

How I love this tragic valley of South Texas, as Ricardo Sánchez calls it; this borderland between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. This land has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-Mexican blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage.

Today I see the Valley still struggling to survive. Whether it does or not, it will never be as I remember it. The borderlands depression that was set off by the 1982 peso devaluation in Mexico resulted in the closure of hundreds of Valley businesses. Many people lost their homes, cars, land. Prior to 1982, U.S. store owners thrived on retail sales to Mexicans who came across the border for groceries and clothes and appliances. While goods on the U.S. side have become 10, 100, 1000 times more expensive for Mexican buyers, goods on the Mexican side have become 10, 100, 1000 times cheaper for Americans. Because the Valley is heavily dependent on agriculture and Mexican retail trade, it has the highest unemployment rates along the entire border region; it is the Valley that has been hardest hit.¹⁰

"It's been a bad year for corn," my brother, Nune, says. As he talks, I remember my father scanning the sky for a rain that would end the drought, looking up into the sky, day after day, while the corn withered on its stalk. My father has been dead for 29 years, having worked himself to death. The life span of a Mexican farm laborer is 56—he lived to be 38. It shocks me that I am older than he. I, too, search the sky for rain. Like the ancients, I worship the rain god and the maize goddess, but unlike my father I have recovered their names. Now for rain (irrigation) one offers not a sacrifice of blood, but of money.

"Farming is in a bad way," my brother says. "Two to three thousand small and big farmers went bankrupt in this country last year. Six years ago the price of corn was \$8.00 per hundred pounds," he goes on. "This year it is \$3.90 per hundred pounds." And, I think to myself, after taking inflation into account, not planting anything puts you ahead.

I walk out to the back yard, stare at *los rosales de mamá*. She wants me to help her prune the rose bushes, dig out the carpet grass that is choking them. *Mamagrande Ramona también tenía rosales*. Here every Mexican grows flowers. If they don't

have a piece of dirt, they use car tires, jars, cans, shoe boxes. Roses are the Mexican's favorite flower. I think, how symbolic—thorns and all.

Yes, the Chicano and Chicana have always taken care of growing things and the land. Again I see the four of us kids getting off the school bus, changing into our work clothes, walking into the field with Papi and Mami, all six of us bending to the ground. Below our feet, under the earth lie the watermelon seeds. We cover them with paper plates, putting *terremotes* on top of the plates to keep them from being blown away by the wind. The paper plates keep the freeze away. Next day or the next, we remove the plates, bare the tiny green shoots to the elements. They survive and grow, give fruit hundreds of times the size of the seed. We water them and hoe them. We harvest them. The vines dry, rot, are plowed under. Growth, death, decay, birth. The soil prepared again and again, impregnated, worked on. A constant changing of forms, *renacimientos de la tierra madre*.

This land was Mexican once
was Indian always
and is.

And will be again.

Notes

The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México*

1. Los Tigres del Norte is a *conjunto* band.
2. Jack D. Forbes, *Aztecas del Norte: The Chicanos of Aztlán* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, Premier Books, 1973), 13, 183; Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of Shaking Earth* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1959), 32.
3. John R. Chávez, *The Lost Land: The Chicano Images of the Southwest* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 9.
4. Chávez, 9. Besides the Aztecs, the Ute, Gabriellino of California, Pima of Arizona, some Pueblo of New Mexico, Comanche of Texas, Opatá of Sonora, Tarahumara of Sinaloa and Durango, and the Huichol of Jalisco speak Uto-Aztecan languages and are descended from the Cochise people.
5. Reay Tannahill, *Sex In History* (Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day/Publishers/Scarborough House, 1980), 308.
6. Chávez, 21.
7. Isabel Parra, *El Libro Mayor de Violeta Parra* (Madrid, España: Ediciones Michay, S.A., 1985), 156-7.
8. From the Mexican *corrido*, "Del peligro de la Intervención" Vicente T. Mendoza, *El Corrido Mexicano* (México. D.F.: Fondo De Cultura Económica, 1954), 42.
9. Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), 2-3.
10. The Plan of San Diego, Texas, drawn up on January 6, 1915, called for the independence and segregation of the states bordering Mexico: Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California. Indians would get their land back, Blacks would get six states from the south and form their own independent republic. Chávez, 79.
11. Jesús Mena, "Violence in the Rio Grande Valley," *Nuestro* (Jan/Feb. 1983), 41-42.
12. *Nosotros los pobres* was the first Mexican film that was truly Mexican and not an imitation European film. It stressed the devotion and love that children should have for their mother and how its lack would lead to the dissipation of their character. This film spawned a generation of mother-devotion/ungrateful-sons films.

13. From the Navajo "Protection Song" (to be sung upon going into battle). George W. Gronyn, ed., *American Indian Poetry: The Standard Anthology of Songs and Chants* (New York, NY: Liveright, 1934), 97.

