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**RELATIONS BETWEEN THE USA AND MEXICO AND THEIR REFLECTION IN  
THE CHICANO LITERATURE**

(diplomová práce)

Lucie Langrová

anglická filologie – španělská filologie

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Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Robert Hýsek

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Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jsem jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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## CONTENTS

1. Introduction	6
2. Outline of Mexican American relations	8
2.1. The USA and Mexico before 1848	8
2.1.1. The era of the conquistadores	9
2.1.2. Mexico under Spanish rule	11
2.2. 1848 – 1945	13
2.2.1. Mexican War	13
2.2.2. First Mexican Americans	15
2.2.3. Great Depression and the World War II	17
2.3. After the war	18
2.3.1. Pre-Chicanos	18
2.3.2. Chicano Movement	20
2.3.3. Contemporary situation	22
3. Chicano literature in general	24
3.1. Historical overview of the Chicano literature	24
3.1.1. Pre-Chicano literature	24
3.1.2. The birth of the Chicano	27
3.1.3. Florecimiento Chicano	29
3.2. Features of the Chicano literature	31
3.2.1. The form	31
3.2.2. The content	32
4. Analysis of selected texts	35
4.1. José Antonio Villareal: <i>Pocho</i> (1959)	35
4.1.1. Family Rubio and the American culture	35
4.1.2. Typical Chicano Features	37
4.1.2.1. Pochos and pachucos	37
4.1.2.2. Getting out of the barrio	39
4.1.2.3. Prejudice towards Mexican Americans	40
4.1.3. Relations between Mexico and the USA	42
4.1.4. Language	45
4.1.5. Conclusion	46
4.2. Rudolfo Anaya: <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> (1972)	47

4.2.1. Symbols and folklore	48
4.2.1.1. Ultima and the owl	48
4.2.1.2. The two competing families	50
4.2.2. Endless dichotomies in Anaya	52
4.2.3. Reflections of the real political situation	55
4.2.4. Language	58
4.2.5. Conclusion	60
4.3. Oscar Zeta Acosta: <i>The Revolt of the Cockroach People</i> (1973)	60
4.3.1. The Chicano lawyer and his clients	61
4.3.2. Language	63
4.3.3. Reflections of the real political situation	65
4.3.4. Acosta as a part of Chicano literary canon	68
4.3.5. Conclusion	70
5. Conclusion	71
Works cited	73
Shrnutí	76
Anotace diplomové práce	77

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this diploma thesis is to explore the relations between the USA and Mexico and how they are reflected in Chicano literature. To be able to see to what extent the Chicano works are or are not political, the thesis is divided into three parts that will give enough background information which will be used for analysis of three actual pieces of Chicano fiction. The objective is to see to what extent the Chicano works are treating political topics and if the writers share a constant point of view.

The first part of the thesis presents a short overview of the history of Mexican-American relations where the main focus is on the events that were crucial not only for the political development of the two countries but also for the Chicano authors. The information would not be too detailed as it is not necessary for the goal of this work and it can be divided into three main blocks.

The first block focuses on the period before the discovery of the new continent, it also describes the arrival of the Spaniards and the Spanish rule over the territory which then comprised both present day Mexico and the United States. The second part covers the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century where the special attention is given to the events of the year 1848 – the Mexican war. The last section reflects the situation after the WWII, especially the immigration from Mexico, the birth of the Chicano movement and the events that influenced it.

The second chapter offers a brief summary of the crucial works of the Chicano literature from its beginning until today. The most important names and tendencies are presented where the focus is on the works of fiction since three novels are analyzed in the last part. The Chicano literature is there also put into opposition with other ethnic literatures in the US and it is showed what are the most specific features that distinguish it from them and also from the “white” literature.

The last and longest part is an analysis of the three novels which are compared with all the information given in the previous sections and the main intention is to find out how their authors depict the relations between the US and Mexico and their opinion on them. The novels are *Pocho* by José Antonio Villareal, *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya and *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta.

The works were specifically chosen since each of them represents a different political attitude. Villareal is an exponent of an assimilationist tendency; Anaya serves us as a good example of an author who is not seen as a political writer and who has managed to pass from the Chicano readership to a wide audience that is not limited by nationality or skin color; Acosta is a politically engaged writer who uses his writing for defense of his own radical ideas.

The objective of this work is to see whether all the three analyzed authors share the same point of view with regards to the Mexican-American history and to what extent they are or are not politically neutral when depicting the historical events. Another aim is to see what era these writers see as an important one and if there is some consistency in that matter.

## **2. OUTLINE OF MEXICAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS**

Since the United States of America and Mexico are neighboring countries, it is obvious that history of these two territories has always been closely connected. In this place I would like to make a short overview of their relations as it is important to be aware of their common past full of conflicts to be able to understand a literature that is written by authors who are strongly influenced by these two very different cultures, the Mexican and the American.

I would like to divide this chapter dedicated to history into three sections going chronologically from the oldest events to the recent past. The first part would deal with the period until 1848, the second will start with the Mexican war and will finish with the World War II and the last one will reflect the contemporary history with a special focus on the birth and development of the Chicano movement.

### **2.1. THE USA AND MEXICO BEFORE 1848**

Even though it is not accurate to speak about the USA and Mexico as if they were two separate and independent countries during this period, I decided to name this chapter this way to be consistent with the terminology used in further sections of the text and to avoid misunderstandings. This part will be concerned especially with the development of Mexico since the beginnings of settlement in the area in the remote past because this territory then covered both a big part of the present-day USA and Mexico. Many events from this period are reflected in Chicano literature whose authors are often glorifying the famous Mexican past, especially the Aztec empire.

The first contacts between the European and Native American cultures began at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century when the American continent was discovered by Christopher Columbus on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1492. Despite the fact that nationality of Columbus was probably Italian, the voyage was done in the name of Spanish Catholic monarchs Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon who supported Columbus financially in his search for the new route to India. It was the Spanish kingdom that was the first European country that came into a close contact with the new continent. The Spaniards started with the conquest of the new territories and with implementing the language, religion and the state structure; nevertheless, they were soon joined by other nations.



### **2.1.1. The era of the conquistadores**

It is obvious that the discovery of a new continent did not equal a discovery of an uninhabited land and that the Spaniards were not the first people there. The region that interests us most, the present-day Mexico and contemporary USA countries bordering with it, had a long colorful history. We can find among its inhabitants ancient tribes of Olmecs, Mayas and Toltecs who are until today famous for their rich culture and advanced scientific discoveries. However, the civilization that was discovered by the Spanish conquistadores was the Aztec empire.

According to the legends the Aztecs came to Mexico from the north from the mystical region of Aztlán in search of the “promised land”. Historian Stan Steiner describes the legend that made them search for a new land in greater detail: “Huitzilopochtli, the sun and war god, prophesied that if the ancestors of the Aztecs would march south they would found a mighty kingdom. (...) they would find an eagle devouring a serpent, and on that spot they would begin to build a great nation.”<sup>1</sup>

The actual location of the region of Aztlán is not clear and opinions of experts differ regarding this topic. Michael Pina comments on the attempts to find the presumed location of Aztlán : “Its location had been a project of innumerable investigations, and remains unknown even today.”<sup>2</sup> It is assumed that it was somewhere in the United States territory or at the border between the US and Mexico.

It is important to mention this subject since the later Chicano activists worked extensively with the symbol of Aztlán as some kind of a lost paradise with its loss having a very negative impact on the future of the whole Mexican nation.<sup>3</sup> Some radical Chicano activists even claimed their right to have this area returned to them and the necessity to create some kind of independent or semi-independent country with the Mexican Americans as its main population; one of those political leaders was Reies Lopez Tijerina.

The Chicano writers also often worked with the old Aztec symbols that can frequently be found in their literature and which show their pride in the rich colorful history of their descendants. The authors also try to stick to the traditional meanings of these symbols. “The

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<sup>1</sup> Stan Steiner, *La Raza: The Mexican Americans* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970) 130.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Pina, “The Archaic, Historical and Mythicized Dimensions of Aztlán,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, ed. Rudolfo A. Anaya, and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications, 1998) 14.

<sup>3</sup> see Luis Leal, In Search of Aztlán,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, ed. Rudolfo A. Anaya, and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications, 1998) 7 – 8.

eagle, Aztlán, the Quinto Sol, and other Chicano symbols of Mexican origin form a part of a mythic system, a characteristic often attributed to the symbol.”<sup>4</sup> It might be interesting to remark that the contemporary Mexican authors do the very same thing as it is quite a natural tendency for all writers who go back into the past of their nation to choose moments they feel to be important and the most remarkable.

When we return to the point of the Spanish arrival to Mexico, it is the era of great prosperity of the Aztec empire with its capital city Tenochtitlán. “When the Spaniards entered their expanding domain in the 1519, they encountered a militaristic and theocratic kingdom of more than six million inhabitants stretching throughout southern Mexico.”<sup>5</sup> The name of the man who condemned it to doom was Hernán Cortés.

The story about the emperor Moctezuma who mistook the Spanish adventurer with one of the Aztec gods, Quetzalcoatl, whose arrival was foretold many years ago, is commonly known thus it is not necessary to repeat it again in this place. However, what might be interesting to mention and should be recalled is the name of a woman who had a crucial part in the conquest of the Aztec empire. It was the famous La Malinche, a native woman who due to her knowledge of Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, and ability to learn Spanish quickly became an interpreter and also a lover of Hernán Cortés. She turned into an essential figure in all the events because it was her who revealed to Cortés why he was offered such a friendly reception by the emperor and she enabled him to benefit from this fact as much as possible.

It is logical that in present-day Mexico Malinche is seen as a very controversial figure. “La Malinche has been transformed from a historical figure to a major Mexican and Latin American feminine archetype, a polysemous sign whose signifieds, for all their ambiguity, are generally negative. [...] Very few Mexicans before the modern period were willing to accept her as anything other than a prostitute or a traitor.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that an archetype of a Mexican female has been seen as a very negative character can be used in further analysis of treatment of women, both in Mexican families and literature which logically also appeared later in the Chicano literature.

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<sup>4</sup> Leal 8.

<sup>5</sup> Manuel G. Gonzales, *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000) 21.

<sup>6</sup> Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: from History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000) 2.

It is difficult for a Mexican or a Mexican American to come to terms with their ancestry and to define their identity based on the historical facts. If we see Malinche as a symbolical mother, then the mother is a traitor of her own nation. On the other hand, Cortés might be understood as a symbol of an aggressive father who came from abroad, destroyed the flourishing culture and established an oppressive regime.

According to Manuel G. Gonzales, Mexicans still do not have a stable and unified opinion on how to see their antecedents. The vision is gradually evolving and has passed through various stages already. As Gonzales notices: “today both Mexicans and Mexican Americans exalt their Indian roots (indigenismo) while denying or condemning their Spanish past. This is a vast change in perspective from the early twentieth century, when the exact opposite was the case.”<sup>7</sup>

### **2.1.2. Mexico under Spanish rule**

The three hundred years of Spanish domination on the Mexican territory, the viceroyalty of New Spain, are presently seen as a very controversial era marked by bloody massacres, exploitation of labor and mineral resources, etc. However, the veracity of this view is sometimes doubted because it is also a period marked by so-called Black Legend.<sup>8</sup> Leyenda negra is in the opinion of Jiří Chalupa from a great part responsible for the strongly negative evaluation of the Spanish role in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

This view is accepted not only by representatives of Latin American studies. According to Paul Allatson, the Black Legend is:

an anti-Spanish discourse said to have risen in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, an era of constant warfare and competition between Western European powers, and of conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism. (...) Anti-Spanish Europeans demonized the Spanish imperial project in the Americas as inhumane, cruel, irrational, and concerned only with exploitation and rapacious profit making.<sup>10</sup>

The deeds of the Spanish rulers cannot be glorified but we must keep in mind that this political tendency existed and it was one of the weapons that other European countries used to

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<sup>7</sup> David G. Gutiérrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 26.

<sup>8</sup> Black Legend is the term used for the false view of Spanish activities on the new continent which were “blackened” by other nationalities that were competing with them.

<sup>9</sup> see Jiří Chalupa, *Historia y geografía de América Latina* (Olomouc: Vydavatelství UP, 2000) 34.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Allatson, *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 36.

discredit the Spanish regime. The behavior of Spaniards did not differ that much from other European nations on the new continent. They all felt that the land belonged to them and they had a divine right to change it and cultivate it. As a reaction to the Black Legend, some Spanish historians created the White Legend later that was trying to do the exact opposite and was belittling and trivializing the Spanish rule and therefore was as unreliable and invalid as the Black Legend.<sup>11</sup>

Also the great life losses on the side of the original inhabitants are not only the result of the Spanish cruelty but sometimes became an unavoidable consequence of new life conditions that the Spaniards brought with them from Europe and they could not actually control. The Indians were in many cases dying in high numbers because of their contact with new European illnesses which their bodies did not know how to fight.

The native inhabitants had also a great defender who repeatedly stood up against their exploitation: he was Bartolomé de las Casas, also called Apóstol de los Indios (Apostle of the Indians). De las Casas wrote extensively in defense of the Indians but it was actually him who gave rise to the slave trade because even though he argued that human beings should not use other human beings as slaves, he suggested the transportation of black slaves from Africa to America. He did not consider black people as human beings and therefore regarded them suitable for work.<sup>12</sup>

The Mexican independence arrived 300 years after the fall of Tenochtitlán in 1821 when some changes in diversification of the society of New Spain started happening. The arrival of the movement for independence was influenced by various factors. The main reasons that made the revolt against the Spanish government possible were the European Enlightenment, revolutions in North America and France, the political situation in the home country which was by that time invaded by Napoleonic army, and the rise of power of the class of creoles<sup>13</sup> who started to demand a share on the government.<sup>14</sup>

The creoles in the capital took advantage of the atmosphere in the viceroyalty and in the end achieved what they wanted. Nevertheless, the situation in the new country was quite chaotic because even though the capital city was independent some other areas resisted the

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<sup>11</sup> see Moises Orfali, "The Spanish Apologia against the Black Legend," *Mighty Europe 1400 – 1700: Writing an Early Modern Continent*, ed. Andrew Hiscock (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007) 167.

<sup>12</sup> see Chalupa 35.

<sup>13</sup> Creoles were white inhabitants of New Spain who were born there and therefore were seen as inferior to the white aristocracy that came from Spain and ruled the country.

<sup>14</sup> see Gonzales 58 – 59.

new order. The big neighbor, the USA, sensed a big opportunity in this untransparent situation and started to work on achieving its own territorial goals in Texas. Manuel Gonzales claims that the “American interest in the rich agricultural lands of the Texas plains goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century.”<sup>15</sup>

The periods of Spanish rule and the wars for independence are not a very popular for the Chicano writers due to all the negative associations with this era mentioned above. Chicanos are, in general, much more fascinated by the Pre-Columbian times where they see their greatest fame.

## **2.2. 1848 – 1945**

This period is marked by a few historical events that had had a great influence on the development of the relations between the USA and Mexico. The era is marked by the Mexican war, the annexation of a vast territory to the US, the “emergence” of first Mexican Americans, and by the beginning of an influx of Mexican immigrants who started crossing the border in search for work.

### **2.2.1 Mexican War**

The Mexican War is one of the most controversial topics in the history of the USA and the opinions of historians differ widely on the issue whether the declaration of war against Mexico was justified or not. The experts of Mexican and Mexican American origin usually condemn the US policy; the American historians are far less radical. Most of them are aware of certain problematic aspects of the whole event but they also acknowledge the fact that the war largely contributed to the present form of the country.

Paul Allatson describes the consequences of the war on both sides of the border: “The Mexican-American War resulted in perhaps the most significant territorial expansion in the USA’s history, one that transformed the country into the territorial form recognizable today.

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<sup>15</sup> Gonzales 70.

In Mexico, however, the war established a legacy of bitterness and a widespread suspicion of US motives in the continent.”<sup>16</sup>

The USA were interested in the territory of Texas, California and New Mexico since the time Mexico gained independence and were using various ways to get it from simple negotiations to military provocations.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless the process was slow and gradual and the war itself was only its culmination.

