



**Las formas de nuestras voces:  
Chicana and Mexicana Writers  
in Mexico**

(The Forms of Our Voices:  
Chicana and Mexican Writers in  
Mexico)

*Claire Joysmith* (Editor)

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**BICULTURAL LITERATURE**

If literature unveils a mirror to the soul, then this well-edited anthology of writings about and by Chicana and Mexicana authors lays bare an exciting and provocative bicultural literary landscape known by only a privileged few. Based loosely on a conference-encounter of Chicana and Mexicana writers held in Mexico City in June 1993, and organized by the editor, the study encompasses not only the original presentations but selective interviews with some of the participants, additional comments, biographi-

cal notes, an analytical introduction and an extensive bibliography. Moreover, the participants from both countries represent the finest and most accomplished of the literary traditions from which they come. Names such as Elena Poniatowska, Sandra Cisneros, Guadalupe Loaeza and Ana Castillo should ring familiar to many.

Indeed, the dynamics of the interaction among the Chicana and Mexicana participants quickly transcended the original intention of the conference and demonstrated the potential of using Chicana literature as a vehicle to challenge and discuss. The

understanding Chicanas within United States literary history, bilingualism and biculturalism, Mexican literature, as well as society and ethnic groups in the United States. The internationally acclaimed writer Elena Poniatowska suggests, for example, that Chicana writers oblige their Mexican audience to confront the most ancient and primitive of Mexican beliefs through their very different exploration of Mexican culture. Aralia López G., a feminist pioneer in Mexico, embarks on a comparison of Mexicana and Chicana literature, concluding that while the two

“interstice between nation-states,” exploring the particular difficulties and challenges she faces as an observer-critic in the United States, and as a Mexican-origin individual in dialogue with Mexican writers with varying degrees of awareness of *mexicanidad* abroad. Yet, as Chicana Ana Castillo notes, the most important task of a woman writer, regardless of nationality or ethnic identification, is to give form to connections among women, with men, or by extension, in this case, between Mexicana and Chicana writers.

The book continues with several articles that analyze individual Chicana authors, successfully balancing the aforementioned essays. Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Gloria Anzaldúa and Mary Helen Ponce all receive detailed and informative analyses of individual works that illustrate the diversity and richness of Chicana literature. After all, it is only through exploring concrete examples of their work that we can fully appreciate their written creativity.

However, Joysmith rounds out the study with a series of interviews conducted with the participants after the encounter, not just to offer perspectives on what transpired but ironically to analyze the silences also generated by the event. All the participants openly acknowledge that Chicana and Mexicana writers have not had as much contact as they would have liked with each

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conference had been conceived as an effort to create physical and cultural spaces for Mexicana and Chicana writers to interact and explore Chicana literature, but the dialogues among them and with the public quickly established the need of all to explore *mexicanidad* especially in the context of feminism, with all its complexities. *Nuestras voces* successfully and correctly transmits this sense of promise, and lays down some avenues of inquiry.

The volume begins with a series of chapters independent of the conference outlining some broad considerations useful in

genres share many of the same cultural codes, they each find themselves at different points of development. Chicana literature has really emerged in the last generation, amidst an intense feminist dialectic, while its counterpart in Mexico has evolved in a much more traditional environment.

However, Chicana Norma Alarcón confronts uncomfortable areas of divergence between Chicana and Mexicana writers that can function as obstacles, but that can also serve as points of future discussion. Using the tools of a Chicana critic, Alarcón posits herself in the

other, for many reasons. While the physical and cultural spaces created by the colloquium obviously encouraged real communication among the participants, the longstanding contradictions and resentments between Chicanos and Mexican society mostly remained unarticulated and silent. To her credit, Joysmith openly acknowledges the silences and probes their parameters through her inquiries.

The participants identified problems of access to the published literature of both countries, different class and ethnic identification and questions surrounding sexuality. Lack of familiarity with the colonized status of the Chicano community in the context of the United States meant that Mexicans found it difficult to comprehend the reality of being Chicana. Ironically, only by giving form and substance to those silences can critics and writers from both countries fill them and transcend the limitations they impose. Its forthrightness and content make this section of the book provocative, and it clearly shows that a productive transnational cultural and literary inquiry is just beginning.

In any event, the potential for dialogue among Chicana and Mexicana writers is enormous. Once the barriers of national political boundaries and lack of contact are acknowledged, writers and critics from both sides of the United States-Mexican border

can approach a creative deconstruction and reconstruction of *mexicanidad* in a broad multicultural and binational context. *Las formas de nuestras voces* provides a

significant point of departure for such an endeavor.

*Barbara Driscoll*  
Researcher at CISAN.