14. Grace Halsell, *Los ilegales*, trans. Mayo Antonio Sánchez (Editorial Diana Mexica, 1979).

15. Margarita B. Melville, "Mexican Women Adapt to Migration," *International Migration Review*, 1978.

Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan

1. Francisco Guerra, *The Pre-Columbian Mind: A study into the aberrant nature of sexual drives, drugs affecting behaviour, and the attitude towards life and death, with a survey of psychotherapy in pre-Columbian America* (New York, NY: Seminar Press, 1971).

Entering Into the Serpent

1. From the song "Sueño Con Serpientes" by Silvio Rodríguez, from the album *Días y flores*. Translated by Barbara Dane with the collaboration of Rina Bermauer and Juan Flores.

2. *Nalgas*: vagina, buttocks.

3. *Dicen que las culebras* like to suck *chichis*: they say snakes like to suck women's teats.

4. *Ella tiene su tono*: she has supernatural power from her animal soul, the *tono*.

5. *Quelite*: weed.

6. *Azadón*: hoe.

7. *Veneno*: venom, poison.

8. *Culebra de cascabel*: rattlesnake.

9. In some Nahuatl dialects *Tonantsi* is called *Tonantzin*, literally "Our Holy Mother." "Tonan was a name given in Nahuatl to several mountains, these being the congelations of the Earth Mother at spots convenient for her worship." The Mexica considered the mountain mass southwest of Chapultepec to be their mother. Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods. Aztec World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1979), 154, 242.

10. Ena Campbell, "The Virgin of Guadalupe and the Female Self-Image: A Mexican Case History," *Mother Worship: Themes and Variations*, James J. Preston, ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 22.

11. Alan R. Sandstrom, "The Tonantsi Cult of the Eastern Nahuas," Mother Worship: Themes and Variations, James J. Preston, ed.
12. *Una tela tejida con ásperas fibras de agave*. It is an oblong cloth that hangs over the back and ties together across the shoulders.
13. Andres Gonzales Guerrero, Jr., The Significance of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe and La Raza Cósmica in the Development of a Chicano Theology of Liberation (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1984), 122.
14. *Algunos dicen que Guadalupe es una palabra derivada del lenguaje árabe que significa "Río Oculto."* Tomie de Paola, The Lady of Guadalupe (New York, NY: Holiday House, 1980), 44.
15. "Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana," from *Proptos de la misa de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, Guerrero, 124.
16. From "La Virgen Ranchera," Guerrero, 127.
17. *La Virgen María* is often equated with the Aztec *Teleoinam*, the Maya *Ixchel*, the Inca *Mamacocha* and the Yoruba *Yemayá*.
18. Geoffrey Parrinder, ed., World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present (New York, NY: Facts on File Publications, 1971), 72.
19. Levi-Strauss' paradigm which opposes nature to culture and female to male has no such validity in the early history of our Indian forebears. June Nash, "The Aztecs and the Ideology of Male Dominance," Signs (Winter, 1978), 349.
20. Parrinder, 72.
21. Parrinder, 77.
22. Nash, 352.
23. Nash, 350, 355.
24. Parrinder, 355.
25. Jacques Soustelle, The Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1962). Soustelle and most other historians got their information from the Franciscan father, Bernardino de Sahagún, chief chronicler of Indian religious life.
26. Nash, 252-253.
27. Nash, 358.
28. Nash, 361-362.

29. Karl W. Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 68, 69, 87, 109.
30. Bernardino de Sahagún, General History of the Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex), Vol.1 Revised, trans. Arthur Anderson and Charles Dibble (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 1950), 11.
31. The Aztecs muted Snake Woman's patronage of childbirth and vegetation by placing a sacrificial knife in the empty cradle she carried on her back (signifying a child who died in childbirth), thereby making her a devourer of sacrificial victims. Snake Woman had the ability to change herself into a serpent or into a lovely young woman to entice young men who withered away and died after intercourse with her. She was known as a witch and a shape-shifter. Bundage, 168-171.
32. Anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl coined the word *participation mystique*. According to Jung, "It denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection . . . [in which] the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to partial identity." Carl Jung, "Definitions," in Psychological Types. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Vol. 6 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), par. 781.
33. I have lost the source of this quote. If anyone knows what it is, please let the publisher know.
34. Some *mexicanos* and Chicanos distinguish between *aire*, air, and *mal aire*, the evil spirits which reside in the air.

La herencia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State

1. Marius Schneider, El origen musical de los animales-símbolos en la mitología y la escultura antiguas (Barcelona, 1946).
2. C.A. Burland and Werner Forman, Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror: The Gods and Cultures of Ancient Mexico (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1975), 55.
3. Gershen Kaufman, Shame: The Power of Caring (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, Inc. 1980), viii. This book was instrumental in my understanding of shame.
4. Alfonsina Storni, Antología Poética. Séptima Edición (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Editorial Losada, S.A., 1956), 42.
5. The suffix "cue" means skirt and is a word to describe a lady. "Coatl" not only means serpent, it also means twin.

6. According to Jung and James Hillman, "archetypes" are the presences of gods and goddesses in the psyche. Hillman's book, Re-Visioning Psychology (New York, NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), has been instrumental in the development of my thought.