The growing immigration from the US to Texas, initially supported by Mexican government that was trying to populate the territory, was the most important factor that led later to independence of Texas in 1836. The Americans who were coming in great quantities to the territory gradually outnumbered the Mexicans. In the end, Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845. The actual pretence which started the conflict between Mexico and the USA was a dispute over the determination of Texas border.

The war consisted of three quite separate campaigns in Texas, New Mexico and California and the Mexican troops were not able to equal their opponents in number, strategy or equipment in either of the territories. In 1847, the Americans entered Mexico City and the negotiations about the peace treaty began. According to Manuel G. Gonzales some American politicians thought about getting more territory than was finally taken. “Mexico lay prostrate. Many senators wondered why the entire country might not be annexed. Some suggested that all of Central America was ripe for taking.”<sup>18</sup>

In the final settlement Mexico lost 947,570 square miles of the area which represented almost half of its territory in those times but in terms of inhabitants less than 1% of its population and was paid \$15 million.<sup>19</sup> The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848 and since that time we can talk about new ethnic minority on the US territory, the Mexican Americans.

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<sup>16</sup> Allatson 160.

<sup>17</sup> see Glenn Hastedt, *Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Facts on File, 2004) 311 – 313.

<sup>18</sup> Gonzales 79.

<sup>19</sup> Gonzales 79.

### **2.2.2. First Mexican Americans**

The year 1848 is a date in the history of Mexican-American relations when a new ethnic minority was born. Today when we say a Mexican American, we usually imagine an immigrant. However, these people were not immigrants since they resided in territories which later became New Mexico, Nevada, Texas etc.<sup>20</sup> long before they became part of the US.

They just happened to become US citizens in 1848 after the Mexican War thanks to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. According to David Gutiérrez the document included these fundamental topics: “The treaty established the new border between the two nations, provided official recognition of the United States’ previous annexation of Texas, and provided for the payment by the United States of 15 million dollars to Mexico in exchange for Mexico’s former Northern provinces.”<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, the people who lived there were originally of the Mexican origin but after the war, due to the Treaty, they had to decide which citizenship they wanted to acquire. And as the treaty says, they were promised to have the same rights as other US citizens:

Mexicans now established in territories previously belonging to Mexico, and which remain for the future within the limits of the United States, as defined by the present treaty, shall be free to continue where they now reside, or to move at any time to the Mexican Republic. [...] Those who shall prefer to remain in the said territories, may either retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of the citizens of the United States.<sup>22</sup>

However, according to some historians the situation in reality was not as simple as the Treaty described. Vicki L. Ruiz describes the situation: “Mexicans on the US side of the border became second-class citizens, divested of their property and political power.”<sup>23</sup> This approach to these new Americans might be one of the sources of the later negative views on the Mexican immigrants who were coming to the USA to get jobs.

After these events, the first big wave of immigration from the south came in 1910s. These years were a time of great instability in Mexico, as they coincide with the era of Mexican Revolution that began in 1911 and ended in 1920, even though it is quite complicated to

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<sup>20</sup> see Chalupa 54.

<sup>21</sup> Gutiérrez 13.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Roche Rico, Sandra Mano, *American Mosaic: Multicultural Readings in Context* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991) 485.

<sup>23</sup> Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 5.

establish exact dates due to the fact that the political situation was quite chaotic.<sup>24</sup> Because of this political insecurity and the violence, which became a daily norm in the country as the revolution actually turned into fights for power between regional military leaders, many people decided to go to the north and start a new life there.

The Mexican Revolution originally started as a protest against the Mexican president and Dictator Porfirio Diaz initiated by his opponent Francisco Madero. However, the change in the leadership of the country did not produce peace but even more violence as Madero was assassinated shortly afterwards and those who took control over the country were revolutionaries fighting rather for their own benefits more than for the well-being of the nation; Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa among them.<sup>25</sup>

This period also coincides with the first political attempts to impose some restrictions on the number of people coming into the US. It is important to remember that the Mexicans were not the only nationality trying to fulfill their American dream. Even greater number of immigrants was coming from Europe and Asia and these diverse cultures posed a certain threat to residents already established in the US.

These events can be seen as the historical background for the origins of the melting pot theory. Alan Brinkley describes the situation and the feeling among the people as follows: “In the first decades of the century, therefore, pressure grew to close the nation's gates. New scholarly theories, appealing to progressive respect for expertise, argued that the introduction of immigrants into American society was diluting the purity of the nation's stock.”<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the Mexicans were not a subject of the Immigration Act of 1921 which was trying to unify the nation based on these assimilationist tendencies.<sup>27</sup> The reason for this might be that the Mexicans were still geographically, although probably not culturally, closer to the Americans than the newcomers from the remote countries. Geographical proximity was also a kind of a guarantee that these immigrants would go back home after they gained some money, a thing that could not be expected from people coming from Europe and Asia. Unfortunately, this certain positive attitude towards Mexicans did not last for a long time.

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<sup>24</sup> see Chalupa 61 – 62.

<sup>25</sup> see Gonzales 118.

<sup>26</sup> Brinkley 489.

<sup>27</sup> see Neil Campbell, *American Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1997) 54 – 55.



### **2.2.3. Great Depression and World War II**

The negative feelings turned against Mexicans later during the Great Depression era since a cheap Mexican labor represented a threat to unemployed American citizens who were not able to support their families. The reaction of the major white population was that “unemployed whites in the Southwest demanded jobs held by Hispanics, jobs that whites previously considered beneath them. Thus Mexican unemployment rose quickly to levels far higher than those for whites.”<sup>28</sup>

It is quite natural that the Anglo Saxon population began to feel hostility towards people who were taking their jobs. This hostility was one of the reasons why a lot of the Mexican immigrants started to leave the United States. Rosana Becerra describes the situation in that time: “An anti-Mexican feeling swept through the Southwest, resulting in mass repatriations.”<sup>29</sup>

Another reason for the negative feelings towards the Mexicans and consequently Mexican Americans might have been their growing self-confidence. Mexican Americans who now had lived in the USA for several generations already and whose number was rising due to the immigration became aware of the fact that they are treated differently than the rest of the society and started to demand equal rights as the white population had. The main problem that was discussed was the access to education as some of the Mexican children were not allowed to visit “white” schools.<sup>30</sup>

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the labor situation was changing rapidly according to the historical events and consequently also the feelings toward unskilled cheap labor from the south of the border were changing as well as the needs of the country and the industry. When the United States entered the war after the Pearl Harbor attack, suddenly a great number of workers entered war and there was even a higher pressure on the need of agricultural production. In this moment, the help from Mexico became more than useful.

However, this time the US government stayed more careful and issued certain restrictions that had to be fulfilled when the war was over. “Large numbers of Mexican workers entered the United States during the war in response to labor shortages. [...] The American and

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<sup>28</sup> Brinkley 661.

<sup>29</sup> Rosina M. Becerra, “The Mexican American Family,” *Ethnic Minorities in America: Patterns and Variations*, ed. Charles H. Mindel, et al (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing Co., 1988) 144.

<sup>30</sup> see Carlos Muñoz, *Youth, Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (London: Verso, 1989) 40.

Mexican governments agreed in 1942 to a program by which *braceros* (contract laborers) would be admitted to the United States for a limited time to work at specific jobs.”<sup>31</sup>

In the end the situation with these workers turned out differently than it was originally expected. After the war the immigrant workers were still needed by the producers and their number did not diminish. Manuel G. Gonzales describes it: “Intended as a wartime expedient, the Bracero Program proved to be so efficacious that it was maintained after the defeat of the Axis, albeit in modified forms.”<sup>32</sup> These people formed base of the Mexican Americans and with later immigrants who came later as the demand for labor in the postwar growth did not disappear but increased.

## **2.3. AFTER THE WAR**

There are several events that mark the period after 1945 concerning both the situation of the Mexican Americans in the country and the relations with Mexico connected with the problems on the US-Mexican border. The Mexican Americans began to realize that they are not treated equally with the majority society and started their fight against the discrimination which with the course of time was becoming more radical. The main inspiration for their demands was the similar claims of the African Americans in the 1960s.

At the same time the number of Mexican immigrants was rising quickly which resulted in stricter border policy on the part of the US and in conflicts with the Mexican government. Another important factor that has marked the relations between these two countries has been the drug trafficking.

### **2.3.1. Pre-Chicanos**

When the WWII ended, the ground was slowly getting ready for the arrival of the Chicano movement in the 1960s. Various factors influenced such a process. It was made possible due to the growth of Mexican American population and the slow and gradual creation of the Mexican American middle class which was usually represented by children of immigrants, i.e. second generation immigrants. These people had already spent all their lives in the United

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<sup>31</sup> Brinkley 734.

<sup>32</sup> Gonzales 171.

States. Manuel Gonzales points out that the share of this people on the fight for the civil rights is often underestimated by Chicano historians who focus only on the radical poor and blamed the middle class for cooperation with the government.<sup>33</sup>

The middle class is not radical by nature and therefore any advancement in the fight against the discrimination was quite small, however, these people helped to prepare the ground for their more radical followers in the 1960s and 1970s. LULAC (The League of United Latin-American Citizens) participated in *Mendez v. Westminster* trial in 1946 where the Mendez family sued California elementary school Westminster because the school board did not let their children attend their school because of their skin color. The court of appeals decided in favor of the Mendez family and this decision was later used as a precedent for the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1950s the situation of members of ethnic minorities started to change in the USA. The most important event of this era is the creation of the civil rights movement started by Martin Luther King, Jr. The African American movement served as an example for the Chicano activists in the 1960s. The first time Mexican Americans started to become directly involved in politics was the creation of Viva Kennedy clubs.<sup>35</sup> More information on Viva Kennedy clubs is offered by Jeffrey D. Schultz: “Kennedy was seen as sympathetic, understanding and supportive of Latino political, economic and social needs. [...] many Mexican Americans began to involve themselves enthusiastically in the electoral process for the first time.”<sup>36</sup>

There were various reasons why the Mexican American civil rights movement appeared with a delay and did not evolve at the same time with the African American and all of them together form an interesting mixture. The immigrant community held a negative attitude toward politics and their socioeconomic situation was not good as well. Mexican immigrants in the US often believed that they would return home some day and saw their situation as temporary. Also many immigrants were not at the US territory legally so they could not

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<sup>33</sup> see Gonzales 178 – 187.

<sup>34</sup> see Muñoz 62.

<sup>35</sup> Viva Kennedy clubs were political clubs that were created to support JFK in his presidential campaign. It was the first time when the Mexican Americans took an active part in American politics.

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey D. Schultz, *Encyclopedia of Minorities in American Politics: Hispanic Americans and Native Americans* (Phoenix: The Oryx Press, 2000) 526.

participate in any political activities and finally, the major society discouraged any political participation.<sup>37</sup>

The Chicano Movement, therefore, arrived a decade later after the African American civil rights movement.

### **2.3.2. Chicano Movement**

It would be appropriate in this place to explain what the word Chicano actually means and what social group denominates itself this way. It is important to know that the Mexican American does not equal Chicano and that Chicano is not a politically neutral expression. Paul Allatson defines Chicano as follows:

Chicano/a is a neocultural sign, and a neosubjective outcome, of a history of conquest, transcultural contact, and migration, spanning more than 150 years. Originally a term of disparagement for working-class Americans, Chicano was adopted as a collective identity marker in the 1960s by the Chicano Movement. The term announced a break among generational and aspirational lines between Mexican American student and worker activists, and older Mexican Americans. It also signified a desire to differentiate from other Latino/a sectors and to affirm Chicanos as a distinct US minority formed by invasion, colonization and capitalist exploitation.<sup>38</sup>

Another interesting aspect is the attempts to trace the origin of this word which have not been until now entirely successful and the exact origin of the word is not certain. Rafaela Castro offers various possibilities:

...one theory circulating during the late 1960s was that the word came from the Mexican city of Chihuahua, and that the *chi* from that name was added to the *cano* of *Mexicano*, and this gave birth to Chicano. Another theory gives Chicano an indigenous base, derived from the *Mexicas* who pronounced the x as “sh,” so they were called *Meshicas*, and the word *Mexicano* came from *Meshicano*. Eventually the *me* was dropped and the word became *Chicano*. A third theory is that when large numbers of Anglo Americans migrated into northern Mexico and the Southwest, they called all Mexicans “*chico*,” equivalent to the designation “boy” for African Americans in the south.<sup>39</sup>

There were two major groups that were fighting independently from each other for the Chicano cause: the rural and the urban. The most important representative of the countryside and probably the most famous Chicano activist was César Chávez who initiated a creation of

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<sup>37</sup> see Gonzales 186 – 187.

<sup>38</sup> Allatson 61.

<sup>39</sup> Rafaela Castro, *Chicano Folklore: A Guide to the Folktales, Traditions, Rituals and Religious Practices of Mexican-Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 46 – 47.

the Farm Workers Association (1962) which was supposed to defend the rights of agricultural workers, and was a supporter of non-violent solutions of conflicts. His favorite tools to achieve his goals were strikes – one of the most famous was the Delano Strike of the peasants in Delano, California (1965 – 1970) – and boycotts of the goods produced by certain farmers. César Chávez is sometimes criticized by more radical Chicano activists, especially students from the cities, for being too passive and not as politically involved as they were.<sup>40</sup>

The Mexican American population from the cities was different from the farm workers; these people often left the country for urban areas to get a better life. However, they often ended even poorer because the cities, especially Los Angeles, did not have enough well-paid jobs for them as they imagined. Therefore, also the ideas of the leaders of these people were more radical. The representative of the cities, Reies López Tijerina was the first one to come with the utopian theory that the territory that became part of the USA in 1848 should be returned to the Chicanos. There they would create their independent “ideal” state.<sup>41</sup>

The last important spokesman of the Chicanos was Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales who focused on young people and was a defender of the idea that the mythical land of Aztlán was to be found in the Southwest. He also participated in the creation of a political party La Raza Unida (1970) and is an author of an epic political poem “I Am Joaquín” that was first published in 1967. There he describes feelings of an individual in between two different cultures not feeling as a part of any of them.

Carlos Muñoz explains why Gonzales was so popular especially among the students: “This search for identity and the dilemmas are the keys to understand the Chicano student movement [...] the movement was a quest for identity, an effort to recapture what had been lost through the socialization process imposed by US schools and other institutions.”<sup>42</sup> As it usually happens with young people they became the most radical part of the Chicano Movement, often inspired by the Marxist ideas that they got to know at universities or colleges.

In the 1970s, there another stream of the Chicanismo appeared which was the Chicana Movement that represented Mexican American women. The situation of Chicanas was similar

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<sup>40</sup> see Gonzales 201.

<sup>41</sup> see Jorge J. Klor de Alva, “Aztlán, Borinquen and Hispanic Nationalism in the United States,” *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, ed. Rudolfo A. Anaya, and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: El Norte Publications, 1998) 150.

<sup>42</sup> Muñoz 76.

to the one of African American women since they too suffered double discrimination as members of an ethnic minority and as females since the men in Mexican families are the main centres of attention.<sup>43</sup> The issues Chicanas focused on were child care, sexual discrimination, abortion and birth control.<sup>44</sup>

The most typical feature of the Chicano Movement is its heterogeneity which prevented any unification on the national level and therefore also the accomplishments are quite small in comparison with the achievements of the African Americans. One of its most important results is the Chicano Renaissance one decade later part of which is also the Chicano literature. The greatest credit goes to the political leaders for the fact that they made Mexican Americans think about their ethnic legacy, about things that make them different from the major population and what links them with it.

### **2.3.3. Contemporary situation**

The situation of Mexican immigrants began to change quite dramatically since 1980s onwards. Mexico has been top country sending both legal and illegal immigrants<sup>45</sup> to the US; therefore the total number of them is rising very quickly. This factor is closely connected with the increasingly negative view of the Mexicans seen by the rest of American society and the increasing demand for setting limits of immigration.

