won the first social drama leaving the Mexican-American very little. In the domain of art, the poet mentions the great muralists of Mexico (largely irrelevant for Mexican-Americans) mariachi music (which often consists of corridos) and finally, and for the first time, we directly meet the master poem, the Mexican corrido. And what is our ephebe's explicit estimate of this form? We have lines which finally and clearly acknowledge the precursor:

The corridos tell the tales  
of life and death,  
of tradition,  
legends of old and new  
of joy  
of passion and sorrow  
of the people - who I am.

While acknowledging its importance, the poet nevertheless clearly implies that the corrido has been the expressive instrument that essentially recorded defeat; the lines that follow and delineate "Who I am." and largely a catalogue of "sorrow," "anguish," "pain," "dejection," and "exploitation." Whether this is a "true" understanding of the corrido's role is wholly irrelevant, for, as Bloom tells us, inter-poetic relationships consist of willful misreadings. The corrido has been identified, acknowledged, but also undone and emptied of its "godhood" and "priority" even while resulting in the further isolation of the ephebe, a necessary isolation.

Such an emptying out of tradition while diminishing the present self leads to either total poetic and social negation, or it prepares the ground for another possible poetic strategy, that which Bloom calls daemonization or the counter-sublime, probably the most unclear of his concepts. If I understand him rightly, in this movement there is a seeming total abandonment, actually a full repression, of the precursor, in favor of a new beginning. Having been consciously limited in the kenosis, in daemonization the precursor seems to disappear altogether as the new poet attempts a seemingly new poetic vision to replace that of the precursor. Believing that he has limited and dealt with the precursor, the ephebe consciously thinks himself free and poetically engages in what Bloom calls "the over-restituting movement of daemonization" in which his imagery and tone is that of hyperbole; "the trope of excess or of the over-throw and like repression finds its images in height and depth, in the Sublime and the Grotesque." For Bloom "the glory of repression, poetically speaking, is that memory and desire, driven down, have no place to go in language except up onto the heights

of sublimity, the ego's exultation in its own operations" (1975: 100).

Consider these lines from the final section of I am Joaquin

And now the trumpet sounds  
the music of the people stirs the  
revolution.

We start to move,

and which ends,

I am Joaquin.  
The odds are great  
but my spirit strong,  
my faith unbreakable,  
my blood is pure.  
I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ  
I shall endure!  
I shall endure!

In his interpretation of I am Joaquin, Bruce-Novoa has suggested that "the poem functions as corridos or popular songs...do, moving one emotionally but not stirring analysis" (1982: 68). Aside from ignoring the complex poetic power of the corrido performance (Paredes 1964; McDowell 1981), this analysis also fails to grasp the relationship between the corrido and the epic. As I have suggested this Chicano epic does have an intimate association with the corrido, but it is a relationship of a struggle against a superior master poem which overwhelms the ephebe's consciousness. He is able to respond to the dominance of the corrido through first, a series of evasions, and finally through the counter-assertion of his own self and his own right to speak, but then the epic ends. For Bloom, a thorough working out of the poetic struggle would carry the poet through two final stages askesis and apophrades in which the ephebe reaches a poetically mature and thoughtful relationship with the parent poem. Here we reach only the poetic phase of daemonization accounting for the final inflated sense of self over against collective

oral tradition; at a deeper unconscious level the poem is antagonistically responding to and struggling with the firm discipline of patriarchal history. As with the !Kung San musician "Jimmy" (Shostak, n.d.), creativity emerges in the antagonistic nexus between self and society except here it is society as past history. And in critical response to feminist analysts who find artistic struggle between "women" and an equally undifferentiated "male" other (Babcock, n.d.; Tsing, n.d.), here creative struggle takes place wholly within the discourse of patriarchy.

#### Poetics, Influence, and Social Drama

In the preceding I have been concerned with explicating the relationship between one Chicano poem written in 1969 and an earlier tradition of Mexican folk balladry. And, I have argued that the Chicano epic is responding to the Mexican corrido with what Harold Bloom has called the "anxiety of influence" in which a younger poet responds to the influence of an earlier dominant poem through a series of revisionary strategies which produce his own poem. The final product of these revisionary movements is ultimately unsuccessful, for as Bloom suggests throughout, the influence of the dominant poem can only be adequately dealt with (though never fully overcome) by carrying through the full series of revisions, something which our ephebe is unable or unwilling to do. Clearly, I also find substantial interpretive power in Bloom's ideas, although ultimately I cannot accept his ahistorical and asocial poetics. 'That even the strongest poets are subject to influences not poetical is obvious even to me, but again my concern is only with the poet in a poet, or the aboriginal poetic self.' (Bloom, 1973: 11) Bloom simply chooses not to consider that his poets and possibly their anxieties are products and producers of the social conditions and contradictions of their historical movement. His

most perceptive critic shares my unease. Ultimately for Bloom, Lentricchia tells us, "the unspoken assumption is that poetic identity is somehow a wholly intraliterary process in no contact with the larger extraliterary processes that shape human identity" (1980: 326).

To restore the social in this analysis, I now return us to where we started, namely with Victor Turner's notion of the social drama. We must recall that both Mexican ballads and the Chicano epic are respectively forms of symbolic action that emerge in the redressive stages of their respective historical social dramas. As key metaphors, we might expect them to either symbolically reproduce or be symbolically correlated with other aspects of the social drama. Indeed, since the second poem is responding to the first, we might expect a parallel structure-of-response in the second drama as a whole in response to the first. That is, can the Chicano movement as a whole be structurally analyzed in Bloom's terms with respect to the social drama of 1890 to 1930? I can offer no definitive answer to this question, but I will point to a beginning assessment by one of the most acute observers of the Chicano movement.

The entire Chicano leadership pattern, in fact, closely resembled the pattern of the Mexican Revolution, where revolutionary juntas and local leaders emerged. These leaders took care of their home bases and were supported by their own followers...all adhered to this basic pattern, inspiring intense loyalty among their followers (Acuna 1981: 360).

For the moment I have focused my analysis on specific instances of poetic symbolic action in each of two social dramas in the history of greater Mexico. I have argued that the later poetry and possibly the whole of its containing social drama constitutes a social anxiety of influence response to the poetic/dramatistic past. In the artistic articulation of this anxiety we can see, in our ephebe's less than

impressive poem, a willfulness and self assertion that evades and denies the collective past even while acknowledging its influence. I suspect that this dialectic of denial and acknowledgement was also reproduced in other aspects of the Chicano movement with respect -- or lack of it -- to the "world of our fathers". In response to this overwhelmingly persuasive past we were not able to write a better poem or enact a more powerful drama, but poetry, struggle and drama there was; there was movimiento. And who can know? It may still exert its own persuasive influence on a third and future social drama.

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