7. *Yemayá* is also known as the wind, *Oyá* as the whirlwind. According to Luisah Teish, I am the daughter of *Yemayá*, with *Oyá* being the mother who raised me.

8. Another form of the goddess *Coatlicue* is *Chimalma*, Shield Hand, a naked cave goddess of the Huitznahua who was present at Aztlán when the Aztecs left from that point of origin. Burland, 166-167.

9. A sculpture, described as the most horrifying and monstrous in the world, was excavated from beneath the Zocalo, the cathedral square in Mexico City, in 1824, where it had lain since the destruction of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. Every year since the Conquest, people had come during an autumn festival with gifts of fruit and flowers which they laid on the pavement of the central square. The Indians maintained that there was somebody very holy and powerful underneath. Burland, 39-40.

10. Juan Eduardo Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, translated from the Spanish by Jack Sage (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1962), 76.

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

1. Ray Gwyn Smith, Moorland is Cold Country, unpublished book.

2. Irena Klepfisz, "*Di rayze abeym*," The Journey Home," in The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz, eds. (Montpelier, VT: Sinister Wisdom Books, 1986), 49.

3. R.C. Ortega, Dialectología Del Barrio, trans. Hortencia S. Alwan (Los Angeles, CA: R.C. Ortega Publisher & Bookseller, 1977), 132.

4. Eduardo Hernández-Chávez, Andrew D. Cohen, and Anthony F. Beltramo, El Lenguaje de los Chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics of Language Used By Mexican Americans (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1975), 39.

5. Hernández-Chávez, xvii.

6. Irena Klepfisz, "Secular Jewish Identity: Yidishkayt in America," in The Tribe of Dina Kaye/Kantrowitz and Klepfisz, eds., 43.

7. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Sign," in We Speak In Code: Poems and Other Writings (Pittsburgh, PA: Motherroot Publications, Inc., 1980), 85.

8. Rodolfo Gonzales, I Am Joaquín / Yo Soy Joaquín (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1972). It was first published in 1967.

9. Kaufman, 68.

10. Chávez, 88-90.

11. "Hispanic" is derived from *Hispanis* (*España*, a name given to the Iberian Peninsula in ancient times when it was a part of the Roman Empire) and is a term designated by the U.S. government to make it easier to handle us on paper.

12. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the Mexican-American in 1848.

13. Anglos, in order to alleviate their guilt for dispossessing the Chicano, stressed the Spanish part of us and perpetrated the myth of the Spanish Southwest. We have accepted the fiction that we are Hispanic, that is Spanish, in order to accommodate ourselves to the dominant culture and its abhorrence of Indians. Chávez, 88-91.

Tlilli, Tlapalli / The Path of the Red and Black Ink

1. R. Gordon Wasson, The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 59, 103.

2. Robert Plant Armstrong, The Powers of Presence: Consciousness, Myth, and Affecting Presence (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 11, 20.

3. Armstrong, 10.

4. Armstrong, 4.

5. Miguel Leon-Portilla, Los Antiguos Mexicanos: A través de sus crónicas y cantares (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1961), 19, 22.

6. Leon-Portilla, 125.

7. In *Xóchitl* in *Cuicatl* is Nahuatl for flower and song, *flor y canto*.

8. Nietzsche, in The Will to Power, says that the artist lives under a curse of being vampirized by his talent.

La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness

1. This is my own "take off" on José Vasconcelos' idea. José Vasconcelos, La Raza Cósmica: Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana (México: Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones, 1961).

2. Vasconcelos.

3. Arthur Koestler termed this "bisociation." Albert Rothenberg, The Creative Process in Art, Science, and Other Fields (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 12.

4. In part, I derive my definitions for "convergent" and "divergent" thinking from Rothenberg, 12-13.

5. To borrow chemist Ilya Prigogine's theory of "dissipative structures." Prigogine discovered that substances interact not in predictable ways as it was taught in science, but in different and fluctuating ways to produce new and more complex structures, a kind of birth he called "morphogenesis," which created unpredictable innovations. Harold Gilliam, "Searching for a New World View," This World (January, 1981), 23.

6. *Tortillas de masa barina*: corn tortillas are of two types, the smooth uniform ones made in a tortilla press and usually bought at a tortilla factory or supermarket, and *gorditas*, made by mixing *masa* with lard or shortening or butter (my mother sometimes puts in bits of bacon or *chicharrones*).

7. Gina Valdés, Puentes y Fronteras: Coplas Chicanas (Los Angeles, CA: Castle Lithograph, 1982), 2.

8. Richard Wilhelm, The I Ching or Book of Changes, trans. Cary F. Baynes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 98.

9. "Soledad" is sung by the group *Haciendo Punto en Otro Son*.

10. Out of the twenty-two border counties in the four border states, Hidalgo County (named for Father Hidalgo who was shot in 1810 after instigating Mexico's revolt against Spanish rule under the banner of *la Virgen de Guadalupe*) is the most poverty-stricken county in the nation as well as the largest home base (along with Imperial in California) for migrant farmworkers. It was here that I was born and raised. I am amazed that both it and I have survived.

Un Agitado Viento

Ehécatl, The Wind