The conflicts about the situation on Mexican-American border are one of two major factors that has been influencing the relations between these two countries, the other factor being the drug trafficking. The attitude of the political administration has always depended on what political party was “occupying” the White House. The Republican administration has generally been representing the stricter policy; unlike the Democrats who have since Kennedy depended on the votes of Mexican Americans and consequently have not been so radical in the measures that were taken.

Even though these political disputes are quite fascinating, the Chicano writers I have chosen for my analysis do not reflect them because their major works that will be discussed in

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<sup>43</sup> see Becerra 148.

<sup>44</sup> see Gonzales 218.

<sup>45</sup> see Alejandro Portes, Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 355.

following chapters were written in the 1960s and 1970s. That is why I have decided not to deal with this period in more detail in this text.

In this first part of my diploma thesis I tried to mention briefly the major political events that mark the history of the US and Mexico from the oldest times when those two countries did not even exist, over the era of Spanish colonization and Mexican war, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century that is marked by immigration from Mexico to the US total numbers of which have been in general rising every decade.

### **3. CHICANO LITERATURE IN GENERAL**

The term Chicano literature and Chicano writer is mainly associated with the Chicano movement, however, it would be wrong to think that the Chicanos started their writing out of nowhere and that they had nothing to draw experience from. Mexican American literature appeared together with Mexican Americans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its foundations were set even before that.

This chapter will offer a brief overview of the Mexican American literature both before and after the arrival of Chicanos. It will deal with its basic characteristics that make it different from the mainstream American literature and also from literature of the other ethnic minorities in the USA. It will be focused on the main ideas and the most important authors. The aim of this chapter is to show why the Chicano literature is an important part of the contemporary American literature and why it is worth our attention.

#### **3.1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHICANO LITERATURE**

Literary critics differ in the usage of terms Chicano and Mexican American literature. Some of them see the year 1848 as the actual birth of this type of literature and neglect the creation in the periods before that since its authors were not technically Mexican Americans. The other problem is the terminology used which denominates the ethnic group. Some authors call Chicano writers all Mexican Americans writing after 1848, some of them use it just for the direct “products” of the Chicano movement while others save the term also for their predecessors who were writing in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

##### **3.1.1. Pre-Chicano literature**

The first author who was writing in Spanish about the territory of the USA, a country which by that time was not even created, was the Spanish explorer Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. His fascinating life story might be even today attractive for the readers. His *Relation of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca* describes his voyage to the new continent, the shipwrecking and his life among the native inhabitants of the territory of



contemporary Texas and its neighboring states until he was saved many years later by another Spanish ship and returned home to Spain.<sup>46</sup>

The area of American Southwest has been for a long time no kind of a cultural centre with prolific literature writing. Due to the fact that the inhabitants of this part of the US were either Native Americans or mestizos the most flourishing for a long time was the oral culture, the folklore, especially legends. An interesting fact is that the most popular protagonists of these legends have been three female figures: La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona. All three of them are still popular with contemporary Chicano writers who often depict them as powerful symbols.

The story of La Malinche has been commented on already and the character of La Llorona (The Weeping Woman) is sometimes associated with her as well. It is so because the story of La Llorona is a story of a woman who killed her children and one of the versions of the amorous history between La Malinche and Hernán Cortés also counts with the motive of a murdered child that Malinche had with him.<sup>47</sup> However, there are many versions that exist of the story of La Llorona.

In general, it can be said that this legend is about a woman who was abandoned by her husband or lover. This man left her alone with her children and the woman did not know what to do next. The reasons why the men leave her differ; the man may be of a higher social status, La Llorona is a prostitute, etc. "Angry and seeking revenge, she kills her children by throwing them into the river, or sometimes by other means. When she realizes what she has done, she goes insane. She is condemned to spend eternity searching for her lost and dead children. Consequently she is often heard in the night calling her children."<sup>48</sup>

The last and very popular folk tales figure is the Virgin of Guadalupe and the miracles linked to her presence. The legend is described by Richard Gray: "According to the legend, the Virgin appeared to a poor Indian in 1531 on a sacred site associated with an Indian goddess of fertility. She asked for a cathedral to be built to her over the site of an Aztec place of worship, which it then was."<sup>49</sup> After looking at the original version of the story it can be easily understood why the Virgin of Guadalupe is so popular in Mexico and among Chicanos.

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<sup>46</sup> see Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 24.

<sup>47</sup> see Castro 141.

<sup>48</sup> Castro 140.

<sup>49</sup> Gray 64.

This religious figure links the Christian and Native American elements because it builds a catholic temple on an Aztec sight and thus is a great personification of the mestizo culture.

The first pieces of Mexican American literature which would begin to form a distinctive cultural current appeared after 1848, i.e. in a time when also the Mexican Americans appeared as a new cultural minority in the USA. Their primary creation proceeded from the oral tradition and its products were the corridos, ballads, influenced by the Spanish ballads and romances, which expressed the pride of the new ethnic minority and their resistance against the gradual Americanization.

Raymund Paredes explains the origin of the word corrido: “The name derives from the verb *correr* – to run – and the corrido does just that ; it is a fast-paced narrative ballad, usually with a theme of struggle, adventure, or catastrophe.”<sup>50</sup> Corridos form a part of the folkloric creation and therefore are anonymous and there exist usually more versions of one corrido. Among the most popular works we can place those that describe lives of men who revolted against the American oppression in former Mexican territory: Gregorio Cortez and Juan Nepomuceno Cortina.<sup>51</sup> The corridos stayed popular among the Mexican American public for almost one hundred years from 1840s to 1930s.

The language of the corridos is Spanish which underwent an interesting development as the time went by and it reflects the change in speech of Mexican Americans in that period. It shows how their language became “infected” with Americanisms and it somewhat confirms the gradual acculturation of Mexican Americans.

The prose writing of that period focused especially on descriptions of the political events and places, therefore the most popular genres were chronicles and books of travels. The most important chronicle written from a Mexican American point of view is *Recuerdos históricos y personales tocante a la Alta California* by Mariano Vallejo in 1875. Although written in Spanish, the author in this autobiographical work declared himself in favor of the colonization and acculturation since he became a prominent citizen with high military post in the new regime.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Raymund Paredes, “The Evolution of Chicano Literature,” *Three American Literatures*, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1982) 35.

<sup>51</sup> see Eric J. Sundquist, “The Literature of Expansion and Race,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Prose Writing 1820 – 1865*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 166 – 167.

<sup>52</sup> see Sundquist 168.

The first works of fiction started to appear in the same time as the chronicles. Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton became one of the pioneers in this genre with her two novels *Who Would Have Thought It?* and *The Squatter and the Don: A Novel Descriptive of Contemporary Occurrences in California* and her importance should not be diminished even though her works were rediscovered only a few years ago. Her novels are valuable to us because she was one of the few who had experience with both Mexican and American point of view since she came from a Mexican American family but married an American. Nevertheless, in spite of her life in comfort among the white majority, the author stands usually in favor of the oppressed minority, hence her importance for contemporary Chicano writers.<sup>53</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the use of Spanish began to give its way to English in writing, nevertheless, this situation lasted only until 1910s when the immigrants from the Mexican revolution started entering the country. Unfortunately, this period did not produce any distinctive writer whose works would qualitatively surpass or at least reach the level of the novels written by non-ethnic authors. The only interesting trend that could be noted is the number of Mexican American women who were writing such as María Cristina Mena or Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca.

### **3.1.2. The birth of the Chicano**

Also the first author that marks the thematic transition towards what later became Chicano literature is a woman. Josephina Niggli was one of the first 20<sup>th</sup> century writers who had the Mexican American issues as their main topic and who was critically thinking about their problems and was trying to find the solutions. Her most important work is *Mexican Village* which is by some critics considered as a novel (e.g. Luis Leal) and by some as a collection of relating stories that are unified by the place setting of the town of Hidalgo (e.g. Raymund Paredes).

The main character of the novel Bob Webster is trying to understand his identity which leads to Mexico, the country of origin of his ancestors. The author describes the typical feeling of a Mexican American who feels neither American, nor Mexican and therefore

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<sup>53</sup> see Susan L. Mizruchi, "Becoming Multicultural: Culture, Economy, and the Novel, 1860 – 1920," *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Prose Writing, 1860 – 1920*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 555 – 557.

considers himself as incomplete. Raymund Paredes assesses the literary contribution of Niggli: “*Mexican Village* stands as a major transitional work in the development of Chicano fiction. [...] Niggli’s greatest achievement was to delineate an important aspect of Mexican-American experience and to create a distinctive ambience for its presentation.”<sup>54</sup>

Another important writer and the first person to introduce the word Chicano in literature was Mario Suárez in 1947. Suárez is an author of sketches that appeared in *Arizona Quarterly* and the word was used to describe inhabitants of a fictional town El Hoyo.<sup>55</sup> For the first time, the writer when he speaks about the residents of El Hoyo, he does not use the term Mexican Americans but prefers the word Chicanos. Another important writer who began writing in this period and is actually an author of the first Chicano novel is José Antonio Villareal in 1959. His most important novel *Pocho* will be analyzed in detail in an independent section in the next chapter.

The first products of what later became to be known as the Chicano Renaissance, or Florecimiento Chicano (Chicano Flowering) started to appear during the tense atmosphere of the 1960s and therefore these works were intensively political. They were one-act plays by Luis Valdez who is also a founder of Teatro Campesino (Peasant Theatre) and who used his plays as a tool which was supposed to help him with spreading his political ideas. The plays were often used in political fight since they are able to react more quickly to the current situation than fiction and they are more easily accessible for the wide public than poetry.

Works by Valdez became a part of the Chicano Movement in the countryside where they “were presented in the open fields, where the campesinos worked, often in the midst of a huelga (strike). His topics were inspired by the problems faced by the farmworkers; later he began to make use of historical subject matter.”<sup>56</sup> The aim of the plays was to motivate and inspire the agricultural workers in their fight.

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<sup>54</sup> Paredes 55.

<sup>55</sup> see Werner Sollors, “Ethnic Modernism,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Prose Writing, 1910 – 1950*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 503.

<sup>56</sup> Luis Leal, Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez, “Chicano literature,” *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 568.

### **3.1.3. Florecimiento Chicano**

The greatest problem the Chicano authors had to face was that the publishing houses were not interested in publishing of their works as they could not imagine a readership that would like to read this type of literature. Therefore the year 1967 is an essential date closely connected with the whole history of the Chicano literature because an independent Chicano publishing house Quinto Sol Publications was established in California.<sup>57</sup>

One of crucial products of the Quinto Sol Publications was the Quinto Sol literary prize that was first awarded in 1970 and its first three winners belong to the most important Chicano writers until today and their works are read not only by Mexican Americans but by a wide public. They were Tomás Rivera who got it for his novel ... *y no se lo tragó la tierra* (This Migrant Earth or The Earth Did Not Devour Him), Rudolfo Anaya for his *Bless Me, Ultima* and Rolando Hinojosa for *Estampas del valle y otras obras* (Sketches of the Valley and Other Works).

The most famous work of Tomás Rivera as its title suggests was written in Spanish and translated into English afterwards, its form is rather experimental and it is not easy to describe it simply as a novel. Richard Gray gives further information: “Two vignettes frame the book. Within that frame there are twelve brief stories or *estampas* common to Spanish and Latin American fiction, interspersed with thirteen sketches. The links between these different themes are tonal and thematic.”<sup>58</sup> The political background for the plot is the Korean War since the plot is set between 1945 and 1955, the form is of a bildungsroman which is a type of writing that is considerably popular among Chicano authors.

Next holder of the Quinto Sol literary Prize is Rudolfo Anaya for his *Bless Me, Ultima* which is one of the most famous works ever written by a Chicano author. This symbolical novel will be commented on in detail in the next section, in this place we should just mention that Anaya is still an active author until today. He does not work only as a writer but also is an editor of various anthologies of Chicano writings. Nevertheless, his most famous works are the first three that he has written and which form a loosely connected trilogy: *Bless Me, Ultima*, *Heart of Aztlán* and *Tortuga*.

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<sup>57</sup> The name Quinto Sol (the fifth son) comes out of Aztec mythology since the Aztecs believed in cyclical conception of time (the suns) where every cycle ends with the destruction of the world as we know it and a start of a new one. This process would happen only five times, the fifth time the world should be destroyed for good.

<sup>58</sup> Gray 775.

The most famous work by Rolando Hinojosa is often compared to the one by Tomás Rivera since the language, the form and the setting are quite similar. Both the authors write in Spanish, use the form of the *estampa* and the setting is for both of them southern Texas and the Korean War. There are four different kinds of a narrative in the work by Hinojosa: twenty portraits of the valley and its inhabitants, six different accounts of the same murder, a chronicle devoted to the lives of Texas Mexicans and recollections of previous personal experiences of one of the protagonists.<sup>59</sup>

1980s are marked by the beginning of production of Chicana writers (female authors), two main representatives of which would be Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo. These writers added a new point of view and also their main protagonists were women. Federico de Latierro adds one more feature that distinguishes Chicana literary production from their male counterparts when he says that we: “...encontramos a bastantes autoras chicanas que desafían a su propia cultura chicana debido a las características de dominación masculina que demuestra.”<sup>60</sup>

The first work by Sandra Cisneros that gave her a critical attention was *The House on Mango Street*, a novella that is comprised of a series of short vignettes which at first sight have not much in common except of the narrator, young girl Esperanza. The story reveals itself gradually as the reading goes on, and the author focuses on destinies of various women living in a poor quarter of Chicago and the struggle of the main protagonist to overcome the shadow of the *barrio* and to get somewhere else. Another well-known work by Cisneros is her short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*.

Ana Castillo is author of novels *The Mixquiahuala Letters* and *Sapagonia*. The writer as Cisneros and her other colleagues concentrates on women issues and problems with the Mexican American cultural heritage as her background. Other famous Chicana authors are Alma Villanueva and Denise Chávez.

Some of the Chicano writers who were writing in 1990s and after the year 2000 would be Daniel Cano, Lionel G. García, Dagoberto Gilb or René Saldaña, Jr.

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<sup>59</sup> see Cyrus R.K. Patell, “Legacies of the Sixties,” *The Cambridge History of American Literature: Prose Writing 1940 – 1990*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 622.

<sup>60</sup> “We can find a lot of Chicana writers who rebel against their own Chicano culture because of its dominant masculine characteristics which it shows.” (translated into English by LL)  
Federico de Latierro, “Algunas reflexiones para entender la literatura chicana,” *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*, ed. Rosa Morillas Sánchez, Manuel Villar Raso (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2000) 99.

### **3.2. FEATURES OF CHICANO LITERATURE**

The fact that Chicano literature in many aspects differs not only from the mainstream literature but also from other ethnic minorities literatures comes from the different ethnic history of the Mexican population in the US which has been described already. The most specific feature that is not shared by any of the minorities is the fact that a considerable number of Mexican Americans were not immigrants and they became US citizens due to historical events, not because they wanted to be.

In this place it would be appropriate to mention briefly what the Chicano literature shares with other ethnic minority literatures. If Mexican American literature is compared with the African American literature, which we might see as a prominent ethnic literature, we can observe that the thing those two groups have in common is the racial discrimination since members of both of them are easily recognizable for the different skin color. Their authors and activists also began to teach their people to become proud of the fact that they were different. Nevertheless, the Chicano writers do not have to deal with the historical trauma of being torn out of the native land and the slavery. The consequent work in low paid positions, poverty and worse level of education are shared again by both minorities.

When we look at the Mexican Americans that came voluntarily in search for work after 1848 and compare them with other nationalities that were also coming to the USA in great numbers, the main difference has been that due to the geographical proximity the Mexicans often planned not to stay for a long time which gets reflected in the fact that the Chicano literary creation started a little later.

#### **3.2.1. The form**

Chicano writers have been producing all the basic literary genres: poetry, prose and drama, and those they were writing in three possible languages. The authors write in English, Spanish or have the option to combine the two and write in Spanglish or *caló* which is “a Spanish word that originally denoted a Gitano or gypsy dialect in Spain. However, among Chicanos/as *caló* refers to the working-class urban Chicano-Spanish dialect [...], and is often used synonymously with Spanglish as well.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Allatson 52.

When deciding what language to choose the writers must think about different aspects that the decision would bring them. Writing in English (e.g. Rudolfo Anaya) equals the possibility to reach the widest audience because the books are comprehensible both for the majority of the Mexican Americans and for the rest of the population as well. Spanish text (e.g. Rolando Hinojosa) means kind of a political statement, the author somewhat renounces the American culture and announces to be a part of the Mexican world. An interesting fact is that since the Chicano writers usually know both languages, they often translate their own works into the other language.

The case of caló would be the most complicated and it would reach the smallest audience because the readers must know both the languages and also have some experience with certain specific features of this dialect. Therefore they are not commonly known among the majority readership.

As regards a genre that would be popular among Chicano writers, we can say that very often the works by these authors contain quite a high number of autobiographical features. The main source of inspiration is the personal experience of the writer and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish where the autobiography ends and the fiction starts. Antonio Márquez comments on this phenomenon: “The blurring of the distinctions between fiction and autobiography has contributed to the expansion of Chicano/a literature by creating a form that quite appropriately reflects the problematic nature of Chicano life and culture.”<sup>62</sup> The consequence of this kind of creation is also reflected in the popularity of the genre of Bildungsroman among Chicano writers.

### **3.2.2. The content**

There are central themes and issues that regularly appear in the Chicano literature and the writers are trying to find the answers for the questions their protagonists ask. The most common problems that the Chicano writers are trying to solve are the questions of identity which the protagonists, who are often immigrants, ask themselves. Since the characters often do not feel to be neither Americans, nor Mexicans, the question of discrimination from the part of the majority population and the problematic cultural heritage where certain parts are

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<sup>62</sup> Antonio C. Márquez, “Crossing border(s): autobiography, fiction and the hybrid narrative,” *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*, ed. Rosa Morillas Sánchez, Manuel Villar Raso (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2000) 212.



emphasized and praised while others are neglected, are some of the topics that are frequently chosen. Other popular themes would be the family relationships where the most important figure is the father and the struggle of the protagonists to overcome their ethnic heritage and to get out of the barrio (the neighborhood).

If we start with the feelings of an immigrant who has become part of a new culture, according to José Serrano, Chicanos have three possibilities how to deal with the situation. They can either accept the Anglo Saxon society and culture and take them as their own, they can in accordance with the melting pot theory give up part of their cultural heritage and therefore contribute to the creation of specific US culture that would be combined of all immigrant cultures, or the last possibility is the cultural pluralism or the Salad Bowl where all the American cultures would exist next to each other with no rivalry whatsoever.<sup>63</sup>

Different writers choose different options which often depend on the era they were writing in and also their political preferences. Therefore the attitude of José Antonio Villareal is much less radical than the view of Oscar Zeta Acosta who was creating a decade later. The view on assimilation also reflects the relationship of the author to both the countries, Mexico and the USA. In general it can be said that the more negative relationship towards the USA, the more positive it is towards Mexico.

What is often seen very positively is the famous Aztec past before the arrival of Spaniards and other Europeans. Chicanos are also very proud of their skin color, calling themselves brown and highlighting the mixing of races (mestizaje) as a Mexican phenomenon. In words of Juan Bruce-Novoa: “Other Chicanos emphasize the mestizaje process itself, turning it into the virtue that distinguishes us from the Europeanized North American and making Mexico the cradle of a new race.”<sup>64</sup>

Another interesting feature concerning the relationship of Chicanos towards other nationalities would be the negative view of Spanish people even though these writers actually do not come into contact with them. Bruce-Novoa has an interesting explanation for that:

“Hispanophobia is nothing new in Mexico and its presence in Chicano literature is, on the one hand, inherited, and, on the other, a reaction against any element of European culture, synonymous with capitalism, imperialism and oppression. Today’s Yankee is the contemporary version of the

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<sup>63</sup> see José Cañero Serrano, “La comunidad chicana y la colonia estadounidense,” *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*, ed. Rosa Morillas Sánchez, Manuel Villar Raso (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2000) 80 – 81.

<sup>64</sup> Juan Bruce-Novoa, *RetroSpace: Collected Essays on Chicano Literature, Theory and History* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1990) 54.

Spaniard of the conquest and colonial periods. [...] All of them represent foreign power which has violated the indigenous people's original purity."<sup>65</sup>

The topic that is regularly treated is the racial discrimination which is encountered most often by the characters who are trying to overcome the fate of their parents who have spent their lives working in menial job positions. They are people who are no longer handicapped by the lack of language knowledge; however, they are still treated differently than the rest of the society even though they might be as talented as the white children. This situation might also provoke a tension within the Mexican American family since the parents sometimes discourage their offspring from trying to change their life and to get out of the barrio.

Another central issue of the Chicano literature is the family and the relationships within it. Federico de Latierro explains: "La familia es el eje central de la cultura. Mediante ella se establece una compleja red que se extiende desde los parientes cercanos hasta los *compadres*, *padrinos*, *concuños* y llega hasta la "familia" de la comunidad. Es imposible entender al chicano sin entender la importancia de la familia."<sup>66</sup>

The most important person in the Mexican American family is the father and right after him the oldest son, the women are supposed to listen to them and do what they are told. Even though the women are those who hold the family together, surprisingly they are often important characters in the works by Chicano writers. Mirandé and Enríquez comment on this and explain why the figure of the mother is so crucial in the Chicano literature as well: "Ties between mother and son are incredibly strong in Chicano literary works and might be called a trait inherent in Chicano culture itself. A mother's endurance in adversity endows her with strength that sustains her children as well as herself."<sup>67</sup>

In this section I tried to present briefly the most important representatives of the history of the Chicano literature and to comment on the most important features which distinguish the Chicano works from other ethnic minority authors. Many of these characteristics are directly influenced by the relations between the USA and Mexico as the writers go often to the history and they are not afraid of adopting clear political attitudes.

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce-Novoa 53.

<sup>66</sup> "The family is the central axis of the culture. It helps to establish a complex red stretched out from close relatives to one's godfathers, one's children's godfathers, brother's brothers-in-law and it goes to community "family." It is impossible to understand the Chicano without understanding the importance of the family." (translation into English by LL) de Latierro 102.

<sup>67</sup> Alfredo Mirandé, Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 167.

## **4. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED TEXTS**

In this chapter I would like to analyze three novels by Chicano authors from a literary point of view and see how the facts and features discussed above are reflected in them with a special attention to the reflections of the Mexican-American relations. The novels to be analyzed are José Antonio Villareal's *Pocho* (1959), Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) and Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973). These three books were written in different periods of time and also their authors had very different purposes when writing them. Those range from merely esthetic to purely political. In my opinion, all three authors have an important role in the history of the Chicano literature, representing different views on given issues.

### **4.1. JOSÉ ANTONIO VILLAREAL: *POCHO* (1959)**

This book is often considered as the first Chicano novel ever written.<sup>68</sup> Therefore we should not expect elevated artistic qualities from the text but rather an interesting testimony of a certain generation. However, we can already find in it some basic features of what later became to be called Chicano literature.

The novel describes a story of a Mexican family called Rubio, immigrants who came to the USA after the revolution and we can watch their struggle for better life in the new country. The author covers quite a long time span; he begins with the Mexican revolution in 1910s and ends with the World War II. Most of the story is told through the eyes of the oldest son, Richard, whose coming of age can be seen in his growing awareness of the things that are happening around him and their consequences. We can see the gradual change from an innocent child to a responsible young man who in the end must face a moral dilemma since he has to choose between taking care of his family and trying to live his American dream.

#### **4.1.1. Family Rubio and the American culture**

The most striking features of the novel are two gradual processes: the slow Americanization of Richard's family and at the same time its slow disintegration which

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<sup>68</sup> Paredes 58.

culminates when Juan Rubio, the father of the family, and later even Richard decide to leave the mother and the sisters. The reasons for this act can be found in the story itself.

At the very beginning of the story which is set in Mexico, we can see a typically male dominated family as has already been described above. The father, Juan Rubio, is a type of an “ultramacho” who is able to kill a man with no real reason and with his young wife patiently waiting for him while he is behaving as if he did not have any. When he is asked whether he had left his wife or not, his answer is: “I do not know yet.”<sup>69</sup>

This utterance might be crucial for the later development of the story because it shows us that even though Mexicans are strongly family oriented,<sup>70</sup> it is acceptable for a man to leave his wife and kids without explanation. Therefore the act of leaving the family is not a product of the Americanization, and it is necessary to look into the text and find the real reasons for such an action

Eventually, Juan Rubio leaves for the USA with Consuelo and the kids. In the new country, all of them are forced to live in a new culture and are trying to accommodate to it. As we learn from the novel, the family does not live in any type of a closed Mexican community; the neighbourhood is inhabited by people of various nationalities with whom the Rubios are being constantly compared.

We witness the gradual social advancement of the family, the father of the family trying to fulfill his American dream. However, this development is seen by Raymund Paredes as the main reason of the final disintegration of the family which he describes as Juan’s fault because his “tragedy is his failure to recognize – much less understand – the assimilationist forces reshaping his family’s values. In Villareal’s rather simplistic formulation, the Rubio family comes apart at precisely the same rate that Juan advances financially.”<sup>71</sup>

While the main change in the life of Juan is the financial prosperity, in the case of the female characters the synonym of the Americanization would be their gradual independence. When Consuelo sees the way of life around her, she begins to accept the new norms and starts leaving the old stereotypes behind and start requires to be treated adequately by her husband.

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<sup>69</sup> José Antonio Villareal, *Pocho* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989) 12.

<sup>70</sup> see Becerra 147 – 149.

<sup>71</sup> Raymund A. Paredes, “Mexican American Authors and the American Dream,” *MELUS*, vol. 8, no. 4, The Ethnic American Dream (Winter, 1981) 76.

On one hand, her husband is not willing to change any of his habits as one of their arguments can show us. “You are thinking yourself an American woman – well, you are not one and you should know your place. You have shelter, and you have food and clothing for you and the children. Be content! What I do outside the house is not your concern.”<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, Consuelo is becoming more and more self-confident and she stops accepting the way her husband treats her. When Richard is contemplating the situation in his family, he realizes that his “mother was a different person altogether now, and constantly interfered when her husband was in the act of disciplining a child, and these interferences grew until they flared into violent quarrels.”<sup>73</sup>

Similar processes can be traced also in case of Richard’s sisters who cease to see the father as an authority. According to Thomas Vallejos “the final outcome of the novel is the undermining of Chicano family and community ties.”<sup>74</sup> This fact is rather ironical as Consuelo still gives an obvious preference to her son over the daughters and thus affirms the traditional establishment of the Mexican family.

With Richard the process of Americanization has a different direction. He dreams about becoming a writer and as a gifted student he is slowly getting closer to the fulfillment of his wish. Nevertheless, the family situation threatens him as he is expected to become a breadwinner which he finally refuses to do, he is too different from his parents now. “By the novel’s end, the separation between Richard and his parents has progressed from philosophical and emotional levels to the physical.”<sup>75</sup>

The ending is a very good example of the philosophy of individualism. Richard decides to prefer his personal happiness which we can understand as a very American attitude over the happiness of the community, the family. In this moment he ceases to be Mexican and he completely renounces the culture of his parents.

No one can express this view more clearly than the author himself when he shows us the way Richard thinks. “I can be a part of everything, he thought, because I am the only one capable of controlling my destiny... Never – no, never – will I allow myself to become a part

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<sup>72</sup> Villareal 91.

<sup>73</sup> Villareal 134.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Vallejos, “Ritual Process and the Family in the Chicano Novel,” *MELUS*, vol. 10, no. 4, The Ethnic-Novel: Appalachian, Chicano, Chinese and Native American (Winter, 1983) 6.

<sup>75</sup> Vallejos 7.

of a group – to become classified, to lose my individuality.”<sup>76</sup> This utterance might be more American than many similar ideas expressed by Anglo Saxon writers.

#### **4.1.2. Typical Chicano Features**

As it was mentioned already the novel bears for the first time some characteristics that later became to be known as typical features of Chicano literature, however, since Villareal is the first representative of such a genre, his ideas are not that radical as those of his followers in 1960s and 1970s.

##### **4.1.2.1. Pochos and pachucos**

The most striking Chicano feature is the title itself. In this place it might be fitting to explain what the word *pocho* means and to differentiate it from *pachuco* which is also used in the text. Both words are used to describe Mexican Americans but the connotations that accompany them are very different. The man who introduced these terms was a Mexican philosopher Octavio Paz. It is quite clear that since Paz uses two expressions, he sees these concepts as two different things. As the title of the novel suggests Richard Rubio is *el pocho*, an expression that has negative connotations for Octavio Paz since he defines it: “La historia de México es la del hombre que busca su filiación, su origen. Sucesivamente afrancesado, hispanista, indigenista, pocho, cruza la historia como un cometa de jade, que de vez en cuando relampagea.”<sup>77</sup>

On the other hand, the definition of *pachuco* by Octavio Paz is:

los pachucos son bandas de jóvenes, generalmente de origen mexicano, que viven en las ciudades del Sur y que se singularizan tanto por su vestimenta como por su conducta y su lenguaje. [...] los pachucos no reivindican su raza ni la nacionalidad de sus antepasados. [...] El pachuco no quiere volver a su origen mexicano; tampoco – al menos en apariencia – desea fundirse a la vida norteamericana.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Villareal 152.

<sup>77</sup> “The history of Mexico is the history of a man who is looking for his origin. Gradually Americanized, Hispanist, Native American, pocho, crosses the history as a jade comet that flashes from time to time.” (translated into English by LL)

Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1993) 155.

<sup>78</sup> “pachucos are groups of young people, usually of Mexican origin, who live in cities in the South who can be identified by their type of clothing and by their behavior and speech. [...] Pachucos do not go back to nor their

When we look at the descriptions, it is easy to note that both of them are somewhat critical towards the two social groups and the conclusion the reader can make is that for Octavio Paz either of the representatives are not Mexican, but people floating between two nationalities pertaining in greater or lesser extent to one of them. In this place it is relevant to examine whether José Antonio Villareal shares this vision and understands the terms the same way as Paz does.

It is obvious that Villareal makes a clear difference between the two groups as well as Paz. *Pocho* is Richard himself, he was born in the US where his parents emigrated from Mexico during the period of the revolution. When during the era of the Great Depression he meets new immigrants from the homeland of his parents, he calls them *pachucos* and he becomes aware that there is a big difference between him and them although they share the same country of origin and therefore should be more or less the same – he “felt strange because she was a Mexican and everyone around them was also Mexican, and felt stranger still from the knowledge that he felt strange.”<sup>79</sup>

On the other hand, Richard does not actually see himself as a Mexican, when the book is ending and Richard’s Americanization is almost finished we can see his view on the issue of nationality. “Always worried about his being Mexican and he never even thought about it, except sometimes, when he was alone, he got kinda funnyproud about it.”<sup>80</sup>

#### **4.1.2.2. Getting out of the barrio**

The main struggle the principal character is dealing with what can be described as a typical problem that also later Chicano writers were trying to solve. It is the theme of getting out of the barrio. The future of the main protagonist is set for him due to his Mexican origins. Richard is described as exceptionally bright boy who is different in his way of thinking and aspirations from other people in the whole neighborhood inhabited mostly by immigrants from all over the world. His dream is to get to the university and to study but nobody else seems to expect such a future for him.

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race, neither the nationality of their ancestors. [...] The pachuco does not want to go back to their Mexican origin; however, they do not wish – at least by their appearance – to integrate into the North American way of life.” (translated into English by LL)

Paz 148.

<sup>79</sup> Villareal 152.

<sup>80</sup> Villareal 108.

The main conflict comes when Richard's father, Juan Rubio, leaves the family and Richard as the oldest son is supposed to look after his mother and siblings since the Mexican American families always have a man as the authority figure, either the father or the son being always the head of the family.<sup>81</sup> In the following extract from the book in a conversation between Richard and his mother we can see how the main protagonist on one hand wants to fulfill his duty, but on the other he is too American now to let somebody force him to do something just because he is expected to.

"You are the head of the family now, Richard. You are the man of the house," she said. "I know how much you wanted to go to the university, and I am filled with sadness that you will not be able to do so, for it is your duty to take care of us." It did not matter to him that she was sincere in her concern about that, and that she had somehow completely absolved herself of any taint of guilt for what had happened. But he could not allow her to believe that he was doing this for any reason other than the fact that he desired to do it.<sup>82</sup>

In the end Richard finds his way out of the barrio, ironically, the only possibility for him how to radically change his life is join the US army in the WWII, even though he does not consider the fighting as a right solution of conflicts. "It had been like a small battle in the big war, and that war was also wrong. Even to take a small part in it was wrong, but now he must also go to war. It was his only alternative – to get away from this place was the only good he could get from it."<sup>83</sup>

In this case I would agree with Cyrus Patell who equals Richard leaving his family to go to war with a symbolic departure from the whole Mexican heritage and his origins. The final action is described as "a gesture that represents the final break with the culture of Mexico that his father still embraces."<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the renouncing of the Mexican culture is something that most of the later Chicano writers would not agree with.

#### **4.1.2.3. Prejudice towards Mexican Americans**

Villareal is also aware of the amount of cliché and prejudice connected with Mexican Americans and he is pointing them out. To some extent it is possible to say that he is a predecessor of the main wave of the Chicano writers that appeared in the 1960s, nevertheless,

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<sup>81</sup> see Becerra 148.

<sup>82</sup> Villareal 171.

<sup>83</sup> Villareal 185.

<sup>84</sup> Patell 617.



it is also necessary to keep in mind that Villareal's objective was different and the audience he wrote for were not the immigrants. Therefore we should not expect any kind of a deep analysis of the problem.

The main objective that Villareal had was to show the American readers the life in the Mexican American community and some types of prejudice the immigrants have to face. However, these are often depicted as oversimplified and it is not possible to see them as a kind of independent testimony because "the early Mexican American authors who composed in English sought to depict their people to an Anglo audience and found themselves assenting, presumably under the weight of popular attitudes, to a variety of American stereotypes."<sup>85</sup>

Still there are many cases when the author is very critical towards the white majority and is trying to show the readers that members of the Mexican American community can be educated people who have to suffer the discrimination and xenophobia. As an example we can use a case when Richard gives an old book to his friend to read it but her mother is not so happy about it: "Take it out to the porch, and tomorrow you return it to him. The idea, handling a dirty thing like that! You might catch something from it!"<sup>86</sup>

It is very interesting to see the issue of religion in the context of prejudice. Mexico is a Catholic country and the mother of the main protagonist is depicted as a very religious person and it is very important for her that her family is like that as well. However, Richard has a problem to fulfill his mother's wish and doubts his faith from an early childhood already when he is thinking: "*God made the world. Who is God?* But if He is was good and kind, why did he make darkness?"<sup>87</sup>

His answers are not answered even when he gets older since what he finds at the priests is not understanding but even more prejudice. The priest is not able to understand him, he is prejudiced against a primitive immigrant whom he sees as a victim of his own passions and he makes Richard think that he is evil for feeling his sexuality. The priest does not even try to see him as individuality with his own specific needs. Nevertheless, what Richard feels is not guilt, as he is not actually guilty but certain kind of absurd amusement over the whole situation.

"However, he was never bothered by his religion, which trained him that what he was doing was a sin. In fact, he derived great pleasure at the confessional these days, and coldly, almost objectively, he

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<sup>85</sup> Paredes, "Mexican" 74.

<sup>86</sup> Villareal 77.

<sup>87</sup> Villareal 37.

went into detail about his evil practice, because, without really understanding it, he felt that the good Padre was somehow enjoying these weekly conversations.”<sup>88</sup>

Therefore Richard is not able to use the religion in the formation of his personality and decides to choose his Mexican roots as a pillar to lean his identity on. Cyrus Patell describes him as a “protagonist who attempts to forge an identity for himself, first by exploring his heritage as a Roman Catholic, then by attempting to understand his historical situation as a member of a colonized people.”<sup>89</sup>

In the end, Richard ends up as a Mexican American who is lost in the new world, not belonging actually anywhere and the main reason for that is the prejudice of the rest of the society that is refusing to accept him.

#### **4.1.3. Relations between Mexico and the USA**

The whole story is very closely connected with the political situation in Mexico and the United States in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The story begins in Mexico during the revolutionary era, then we witness the Great Depression and the last major event is the World War II with Richard leaving to fight in the American army. All the major political events are described chronologically.

The opening of the novel is set in Mexico. We are not told the exact year but we know that it is around the Mexican revolution which lasted from 1911 to 1920. We are not sure about the date but it is obvious from the atmosphere that Villareal presents that we do not feel the revolutionary spirit but more likely we see a sleepy town where nothing really happens. According to Thomas Vallejos it is not possible to speak about revolution anymore: “When the novel opens, however, the Mexican Revolution is long past – if not in years than in spirit.”<sup>90</sup>

We are offered just indirect hints about the exact time but Juan Rubio is described as a very experienced soldier which suggests agreeing with Vallejos that it is more likely that the time setting is after the revolution. One of the hints we can use to define the time period is the moment when Juan’s identity is revealed to a young lieutenant. We can see that he is quite

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<sup>88</sup> Villareal 114.

<sup>89</sup> Patell 617.

<sup>90</sup> Patell 616.

famous among soldiers throughout Mexico and from his degree of experience we can conclude that he has been part of the revolution for a long time already. The young man says: “The colonel Rubio? [...] Rubio of Santa Rosalía, Torreón, Zacatecas, and even here, Juárez.”<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the Rubio family changes the setting quickly as they move to the United States where they are confronted with other political issue influencing the relations between the USA and Mexico, the immigration. Naturally, as the book is described from the point of view of an immigrant we have their first hand experience. The Rubios are part of the immigration wave which was one of the consequences of the revolution. The author describes quite interestingly the way the Mexicans were welcomed in Texas referring there to the battle of Alamo in 1836.

The ever-increasing army of people swarmed across while the border remained open, fleeing from squalor and oppression. But they could not flee reality and the Texans who welcomed them as a blessing because there were miles of cotton to be harvested, had never really forgotten the Alamo. The certain degree of dignity the Mexicans yet retained made some of them turn around and walk back to the hell they had left. [...] The bewildered people came on – insensitive to the fact that even though they were not stopped, they were not really wanted.<sup>92</sup>

Even though in the later parts of the story the author describes immigrants’ hard work on the fields, this fragment of the text already partly uncovers the risk of what might happen next. Consequently, it is not that much surprising for us what happens during the period of the Great Depression. Villareal shows us that the Americans were not happy to have all the Mexican immigrants nearby even when they needed them and when the numbers of unemployed people rose, the repatriations started and lot of the immigrants had to go back.

The author describes the conditions under which the immigrants were living and comes with an interesting idea of one of the motives that could have contributed to the negative view on Mexicans during the Depression. As most of them worked in agriculture, the hunger was not such a big problem in comparison with employees who worked in industry and lost their jobs. It is quite a paradox that the fact that Richard has something to eat raises his popularity among his classmates who had hated him before for being different. “The hated, oft-repeated

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<sup>91</sup> Villareal 5.

<sup>92</sup> Villareal 16.

cries of his schoolmates – ‘Frijoley bomber!’ ‘Tortilla strangler!’ – now disappeared, as did the accompanying laughter, and he sometimes shared his lunch with them.”<sup>93</sup>

From the last quotation we can sense a sympathy the author has with the people during the Depression era. As the story goes on this sympathy grows even stronger, however, it is pointed towards the white majority and not the Mexican immigrants. This is quite a surprising aspect in a Chicano novel and it might be explained by the fact that the book was essentially written for the white audience. One of these moments is when the farm workers demand higher salary for their work but they are actually asking a farmer who is giving them more than the others. Consequently, the Mexicans look greedy and primitive as the whole situation culminates in an outburst of violence.

In fact, this chapter is one of the weaker parts of the novel since it is kind of absurd that such a good employer who pays more than the others and buys clothes for the children of his employees would even exist. It is not very clear what the author meant by introducing this character who plays no role in the story further on. The daughter of the farmer when describing her father tells the men: “All right! So this is a strike! We were warned that this might happen this year, but dad wouldn’t believe that his friends would let him down. He’s always been so good to you and, and even now is doing the best he can.”<sup>94</sup>

Later on in the story, Villareal is concentrating more on Richard’s becoming a man or the changes in the family relationships and the political situation does not interest him that much. This attitude changes with the second big wave of Mexican immigration in 1940 when the main protagonist meets the new immigrants. Octavio Paz’s view of pachucos has already been described but José Antonio Villareal also offers his own description of these people: “they attempted to segregate themselves from both their cultures, and became truly a lost race. In their frantic desire to become different, they adopted a new mode of dress, a new manner, and even a new language.”<sup>95</sup>

The writer is also describing the attitude of the majority population towards these new Americans who were trying to be so visibly different and not to be part of any of the two cultures. In this point, he is critical again towards the whites and describes their fear of these

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<sup>93</sup> Villareal 47.

<sup>94</sup> Villareal 54.

<sup>95</sup> Villareal 149.

people and the subsequent prejudice which was already discussed in one of the preceding chapters.

#### **4.1.4. Language**

When we analyze the language that the author uses, we can notice various interesting features. The first thing we should mention is that despite the Spanish title the whole book is written in English and only some Spanish words or phrases are used in the text. These we can divide into two groups.

In the first group I would include expressions that describe specific Mexican features, words that would be difficult to translate into English, or the translation would possibly slightly change the meaning. As an example I would like to quote a sentence from the beginning of the book, expressed by a father of the main protagonist: “I will run cattle for your gringo, but only because I would rather do that than work as a farmhand. After all, I am a jinete.”<sup>96</sup>

In this case the translation into English would change the meaning of the Spanish words and therefore might change the message of the sentence. The first not translated word is *gringo*, a word of Spanish origin but comprehensible to an English speaker. Even more interesting is the case of *jinete*. The proper translation would be *cowboy*, however, it is easily understandable that Villareal chose to use the Spanish equivalent due to the great number of connotations the word cowboy has in the American culture.

In the other group there are Spanish expressions that are not translated because they are used to give some kind of a “local color” to the whole narration and it is not so important if the reader understands them or not. These are exclamations, addressing people or swear words. An example of such a usage can be: “¡Por Dios! You will surely turn into crazy with all this thinking.”<sup>97</sup> These expressions appear repeatedly from time to time in the story and it does not seem that the gradual Americanization of the main protagonist would have some special effect on it, the number of them is not diminishing. More important factor is who is he speaking to since they should evoke in the reader the idea that Richard is speaking Spanish at the moment.

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<sup>96</sup> Villareal 15.

<sup>97</sup> Villareal 96.

Otherwise the English of the author is the English of a native speaker of the language, not an immigrant, there are no “mistakes”, and it is not Spanglish. I must agree with Raymund A. Paredes when he says that *Pocho* was written essentially for an Anglo-American audience to make the people somehow acquainted with an ethnic minority they knew nothing about until that time.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, when Villareal needs to evoke the language of a newcomer in the country he is fully capable to do so. He also uses the language to represent the social status of his characters by their speech. The first case can be demonstrated in a speech of a Portuguese speaking immigrant when trying to communicate with Richard: “‘Unnastand? Goot!’ said the man. ‘You talka da Spañol, I talka da Portagee. Hokay?’”<sup>99</sup> The second example is a speech of a girl living in the same neighborhood as Richard, i.e. a poor working class girl. “‘Whatcha sore about?’ asked Zelda. ‘We wuz jes’ playin’ wit’ ’im.’”<sup>100</sup>

When speaking about the language used in the novel it is also interesting to comment on the language the main protagonist is using to communicate with other Spanish speakers. His mother tongue is Spanish but due to the fact that he spent all his life in the United States it is kind of different than the language spoken in Mexico and thus the mother tongue spoken by the recently coming immigrants. The difference in Richard’s speech is described in a scene where he talks to a girl who arrived from Mexico and has been in the US for a short time only: “Once, she giggled as he spoke and he flushed, for he knew she was laughing at his Spanish, which was a California-Mexican-American Castilian.”<sup>101</sup>

#### **4.1.5. Conclusion**

After the analysis of the novel it is possible to say that even though *Pocho* by José Antonio Villareal is the first Chicano novel ever written and there are naturally some imperfections in the text, the book already offers to the reader themes that later became typical for other Chicano writers as well. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that it was written principally for the white audience which can be noted in some cases of oversimplification and attempts to please the Anglo-Saxon readers.

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<sup>98</sup> see Paredes 58

<sup>99</sup> Villareal 81.

<sup>100</sup> Villareal 68.

<sup>101</sup> Villareal 165,

Regarding the reflection of the international relations and historical events the novel can serve us as a kind of a chronicle of many affairs since the whole story of the characters is very closely connected to the historical events. We can say that the political situation is the main motivation for the protagonists when solving some crucial life issues. It is the politics that makes them come to America and it is the politics that makes Richard leave it in the end.

#### **4.2. RUDOLFO ANAYA: *BLESS ME, ULTIMA* (1972)**

The next novel to be analyzed is one of the most famous works of the Chicano literature *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya. Published thirteen years after *Pocho*, it is noticeable that in this case we can talk about much more elaborate and complex work where the actual meaning is not so directly presented but it is rather hidden in various layers of the whole narration. The crucial word in the analysis is the symbol. Via the usage of various symbols of both Mexican and American culture we are able to discover the rich world where two different cultures are combined into a unique and powerful mixture.

When we briefly mention the plot we can see that there are some basic features that are shared by both novels, *Pocho* and *Bless Me, Ultima*. In both novels the main protagonists are young boys and we watch them as they from various reasons lose their innocence and become in charge of their families. They become the men of the house. Naturally, there are some significant differences as well. In *Bless Me, Ultima* the author describes a shorter time period – more or less one year when the main protagonist Antonio who is seven years old at the beginning must choose from range of possibilities and finally find his place in the world.

During one year Antonio must deal with loss of his brothers, direct encounters with death and he is also a witness of conflicts of his parents and a few of supernatural events.

Antonio's guardian and mentor in this quest is Ultima, quite a mysterious elderly woman, who has certain supernatural powers since her vocation is being a *curandera* (a healer). From the fact that the most important female character has such a specific mission, it might be expected that Anaya's novel can offer a greater degree of insight into the traditional Mexican culture. This assumption can be affirmed as true because the setting of the novel is the area of New Mexico and the protagonists are "proper" Mexicans Americans. They are no longer immigrants but people whose predecessors were Mexicans who lived in Mexico but after the year 1848 they became citizens of the USA due to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Even

though they are officially Americans, the family Márez as many others in that territory keep the way of living of their ancestors.

#### **4.2.1. Symbols and folklore**

##### **4.2.1.1. Ultima and the owl**

The feature which makes *Bless Me, Ultima* very different from the pioneer novel *Pocho* is the approach to the rich Chicano culture. This culture is the main source for Anaya's literary production and forms an essential part of the story. As Raymund Paredes sees it: "Anaya creates a distinctive cultural ambience primarily through the use of folklore."<sup>102</sup>

As the main symbol we can see the protagonist whose name is used in the title – Ultima. In Spanish *último* means *the last* and the reader actually can see the woman as one of the last representatives of the tradition and the gradually disappearing genuine Mexican culture in the US territory. The whole family feels the deepest respect towards her and when her good deeds are described, the reader might have a feeling that the community sees her as some kind of an angel: "There isn't a family she did not help, no road was too long for her to walk to its end to snatch somebody from the jaws of death, and not even blizzards of the llano could keep her from the appointed place where a baby was to be delivered—"<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, not everybody values Ultima as highly as the Márez family. To understand one of the main conflicts of the book the reader must be aware of a fact that even though Ultima's deeds are seen as generally beneficial for the people of Las Pasturas, some of them might be afraid of her because of her supernatural powers. Rafaela Castro explains the Chicano folklore: "*Curanderas* are sometimes mistaken for witches because of their healing power, but they are also often called upon to undo the work of witches."<sup>104</sup>

What is described by Castro really happens further on in the story. Ultima is asked to undo a curse that was laid on Antonio's uncle when he witnessed witches' black mass. The event is described in a great detail: "They were very angry to be caught performing their devilish

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<sup>102</sup> Paredes 68.

<sup>103</sup> Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima* (New York: Warner Books, 1994) 3.

<sup>104</sup> Castro 27.



mass. He said they screamed like furies and were upon him, attacking him like wild animals – but he did the right thing. [...] He held up the holy cross in the face of those evil women.”<sup>105</sup>

The reader might be surprised that during the 1940s, as the book is set during the WW2, there were still people who believed in witchcraft. Rafaela Castro clarifies the situation: “Witches and *brujería* (witchcraft) are accepted facts of life in Mexican and Chicano culture.”<sup>106</sup> Consequently, it is not so shocking that after healing the cursed man the society which still believes in witchcraft accuses Ultima that she is performing black magic and is a witch herself.

The tension among the inhabitants is strongly supported by the father of the supposed witches and it almost leads to lynching as the angry mob comes to the Márez house and demands Ultima for a trial. One of the angry villagers says to Antonio’s father: “We do not want to quarrel with you, Márez; it is the old witch we want. Give her to us and we will take her away. There will be no trouble. Besides, she is of no relation to you, and she stands accused of witchcraft—”<sup>107</sup>

The man who accused Ultima of witchcraft is Tenorio, the father of the evil witches. To prevent the angry crowd’s raid on the house which Tenorio provokes Ultima must undergo a test which should reveal her true nature and show if she is good or evil. In this moment, another of the important symbols comes to an action: it is Ultima’s owl that has been accompanying her everywhere she goes. “There was a rustling and whirling of wings above us, and all men ducked and held their hands up to protect themselves from the attack. But the owl sought only one man, and it found him. It hurled itself on Tenorio, and the sharp talons gouged out one eye from the face of the evil man.”<sup>108</sup>

During this minute of distraction Ultima manages to walk through the door on which the sign of the cross made out of silver needles has been installed. The purpose of the test is to see whether the woman can walk under the holy sign. However, in this instant the reader starts to doubt if Ultima is only the good curandera or whether she has something from the bruja inside of herself as well.

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<sup>105</sup> Anaya 88.

<sup>106</sup> Castro 27.

<sup>107</sup> Anaya 130.

<sup>108</sup> Anaya 134.

Antonio narrates that when Ultima passed the test successfully and the people left their house, he found something on the floor: “A faint glitter caught my eye. I bent down and picked up the two needles that had been stuck to the top of the door frame. Whether someone had broken the cross they made, or whether they had fallen, I would never know.”<sup>109</sup>

The character of Ultima turns out even more ambiguous when we examine the owl as a symbol in greater detail because as we are told in the last part of the story it is in the owl where Ultima’s soul resides. In European and consequently Northern American tradition, owls are symbols of wisdom and are perceived very positively by people. Nevertheless, owls in Mexican, i.e. mestizo tradition are viewed very negatively. Castro describes: “Witches often take form of an owl. (...) The hoot of an owl is an evil omen, so one must be very careful to stay away from owls.”<sup>110</sup>

Consequently, the reader is kept feeling uncertain about his attitude toward Ultima until the very end of the story when the whole idea that the author was trying to tell us becomes clear.

#### **4.2.1.2. The two competing families**

The next issue to discuss is the symbolic fight over the soul and the future vocation of the main protagonist. Antonio feels that he is old enough already and must choose between two very different professions that are both traditional in his family. His father wants him to become a *vaquero* (cowboy) just like him and his ancestors, and the mother is dreaming of his future as a priest and a farmer which is the path her relatives have taken. It is actually the main conflict of the story since Antonio is torn apart between these two possibilities and he feels no strong inclination toward neither of them. Besides he is really apprehensive since he is being constantly urged to choose.

The contrast is reflected also in the surnames of the characters. Antonio’s father is Márez thus he has the word *mar* (sea) in his name. The concept of the sea evokes a constant change, wilderness and spontaneity which might also serve us as a good description of his job. On the other hand, the mother’s surname is Luna. She comes from a family of farmers who use the moon as a help for orientation in the farming. The moon in this case represents stability and certainty.

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<sup>109</sup> Anaya 135.

<sup>110</sup> Castro 27.

Anaya describes the contrast using Ultima as his spokesperson:

“It is the blood of the Lunas to be quiet, for only a quiet man can learn the secrets of the earth that are necessary for planting – They are quite like the moon – And it is the blood of the Márez to be wild, like the ocean from which they take their name, and the spaces of the llano that have become their home.”<sup>111</sup>

Ultima becomes Antonio’s guide and guardian and is trying to help him to understand what the best thing is for him. This seems as a logical result since both the parents feel strong respect towards her. The basic lesson Antonio is taught by her is need for patience. She tells him: “A curandera cannot give away her secrets, but if a person really wants to know, then he will listen and see and be patient. Knowledge comes slowly—”<sup>112</sup>

The relationship between the boy and the old woman becomes so intimate that even the parents are not able to understand it and are sometimes shocked by the way the old woman and the boy communicate with each other. They often feel that Antonio is not polite enough and is not behaving properly. The authors of *La Chicana*, a book explaining the position of Mexican American women in the USA, say: “A more permanent link between feminine spirit and the male realm has probably not been made in Chicano literature.”<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, Mirandé and Enríquez are also aware of the fact that Ultima does not function just as a pure symbol of a mentor and a guardian of almost forgotten traditions. They describe her as a strong believable female character as well. “The value of Anaya’s portrait of Ultima, moreover, is that she combines archetypal and symbolic functions which are critical to the novel, but she is also very much a woman of flesh and blood who is an exemplar as much for Antonio as for the reader.”<sup>114</sup>

In this part we could see some of the symbols and usage of folklore in the novel. Due to the fact that the symbology is used for expressing the basic message of the story, this topic will be treated in following chapter as well.

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<sup>111</sup> Anaya 41.

<sup>112</sup> Anaya 34.

<sup>113</sup> Mirandé, Enríquez 170

<sup>114</sup> Mirandé, Enríquez 170

#### **4.2.2. Endless dichotomies in Anaya**

*Bless Me, Ultima* is usually described as a Bildungsroman because we watch the main protagonist going from the state of initial innocence to certain kind of wisdom. To define Bildungsroman more precisely, it is possible to quote Chris Baldick who says that it is “a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity.”<sup>115</sup>

When we see this definition we can understand why some critics use this term and some not. There is no doubt that Antonio undergoes quest for identity, as he must decide which family path he will take as was described earlier. Nevertheless, the whole narration occupies time span of one year and Antonio is almost seven<sup>116</sup> when the story begins. Consequently, it is quite problematic to talk about adulthood in the traditional sense of the word.

However, the theory that Antonio becomes an adult in certain way is quite acceptable because the other family members begin to see him like that. When his older brothers leave the house for good and his father works out often, he is the only man who is left. Gradually, he comes to realize it and starts to behave as a man of the house. The following extract is from the last chapter. “Take them to their room,” I said to my mother. It was the first time I had ever spoken to my mother as a man; she nodded and obeyed.”<sup>117</sup>

Even though the situation might seem a little ridiculous to a contemporary reader, when they imagine an eight-year-old boy talking to his mother in such a way and the woman accepting it without a surprise, it is important to keep in mind that the head of the Mexican family is always the man, no matter what his age is. Thereby the whole situation is completely acceptable in this cultural environment.

As it was mentioned before, Antonio has to choose his future vocation which means that he has to decide between the two family traditions but that is not the only choice he has to make. Mauricio Linde describes the whole narration as “una lista interminable de dicotomías, polos opuestos, extremos distantes y pares contrapuestos que deben abrazarse y fundirse, al menos en el espacio discursivo literario.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 24.

<sup>116</sup> see Anaya 1.

<sup>117</sup> Anaya 259.

<sup>118</sup> “an endless list of dichotomies, opposite poles, distant extremes and contradictory pairs which should embrace and merge into each other at least within the literary discursive space.” (translated into English by LL)

The other opposite sides Antonio must select from is Catholicism and the Golden Carp,<sup>119</sup> the country and the city, the tradition and the progress, good and evil, and finally Mexico and the United States. The main protagonist must face all these options and choose from them the one that is the best for him. The realization of this necessity makes him feel really anxious and stressed, various parties are pressuring him and he is aware of the fact that pleasing one side would cause a disappointment in the other.

The guidance is offered to him not only by Ultima but also by his dreams which are partly prognostic and partly they just simply reveal what is on his troubled mind. They help him to decide and to see the connection between the past and the future. The first dream he has is about his birth and the argument between the two families about his destiny that started this very day. Suddenly, Ultima steps out between the quarrelling men and declares: “Cease! she cried and the men were quiet. I pulled this baby into the light of life, so I will bury the afterbirth and the cord that once linked him to eternity. Only I will know his destiny.”<sup>120</sup>

The other dichotomy Antonio must face is the difference between the town and the country. The country is where his family and all other relatives live; it is a place where he feels safe. On the other hand, the town is viewed as a dangerous place where English is spoken, evil men live and the originally good village people get under the influence of various negative powers and become evil as well. As José Antonio Gurpegui describes it, “la ciudad es a donde van los hombres en busca de sexo y alcohol.”<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, it is also a place of the protagonist’s greatest success because he goes to school there where he excels.

The contrast between the town and the country is also closely connected with the opposition between Antonio’s devotion to Catholicism and to the Golden Carp – the pagan river god who is described as a peaceful creature who is trying to protect his people. The knowledge about his existence makes Antonio very uncertain about all the religious information he has ever been told in church in town. “If the golden carp was a god, who was

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Mauricio Linde, “«Father’s leg» vs. «Patrona’s lush garden»: la recuperación de la cultura matriz en «The gift» de Rudolfo Anaya,” *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*, ed. Rosa Morillas Sánchez, Manuel Villar Raso (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2000) 62.

<sup>119</sup> Golden Carp is for Anaya a mysterious pagan god living in the river in Las Pasturas and echoing the culture of the Aztec empire.

<sup>120</sup> Anaya 6.

<sup>121</sup> “the city is where the men go to look for sex and alcohol.” (translated into English by LL)

José Antonio Gurpegui, “Rudolfo Anaya: de la denuncia social al posmodernismo,” *Literatura chicana: Reflexiones y ensayos críticos*, ed. Rosa Morillas Sánchez, Manuel Villar Raso (Granada: Editorial Comares, 2000) 166.

the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong god?"<sup>122</sup> are the basic questions that he is asking but receives no simple and direct answers.

Antonio is in the same situation as before since he is forced to decide from the two options and he is feeling uncertain again. Theresa Kanoza explains his reasons: "His journey into paganism is an exhilarating quest but one which induces guilt and anxiety as he breaks the first commandment of his Christian faith."<sup>123</sup> Also the worshippers of the river god make it clear that he should decide between his preferences.

It is again one of Antonio's dreams and Ultima's words in it that help him to solve and understand the situation:

the sweet water of the moon which falls as rain is the same water that gathers into rivers and flows to fill the seas. Without the waters of the moon to replenish the oceans there would be no oceans. And the same salt waters of the oceans are drawn by the sun to the heavens, and in turn become again the waters of the moon. [...]

The waters are one, Antonio. I looked into her bright clear eyes and understood the truth.

You have been seeing only parts, she finished, and not looking beyond the great cycle that bind us all.<sup>124</sup>

In this moment Antonio sees the solution of how to choose from all the options that he is being offered. He finds out that there is no actual need to select, Ultima helps him to learn that the best thing he can do is not to refuse any of the possibilities but to accept them all and to make something special out of them. They are no actual dichotomies because they complement each other and make him what he is.

Thomas Vallejos explains this attitude returning again to the Luna-Márez conflict: "the families are one in Antonio, just as the two faiths are one in the syncretic mestizo culture of his family and his community."<sup>125</sup> The reader can see that Vallejos using this example creates a more general connection as well because the feelings that are described by Rudolfo Anaya are applied on the cultural situation of the specific territory of New Mexico.

It is even possible to use this idea to describe the typical problems of an immigrant in a new country and use it further on for the specific experience of a newcomer from Mexico who arrives to the USA. The Mexican immigrants might also feel the necessity to choose between

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<sup>122</sup> Anaya 81.

<sup>123</sup> Theresa M. Kanoza, "The Golden Carp and Moby Dick: Rudolfo Anaya's Multiculturalism," *MELUS*, vol. 24, no. 2, Religion, Myth and Ritual (Summer, 1999) 161.

<sup>124</sup> Anaya 121.

<sup>125</sup> Vallejos 9.

their traditional culture and the new culture of the USA. However, Anaya shows us that there exists the third option which is renouncing neither and making something special out of both of them.

Enrique Lamadrid expresses a very similar opinion concerning Antonio's possible future role in his society when he says that the main protagonist is the only one who because of his knowledge is able to help the people around him as well. He understands the processes and dilemmas they are going through because he has the same experience and he can teach them how to get used to the changing reality around them and to get the best from the Anglo way of life.<sup>126</sup>

In the same way the reader can understand better the character of Ultima herself and they can comprehend why she is not just the simple guardian angel. In the end, they come to know what the difference between "la curandera" and "la bruja" is. The reason why she might have had problems with passing the test with the needles is that she has some traces of evil inside of her as well. "Ultima is not without her own dark side, since she too encompasses dualities. [...] She is part saint but also part witch. Her ability to cast out demons and to remove curses derives from her own acquaintance with evil. Yet her dualities do not taint or confound her; they complement her."<sup>127</sup>

The reader can see that the main idea of the novel is still relevant nowadays for a contemporary reader because the author defends the concept of multiculturalism. His views can be applied universally since he explains how various cultures can coexist together without losing their cultural particularities which might be very helpful for immigrants from other countries as well. This theory can be seen also applied to one of the political issues that the book presents.

#### **4.2.3. Reflections of the real political situation**

*Bless Me, Ultima* is certainly not a political novel in the traditional sense and more than direct references of the political situation the reader should expect certain allusions that just add the information to depict the atmosphere of those times. Nevertheless, as the novel is set

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<sup>126</sup> see Enrique Lamadrid, "Myth as the Cognitive Process of Popular Culture in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*: The Dialectics of Knowledge." *Hispania*, vol. 68, no. 3 (Sep., 1985) 500.

<sup>127</sup> Kanoza 165.

during the time of the World War II, the author cannot just ignore the political events. Enrique Lamadrid describes the novel and its historical references: “It is mystically harmonious with nature, yet also incorporates a dynamic, even dialectical awareness of historical forces, from the colonization by Hispanic farmers and ranchers to the coming of the Anglos and World War II.”<sup>128</sup>

However, it is important to mention that the protagonists themselves do not actively interfere with the historical events; the events usually influence them and this mostly happens in an indirect way. The only exception of this rule is the case of Antonio’s older brothers Andrés, Eugenio and León who have actively participated in the war and now they return back home. Theresa Kanoza describes the event as the only acknowledgement of how the American history influenced the Chicano family.<sup>129</sup>

Probably the best description of what the war does to the young men and to the whole country as well is offered by Antonio’s father. “The war sucks everything dry, it takes the young boys overseas, and their families move to California where there is work.”<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Márez does not show much support when his “sucked dry” sons return and is unable to understand that they have changed due to the war experience and the life would never be the same for them again. The boys do not know how to cope with their traumas either and they prefer leaving the native village for a city life where they are lost as well.

Antonio keeps seeing his brothers in very disturbing dreams where they are telling him things such as “We are the giants who are dying...”<sup>131</sup> Thomas Vallejos does not see this subplot as a political statement and links it again to the family dilemma of Antonio. “Although, as in *Pocho*, the disintegrating effects of modern life upon the traditional Chicano family and community are never resolved by Antonio’s brothers, Anaya clearly uses this subplot to contrast with Antonio’s loyalty to family and community.”<sup>132</sup>

Another important political event that is only briefly mentioned despite its worldwide immense effect is the atomic bomb which is actually being tested not far from the Las Pasturas; even though it is obvious the author is aware of the danger it presents.

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<sup>128</sup> Lamadrid 496.

<sup>129</sup> Vallejos 9.

<sup>130</sup> Anaya 3.

<sup>131</sup> Anaya 61.

<sup>132</sup> Vallejos 9.



“The atomic bomb,” they whispered, “a ball of white heat beyond the imagination, beyond hell—” And they pointed south, beyond the green valley of El Puerto. “Man was not made to know so much,” the old ladies cried in hushed, hoarse voices. “They compete with God, they disturb the seasons, they seek to know more than God himself. In the end, that knowledge they seek will destroy us all—”<sup>133</sup>

The author prefers to choose from this subject the human competition with God and the question whether that is a good thing and it makes Antonio think again about problems concerning religion rather than the foreign policy.

Anaya also goes more into the past and describes the complicated history of the territory and of all the nations that lived there and fought against each other. It is again Ultima who educates Antonio. She is not afraid to start in the remote past with the Pre-Columbian civilizations: “She spoke to me of the common herbs and medicines we shared with the Indians of the Rio del Norte. She spoke of the ancient medicines of other tribes, the Aztecas, the Mayas, and even of those in the old, old country, the Moors.”<sup>134</sup>

Ultima describes more recent events as well and explains the origin of the gradual changes that are appearing in the area and gives reasons why Antonio’s father became a vaquero:

Then the railroad came. The barbed wire came. The songs, the corridos became sad, and the meeting of the people from Texas with my forefathers was full of blood, murder and tragedy. The people were uprooted. They looked around one day and found themselves closed in. The freedom of the land and the sky they had known was gone. Those people could not live without freedom and so they packed and moved west. They became migrants.<sup>135</sup>

The last issue that is occasionally mentioned is the language situation and cultural differences between the Mexican Americans and the rest of the population. Antonio’s mother tongue is Spanish because it is a language of his parents who do not know any English. Antonio explains this situation. “All of the older people spoke only Spanish, and I myself understood only Spanish. It was only after one went to school that one learned English.”<sup>136</sup>

His parents, or more exactly his mother, are described as enlightened people who motivate their son to learn and speak the foreign language since they are aware that it will open many possibilities to him. “Many of the old people did not accept the new language and refused

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<sup>133</sup> Anaya 190.

<sup>134</sup> Anaya 42.

<sup>135</sup> Anaya 125.

<sup>136</sup> Anaya 10.

their children speak it, but my mother believed that if I was to be successful as a priest I should know both languages, and so she encouraged me in both.”<sup>137</sup>

The main protagonist becomes one of the best pupils at school and it is clear that his future does not lie only in the village where he was born. Nevertheless, his first days in school were not easy as he had to deal with the fact that he was different than the majority and as it is usual with the children, their primary reaction towards their new classmate was quite negative. “My mother packed a small jar of hot beans and some good, green chile wrapped in tortillas. When the other children saw my lunch they laughed and pointed again.”<sup>138</sup>

The reader can see that *Bless Me, Ultima* is not a political but a philosophical novel with some political statements. This fact is sometimes described as a negative feature since some critics think that the Chicano novels should always be political. Lamadrid explains this view as follows: “The political analysis which deems the novel reactionary seems to be based on assumption that Chicano novels should document only the most relevant social and political struggles.”<sup>139</sup>

Naturally, the reader can see this not only as a negative side but as a very positive feature that made Anaya read not only by the Mexican Americans but by the rest of the USA population. The author works with universal concepts of good and evil, religion, family etc. which are fully understood and experienced by people of other nationalities as well and the message which Anaya is trying to communicate is common and very contemporary for all of us.

#### **4.2.4. Language**

If we are to speak about language, we can note again similar features with *Pocho*. The main protagonists are young boys who grew up in the USA but whose mother tongue is Spanish. Naturally, they received their education in English, therefore they have no problem with this language and this fact is reflected in the novels. They are fully comprehensible for a non-Spanish speaker who does not have to deal with any complicated morphological or syntactical constructions adopted from Spanish or Spanglish.

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<sup>137</sup> Anaya 180.

<sup>138</sup> Anaya 58.

<sup>139</sup> Lamadrid 497.

Even more so the language of Rudolfo Anaya is as rich and as colorful as the language of any other highly esteemed American writer. This statement can be demonstrated by the very first sentences which introduce the reader into the story:

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 mystery into my living blood.<sup>140</sup>

From these words we can notice the rich imagery and the colorful language the writer uses to conduct them into the special setting and the magical atmosphere that lasts the whole narration. The nature and the vivid descriptions of the countryside is one of the essential characteristics of the novel.

It is necessary to acknowledge that Anaya is using Spanish more often than his predecessor; presumably his main reason is similar to the one of the former author because he is also trying to add some local color features to his narration. This fact explains his frequent use of Spanish interjections and other emotive expressions such as *Ay*, *Ave María Purísima*, *Madre de Dios* etc. which are understood by the wide audience and do not have to be translated. Mexican songs and rhymes that appear in the text have the same function, understanding them is not crucial for the plot development but for the atmosphere.

The author works with the language in different ways and he successfully manages to use vocabulary that is not expected to be generally known among the reading public as well. Anaya uses several different techniques to do this. One that appears quite often is that instead of simple translation of the sentence a speaker has just said, he paraphrases the utterance. One of the examples describes a conversation by a river: “¡Mira! Qué suerte, tunas,’ Ultima cried with joy and pointed to the ripe-red prickly pears of the nopal.”<sup>141</sup> In this case, even though the reader might not understand the meaning of the Spanish phrase, the word joy and the description of the Spanish word *tuna* helps them to understand the text better.

Another elegant way of dealing with the Spanish is using the adequate reaction of another speaker to clarify the meaning of the previous question or exclamation. A prototypical example would be:

“Cómo te llamas?” she asked.

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<sup>140</sup> Anaya 1.

<sup>141</sup> Anaya 40.

“Antonio Márez,” I replied.<sup>142</sup>

The reader can see that the author is trying to reflect the native tongue of his protagonists and he is trying to achieve the proper artistic effect in various ways. Anaya wants the reader to somehow feel the atmosphere of the distinct culture that consists of two different traditions as the author does. Federico de Latierro explains writer’s reasons in more detail:

Rudolfo Anaya confiesa que él escribe en inglés porque maneja mejor la mecánica de este idioma, pero que siempre que puede acude al español para matizar los significados concretos y únicos de sus pasajes que, de otra forma, resultarían descargados de la profundidad hispana que llevan dentro de sí sus personajes. [...] El español es considerado entre los escritores chicanos como un idioma más personal y familiar que el inglés.<sup>143</sup>

#### **4.2.5. Conclusion**

In my analysis of *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya I discovered that the novel should not be treated as a political work and even though the environment in which it is set and the historical reality influences all the characters it is not the essential of the novel’s development. What really matters are the ideas and dichotomies that are expressed and must be solved by the main protagonist.

The author focuses on the universal questions that the humankind has been trying to solve for a very long time and he does that giving his ideas a “Chicano wrapping.” Nevertheless, the fact that the characters are Mexican Americans does not help with the solution of the universal philosophical questions. It just stabilizes them in a time and a place and makes the setting believable and interesting for the reader.

#### **4.3. OSCAR ZETA ACOSTA: *THE REVOLT OF THE COCKROACH PEOPLE* (1973)**

*The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is in as many aspects different from Anaya’s novel as it is possible. Its title correctly suggests that this work is very political and its aim is quite

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<sup>142</sup> Anaya 58.

<sup>143</sup> “Rudolfo Anaya confesses that he is writing in English because he handles better the mechanics of this language but he as much as he can goes to Spanish to shade the unique and actual meanings of his texts which otherwise would be deprived of the Hispanic profundity that his protagonists have inside of themselves. (...) Spanish is seen among the Chicano writers as the language which is more personal and familiar than English.” (translated into English by LL) de Latierro 103.

radical since the author describes various Chicano riots and demonstrations in Los Angeles in 1970. The main protagonist Buffalo Z. Brown is the first Chicano lawyer, a man of a Mexican American origin with law education who is defending Chicano activists. The main protagonist is very politically active and therefore he does not mind that he is defending people who will not be able to pay him for what he does. He is fighting for the same cause as them.

However, the protagonist of this novel with strong autobiographical features is not an angelic fighter for the Chicano cause seeking justice in the corrupt world. The narrator is not afraid of being critical about himself and by describing himself very sincerely he gradually destroys any positive image or sympathies that the reader might feel towards him. He is a fat, ugly womanizer who likes alcohol, drugs and prostitutes; all of these in high doses. The author of the book had a very similar reputation as the main character whom he based on himself. Oscar Zeta Acosta presumably died as he lived since he disappeared one day in Mexico and nobody actually knows what really happened to him.

Also the men Brown defends are far from being perfect and are not always falsely charged. Some of them do not believe in Chicano cause as much as they believe in violence and violent solution of conflicts. What Acosta offers to the public is actually not a very pleasant thing to read, the writer looks at the Chicano protests of 1970s with no pretence or distortion of the facts.

#### **4.3.1. The Chicano lawyer and his clients**

*The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is a political novel and therefore the reader should not expect such a rich symbology and folkloric associations as in the works of Rudolfo Anaya. Nevertheless, one of the things that have clear symbolical meaning is the name of the narrator who confesses that he changed it to help him in his political fight. Only by saying his name, the main protagonist – Buffalo Z. Brown – gives a political statement.

Brown is a skin color of mestizos whose representatives are the Mexican Americans, Buffalo is a typical American animal that lives on both sides of the border, and Z. (zeta –the way the letter Z is pronounced in the Spanish spelling) the author picked up from a movie because it was for him a closest thing to Chicano Humphrey Bogart.<sup>144</sup> By changing his name

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<sup>144</sup> see Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 123.

the narrator becomes politically involved and makes it clear at the court and in front of the jury at which side he stands.

The reader gradually discovers the importance of the Chicano lawyer at the trials; his clients are the *vatos locos* literally crazy guys who usually cultivate an image of tough men with a special way of clothing, values and speech style. They are people who often suffered discrimination from the side of the white lawyers and were withheld a fair trial. Despite the fact that the reader knows that these people often committed the crimes they are accused of they feel that they should be treated equally as other people whatever their skin color is.

James Smethurst describes typical Brown's clients: "The vatos do not go to school; they have no jobs; they are uninterested in ideology. They drink and take drugs. They mark of and defend their turf. They wait for something to do and when that something presents itself – often involving some sort of violent behavior – they do it."<sup>145</sup>

The behavior of the vatos locos is therefore similar in many aspects to the behavior of their lawyer, nevertheless, that is the very reason why they trust him which is one of the most important things required for a successful trial. The emotions vatos locos feel toward the "traditional" lawyers are well represented in the explanation of one of them why he prefers Buffalo Brown: "I don't want no fucking white ass liberal to talk for me."<sup>146</sup>

The descriptions of the trials are one of the most interesting parts of the novel and it is only up to the reader to distinguish between a fighting for the just cause and a blind radicalism. Sometimes the differences are quite clear and at other moments one must question the reliability of the narrator. However, the statement that there was a discrimination of the Mexican Americans in LA in that period is justifiable from certain parts of the text.

The first case Buffalo Z. Brown is working on is not political. He investigates a mysterious death of a young Chicano who died in prison in his cell. The official report says that he committed suicide but his family is convinced otherwise due to the fact that he was a devoted Catholic and also because of some discrepancies in what the witnesses said. There is a strange information that appeared in the report about his death as well.

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<sup>145</sup> James Smethurst, "The Figure of the *Vato Loco* and the Representation of Ethnicity in the Narratives of Oscar Z. Acosta," *MELUS*, vol. 20, no. 2, Varieties of Ethnic Criticism (Summer, 1995) 125.

<sup>146</sup> Acosta 53.

During the trial the main protagonist, as it is usual for him provokes some conflicts and therefore the judge forbids him to interrogate the witnesses. He must write his questions on a piece of paper and the judge asks the witnesses for him. This action is described by the narrator: “Before each one, he tells the witness which lawyer framed the question. And then he asks it in a manner suggesting the answer he wants.”<sup>147</sup> In this case the reader can see that the client, or the lawyer, is being discriminated, the question is whether it is because he is Chicano or because he is rude.

Even though the main protagonist is described as a character that is difficult to like and many readers can have problem with that, we cannot deny that he loves his people and he tries to do the best for them. He sees them all in a very positive light, at least in the first part of the book before he gets tired of the politics and leaves for Mexico for a while. “...we see the Cockroaches outside: faces in a sea of molasses. The Chicanos are a beautiful people. Brown soft skin, purple lips and zoftig chests.”<sup>148</sup>

#### **4.3.2. Language**

The people who are the main protagonists of this novel are very different from the characters of Villareal and Anaya in terms of origin. They are no longer more Mexicans than Americans, they were born in the US, their relationship to Mexico as their home country is more abstract than concrete and they speak English much better than Spanish. They are usually very poor, therefore the writer calls them cockroaches which Acosta sees as a symbol of poverty and the dwellings of Brown’s clients are usually full of them.

Despite the fact that these Chicanos usually have not been to Mexico ever in their life, the less they know about the country of their parents, the more they are proud of their Mexican heritage. They keep calling each other using the Spanish pronoun *ese* and love using other Spanish words in their speech, however, these are probably the only Spanish words they know because even though Spanish is the tongue of their mothers, it is not their mother tongue.

The principal characters are called *vatos locos* whose specific speech style is characterized by James Smethurs: “The diction and syntax of the language they speak is an intercultural mixture of various vernacular Spanish and English idioms where non-Spanish elements

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<sup>147</sup> Acosta 110.

<sup>148</sup> Acosta 14.

predominate.”<sup>149</sup> It can be concluded that the speech of vatos locos reflects what they really are, the non-Spanish (or non-Mexican) elements predominate in their personalities as they predominate in their language.

The main protagonist can serve as a typical example. He is excessively proud of his ethnic heritage but he does not actually know much of Spanish and feels ashamed of it. Buffalo Z. Brown is not afraid to acknowledge this fact and he does so on more occasions. When he sees a cockroach in his room, an old song crosses his mind and Brown observes: “The old revolutionary song is just about the only Spanish I know.”<sup>150</sup>

It must be admitted that the main protagonist is trying to make up for this defect and wants to learn Spanish. He travels to Mexico and other Latin American countries as it can be understood from the following quotation: “I realize I’ve hardly even spoke in Spanish since I left Panama.”<sup>151</sup> The fact that the protagonist sincerely acknowledges that he has a problem with the language of his ancestors is one of the few moments when he seems quite likable and sincere in the story.

Brown also describes moments when he feels ashamed of himself due to his ignorance of Spanish. As he gets greater reputation as the Chicano lawyer he is asked by a Mexican TV channel for an interview. He agrees but then he realizes again that he might have problems with the language. “For an instant I freeze up. It is the first time I’ve been interviewed in Spanish.”<sup>152</sup>

Even though Brown is ashamed of himself, he blames the major American society for such a situation. He is aware that he is not the only one fighting this language deficiency and sees the responsibility for such a situation at white officials who decide about their lives and who do not let them attend Spanish speaking schools. In this instant, Acosta goes back to history and is referring to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. “Are we such a threat just because we have demanded a compliance with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which provided for a bilingual society? Is there something wrong with speaking Spanish in our schools?”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Smethurst 126.

<sup>150</sup> Acosta 23.

<sup>151</sup> Acosta 29.

<sup>152</sup> Acosta 134.

<sup>153</sup> Acosta 60.



The reader can see that the language situation in this novel is much different from the works by Villareal and Anaya, especially due to the fact that the novel is set in different time and place. Therefore it can be expected that all the other ideas concerning racial inequality or the history of the territory will be treated differently and the solutions proposed will be much more radical than in the previous novels.

#### **4.3.3. Reflections of the real political situation**

Oscar Zeta Acosta in this political novel actually mentions all the important events that mark the history of relations between USA and Mexico. The author views most positively the oldest Pre-Columbian history and more or less puts the blame for all the misfortunes of his people on the United States. The opinions of Acosta are stereotypical in many aspects and often quite radical in the solutions.

In the moments when the narrator is talking about the glorious Aztec past, his means of expression undergo a radical change. He ceases to be concise in style and starts being more poetic with a language full of adorns. When Acosta describes an incident when a Chicano crowd gets in a conflict with police outside a church, these are the words he uses: “never before have the sons of the conquered *Aztecas* worshipped their dead gods on the doorstep of the living Christ.”<sup>154</sup> This sentence is important for further understanding of the political opinions of the author as well because, in this place, he labels himself and his people as the direct descendants of the Aztecs.

The last quotation has actually a hidden irony inside itself because Acosta is using a Spanish word to name the nation of Aztecs, probably to weaken the connection between Chicanos and Anglo Saxons. Nevertheless, at the same time as he wants to fortify the importance of that nation he writes its name with a capital letter which is a grammatical feature of English, not Spanish. Therefore he unconsciously affirms that his legacy is a mix of two different cultures, no matter how much he renounces one of them.

It might seem surprising that the author calls Chicanos direct descendants of the Aztecs and somewhat forgets about the powerful Spanish influence. It is so because Acosta and his alter ego in the novel have a very special theory about the origin of all LA Chicanos. The

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<sup>154</sup> Acosta 12 – 13.

writer sees them as direct descendants of Aztecs from Aztlan who actually never left for Mexico and have been living in the same place for thousands of years.

Acosta describes the history of the territory:

It is the ancient land of Aztlan, the original homeland of *aztecas*. New invaders. New conquerors. They, too, are on a holy mission. As Cortez had done before, through modern warfare, through politics and diplomacy, the new white barbarians invade the land and subdue it. [...] The United States pays a couple of million to an idiot in Mexico City for all Aztlan and for all slaves living thereon. [...]

“But we are not Mexicans,” the people cry out. “We are Chicanos from Aztlan. We have never left our land.”<sup>155</sup>

Acosta’s interpretation of Mexican-American history is that the land was stolen from his people because it had always belonged to them. He actually defends same ideology as Reies Lopez Tijerina whom he mentions few times in his work as well. The greatest evildoer for both Acosta and Tijerina is the US government and its representatives, i.e. policemen and other officials, who are called the pigs. “The *vato loco* has been fighting with the pig since the Anglos stole his lands in the last century.”<sup>156</sup>

The solution of this historical injustice is offered as well and not surprisingly it is as radical as it is expected from the “professional revolutionary.”<sup>157</sup> Therefore it is an idea that will always be a utopia only: “We need to get our own land. We need our own government. We must have our own flag and our own country. Nothing less will save the existence of the Chicanos.”<sup>158</sup> The question remains if such radical political proposals are helpful for the oppressed ethnic minority, or whether the revolutionaries should not rather focus on solution of urgent problems as discrimination and racial inequalities.

However, James Smethurts has a generally positive opinion on Acosta and he states that by this exaggerated territorial demands the author actually points out their absurdity. “Acosta similarly problematizes claims of a common *Chicanismo* on the part of the various participants in Chicano social and political movements, as well as undermining attempts to organize Chicanos through myths of origins – particularly that of Aztlan.”<sup>159</sup>

There might be one more reason why the main protagonist is suggesting the creation of an independent country and is ignoring the Mexican historical influence. Despite the fact that he

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<sup>155</sup> Acosta 161.

<sup>156</sup> Acosta 91.

<sup>157</sup> Acosta 153.

<sup>158</sup> Acosta 201.

<sup>159</sup> Smethurst 121.

might be even aware of the fact that the people who lived in the area of presupposed Aztlán before 1848 were so low in number that it is highly improbable that all the Mexican Americans in LA are their direct descendants. Buffalo Z. Brown visits Mexico but this experience is not very positive. Juan Bruce-Novoa interprets his journey as a moment when he realizes that life in the old homeland is even more difficult than the life in the US. This might be why the author does not call for returning there.

For Brown Buffalo, Mexico is no longer paradise lost, but a refuge and haven. Mexican reality, however, once again destroys his illusions. His brother, who lives in Mexico, makes him see that the Chicano movement is a rhetorical farce compared to the land reform struggle in Acapulco. [...] Mexico represents here a model of real revolution and its risks, a point of contrast, an accusing angel.<sup>160</sup>

Acosta recalls in his work other historical moments and personalities as well but he presents a highly prejudiced point of view. One of such infamous individualities is Malinche whom he sees as a traitor and the main reason why Spaniards managed to destroy the Aztec empire in the first place. The author stresses and condemns as many Mexican writers often do the importance of her relationship with Cortes. “Malinche, to her everlasting disgrace, provides him with her brown body and her strange words.”<sup>161</sup>

Another event that is seen very subjectively by the author is the Mexican Revolution which he glorifies. This attitude is again quite questionable because as it was mentioned in one of previous sections this fight for freedom at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned into a series of bloody disputes for power and political influence. Nevertheless, the Mexican Revolution serves as one of occasions when Acosta does not mind being connected with Mexico.

The following utterance comes from a moment when a group of revolutionaries decides to occupy an estate close to a church because of a religious dispute. The Chicanos want to spend three days there without eating and the first evening is described as an ideal of political unity and peace with an atmosphere very similar to the hippie movement. “They sing songs of Mexican Revolution which they learned from their grandmothers.”<sup>162</sup>

When comments on more contemporary political events appear, we can see that they are often connected with the Civil Rights era in the 1960s. In many cases the author is referring to

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<sup>160</sup> Bruce-Novoa 61.

<sup>161</sup> Acosta 160.

<sup>162</sup> Acosta 84.

the predecessors of the Chicanos in the fighting against discrimination, African Americans, from whom the Chicanos got the inspiration. In the first part of the novel when the main protagonist is not yet working as the Chicano lawyer and therefore is absolutely lost and without life purpose, he expresses his opinion on Chicanos: “The whole so-called Chicano Movement seems to me nothing but another splinter from the Old Civil Rights era.”<sup>163</sup> Naturally, the moment Bufallo Brown meets the Chicanos and gets to know what they are fighting for, he changes his opinion and finds the mission and sense in his life.

The last political comment that is worth mentioning is the description of a demonstration that is organized to express the negative opinion of Chicanos on President Nixon and the Vietnam War. The protesters are chanting slogans that mention not only the war but also the shooting at the Kent State University. It is an infamous event when the protests against American invasion to Cambodia were violently stopped by Ohio National Guard by shooting in people and killing four students. “We are here to tell Richard Nixon that he can’t continue to bomb and kill the poor yellow brothers and sisters in Vietnam, in Cambodia ... or at Kent State!”<sup>164</sup>

We can see that in the novel which deals with the human rights and racial discrimination there are many moments when the author is recalling some historical events and that the political relations between USA and Mexico are very important to him. However, the views that are presented by Acosta are very tendentious and therefore this work cannot serve us as a reliable historical chronicle of any kind.

#### **4.3.4. Acosta as a part of Chicano literary canon**

Oscar Zeta Acosta is rather a controversial figure among the literary critics who occupy themselves with the Chicano literature. They are Raymund Paredes who mentions the author in his “The Evolution of Chicano Literature” and Juan Bruce-Novoa who dedicates to Acosta in his essays. The principal question they are trying to answer is whether he actually should be considered as a part of Chicano literary canon or not, therefore whether he is a quality author who produced two important novels or a lawyer who wrote two marginal narratives. The main problem probably lays in the vivid descriptions of his peculiar lifestyle which occupy a

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<sup>163</sup> Acosta 36.

<sup>164</sup> Acosta 176.

significant part of his works. With Acosta the reader can never be sure if the writer approves of his former behavior or whether it is meant as a kind of critique.

Raymund Paredes is a researcher who sees Acosta in a negative light. The author's attempts to define who he is via ethnic radicalism are seen as superficial by Paredes and his ideas are considered as not convincing. "The work of Oscar Zeta Acosta is problematical here because Acosta wants so desperately to retrieve his ethnic heritage. But the reader is struck by the superficiality of his quest and the flimsiness of the foundation on which he hopes to build his ethnic identity."<sup>165</sup>

What Paredes means by ethnic heritage and criticizes most are Acosta's suggestions about creating an independent Chicano country which are based on events in the remote past that will be commented further on. By word "superficiality" the critique probably means the "carpe diem" lifestyle of the main protagonists which gets into the mind of the reader more easily than the complicated political ideas and it also seems that the main protagonist enjoys this part of his life more than his anti-discrimination quest.

Another feature that can be called as superficial and flimsy is the style the novel is written in. The author presupposes a very good knowledge of events and personalities that had something to do with the Chicano movement in LA in 1970. There are no explanations and it is easy to get lost in the text without the proper amount of information. Other aspect that makes Acosta difficult to read is the character of the text which at some moments almost resembles a stream of consciousness because the author often jumps from a topic to a topic as they appear in his mind which might contribute to the feeling of being lost in the text. The last negative characteristic would be that the characters lack any psychological depth, we do not know their motivation and thus they often seem only as a gang of violent primitives with no real political goals.

One of the scientists who represent the opposite point of view and are defending Acosta's contribution to the Chicano literature is Juan Bruce-Novoa. In one of his essays he is trying to answer the question whether works by Acosta should be seen as a part of Chicano literary canon or not. Bruce-Novoa's attitude is affirmative in this aspect because the ethnic

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<sup>165</sup> Paredes 74.

experience is an important issue for the author. The whole message of his novels is actually seen by Bruce-Novoa as a critique of the whole Chicano movement.<sup>166</sup>

Juan Bruce-Novoa in response to Raymund Paredes writes: “I suspect that, more than the flimsiness of Acosta’s ethnic foundation, what bothers some Chicano readers is that Acosta draws into question the flimsiness of a Movement based on ethnicity in the context of a mobile and versatile society like the United States.”<sup>167</sup>

Another defender of works by Oscar Z. Acosta is Ramón Saldívar whose statements on this topic are very affirmative. Saldívar takes Acosta’s political opinions seriously and even approves of his radicalism. Saldívar claims that the value in the author is that from the doubt he feels at the beginning he can create something new and special. Saldívar calls his radical ideas as hypothetical only and the positive attitude towards violence is not mentioned at all.<sup>168</sup>

#### **4.3.5. Conclusion**

The political novel by Oscar Zeta Acosta *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* is quite a controversial work among Chicano literature. Its author is a radical reformer who does not condemn violence as a means of getting what we want and who uses various arguments to achieve his goals. Acosta is quite eclectic in choosing those arguments and he often refuses to look at the whole picture, he usually says what he needs to say in the very moment. Often the writer does not mind if he contradicts himself, as in the instance of Mexico which he glorifies at times but also criticizes at other.

The novel should not be read as a reliable chronicle of events of that age but just as one of possible points of view. Acosta is not a trustworthy narrator and his real opinions and attitudes are not very clear; sometimes they are overlain by detailed accounts of his sexual and drug adventures. We can never be sure whether what is described in the book is a real discrimination of people with different skin color or the disgust of the white officials to deal with a rude lawyer who occasionally is not actually defending his clients but dramatically overacting for the TV cameras present in the courtroom.

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<sup>166</sup> see Bruce-Novoa 137 – 139.

<sup>167</sup> Bruce-Novoa 137.

<sup>168</sup> see Ramoñ Saldívar, “A Dialectic of Difference: Towards a Theory of the Chicano Novel,” *MELUS*, vol. 6, no. 3, The Ethnic Perspective (Autumn, 1979) 83.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In this diploma thesis I tried explore the way how the relations between the USA and Mexico are depicted in three selected works of Chicano literature. The first two chapters were supposed to give some theoretical background for the analysis and the last one is the actual analysis of the three novels.

The first section deals with a brief history of Mexican-American relations where special attention was given to the events that the selected authors mention in their works, e.g. the Aztec empire, Mexican war, Mexican revolution, etc. The second part is focused on the most famous Chicano writers and their works and on their historical predecessors as well, there are also mention the most important issues and questions that the Chicano authors are trying to answer, e.g. immigration, acculturation, discrimination, etc.

All the three books share certain features which make them pieces of Chicano literature. They are all novels with a good number of autobiographical elements, there appear Spanish words or phrases in all of them. However, the number differs from author to author. And they all make reference to different periods of Mexican-American history.

The first novel to be analyzed is José Antonio Villareal's *Pocho*, first published in 1959. Villareal is a forerunner of the Chicano Movement therefore his political attitudes are not as radical as those of later Chicano writers. His is a representative of the opinion that to become successful in the quest for the American dream one must suppress their ethnical heritage and become a part of the major society. The historical events that are mentioned most often by Villareal are Mexican revolution, Great Depression and World War II. The events actually correspond to the time setting of the novel.

*Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya that was published in 1973 can serve as an example of a work which surpassed the Chicano readership and was able to reach a wide audience. Therefore it is not very surprising that the political problems of that period are not examined in such a detail as they are by other writers. Anaya is appealing on his readers using the universal questions that concern family, friendship or religion. Nevertheless, even Anaya sometimes must refer to some actual political events, those are World War II and the situation of Mexican American families living in New Mexico that suddenly became citizens a new country due to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

In *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* by Oscar Zeta Acosta we can see how the historical events are used in terms of political struggle. The author is working with the information according to what the most suitable for him is and he does not worry too much about the credibility of the things he says.

In my diploma thesis I have found out that different Chicano authors treat the topic of the relations between the USA and Mexico differently and therefore Chicano literature cannot be used as a reliable source of historical information. The writers choose the eras that are important for them and their view is often prejudiced since they represent one of the parties that are concerned with this problem. Nevertheless, the three novels I have analyzed can serve as interesting example of possible tendencies that might appear.



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## SHRNUTÍ

Diplomová práce se zabývá tématem mezinárodních vztahů USA a Mexika a jejich odrazem v chicanské literatuře. Cílem práce je zjistit, zda američtí autoři mexického původu přistupují k tomuto tématu konzistentně a zda je možné jejich díla považovat za relevantní zdroj informací k danému oboru. Práce je rozdělena na tři části. První část se zabývá historií vztahů mezi USA a Mexikem, kde je kladen důraz hlavně na ty události, kterými se zabývají samotní autoři chicanské literatury. V druhé části je stručný přehled hlavních autorů a směrů mexicko-americké literatury. Poslední část se věnuje analýze tří konkrétních literárních děl, a to románů *Pocho* od José Antonia Villareala, *Bless Me, Ultima* Roberta Anayi a *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* Oscara Zety Acosty. Díla byla vybrána záměrně tak, že jejich autoři reprezentují různé politické postoje a tím pádem i rozdílné pohledy na danou problematiku. Villareal je zastáncem asimilace, tzv. „melting pot“ teorie, Zeta Acosta je představitelem politického radikalismu a Roberto Anaya se stal tvůrcem, který překročil stín menšinového autora, jelikož jeho tvorba prezentuje myšlenky natolik universální, že je přístupná všem čtenářům v USA a ne pouze mexickým Američanům. Závěrem práce je, že tyto romány navzdory jejich literární hodnotě nelze považovat za spolehlivé zdroje, co se týká relevantních historických informací na téma vztahů USA a Mexika. Tito tvůrci už ze své podstaty nemohou být pouze nestrannými pozorovateli a jejich tvorbu je třeba brát pouze za jeden z možných názorů na celou problematiku.

## **ANOTACE DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE**

1. Název práce: Relations between USA and Mexico and Their Reflection in the Chicano Literature
2. Příjmení a jméno: Lucie Langrová
3. Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky Filozofické fakulty UP v Olomouci
4. Obor: anglická filologie – španělská filologie
5. Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Robert Hýsek
6. Počet stran: 77
7. Rok obhajoby: 2010
8. Klíčová slova: Mexico  
USA  
Chicano  
literature  
international relations
9. Resumé: Diplomová práce je zaměřena vztahy USA a Mexika a jejich odraz v chicanské literatuře. Cílem práce je pomocí teoretických informací o dané problematice a analýzy tří konkrétních románů zjistit, zda díla chicanské literatury můžeme považovat za relevantní zdroje informací v této otázce.