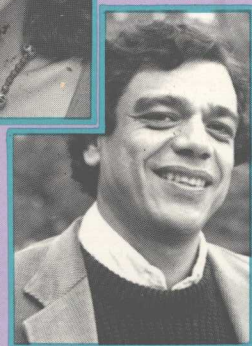
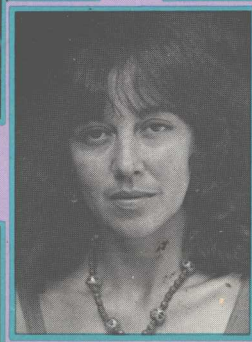
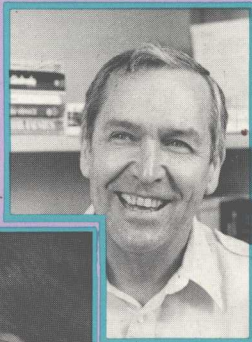
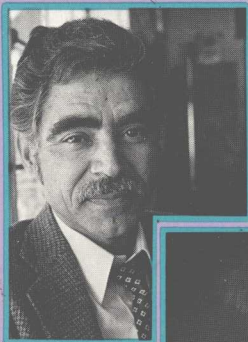


UNDERSTANDING

CHICANO LITERATURE



by Carl R. Shirley
and Paula W. Shirley

UNDERSTANDING Chicano LITERATURE

CARL R. SHIRLEY

and

PAULA W. SHIRLEY

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS

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Published in Columbia, South Carolina, by the
University of South Carolina Press

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shirley, Carl R., 1943-

Understanding Chicano literature / Carl R. Shirley and Paula W. Shirley.

p. cm. — (Understanding contemporary American literature)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-87249-575-2. ISBN 0-87249-576-0 (pbk.)

1. American literature—Mexican American authors—History and criticism. 2. American literature—20th century—History and criticism. 3. Mexican Americans—Intellectual life—20th century. 4. Mexican Americans in literature. I. Shirley, Paula W. II. Title. III. Series.

PS153.M4S55 1988

810'.9'86872073—dc19

88-15084

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For Néstor,
whom we loved

EDITOR'S PREFACE

Understanding Contemporary American Literature has been planned as a series of guides or companions for students as well as good nonacademic readers. The editor and publisher perceive a need for these volumes because much of the influential contemporary literature makes special demands. Uninitiated readers encounter difficulty in approaching works that depart from the traditional forms and techniques of prose and poetry. Literature relies on conventions, but the conventions keep evolving; new writers form their own conventions—which in time may become familiar. Put simply, *UCAL* provides instruction in how to read certain contemporary writers—identifying and explicating their material, themes, use of language, point of view, structures, symbolism, and responses to experience.

The word *understanding* in the series title was deliberately chosen. Many willing readers lack an adequate understanding of how contemporary literature works; that is, what the author is attempting to express and the means by which it is conveyed. Although the criticism and analysis in the series have been aimed at a level of general accessibility, these introductory volumes are meant to be applied in conjunction with the works they cover. Thus they do not provide a substitute for the works and authors they introduce, but rather prepare the reader for more profitable literary experiences.

M. J. B.

PREFACE

Understanding Chicano Literature is a survey. We do not attempt in depth critical literary analysis, nor do we intend to write for an audience already familiar with the works discussed. We cannot discuss the writings of all Chicano authors, for to do so would be impossible. We have selected some of those whom we consider the best and most representative in all genres. This book is a primer, principally for Anglo students embarking on the study of a growing body of fine writing that constitutes quite a few threads in the intricate tapestry of American literature.

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A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

There is no single Chicano spoken language; there are several. Some Chicanos are perfectly bilingual in standard Spanish and standard English. Some speak only English, but almost all speak both languages with varying degrees of proficiency. Some are more fluent in English than in Spanish, while for others Spanish is more comfortable. Many Chicanos, especially in urban areas, speak and understand a third language, called *caló* or *pocho* or *pachuco*. This mixes English and Spanish grammars, structures, and vocabularies to form a hybrid language; it combines both languages, while adding new words and structures.

Most Chicano prose fiction is in English, but there are more and more novels and short stories published in Spanish, some with a considerable amount of *caló*. Poetry presents greater linguistic complexity; there are poems completely in English and others entirely in Spanish, but many employ both languages and even include *caló*. Frequently a poet will use all three languages in the same poem and, just as frequently, in the same line, thus reflecting a natural phenomenon in Chicano speech called code-switching. This occurs in the speech of bilingual people because a word or phrase in one language most readily occurs to a speaker at the

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

moment of utterance, not because of a lack of knowledge of the other language. Theater is much like poetry in that it is frequently a mixture of English and Spanish, uses *caló*, and contains much code-switching.

In this survey the original language of the titles of all works is used, but Spanish titles have been translated into English. There are translations of all quotations written in Spanish, and all references are made as clear as possible to those who read and understand only English. For readers wishing to learn more about Chicano language, several books on the topic are listed in the suggested readings at the end of this book.

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UNDERSTANDING

CHICANO LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts. No stock shows a grander historic retrospect—grander in religiousness and loyalty, or for patriotism, courage, decorum, gravity and honor. . . .

As to the Spanish stock of our Southwest, it is certain to me that we do not begin to appreciate the splendor and sterling value of its race element. Who knows but that element, dipping, like the course of some subterranean river, invisibly for a hundred or two years, is now to emerge in broadest flow and permanent action.

Walt Whitman, 1883

Whitman was inaccurate and was speaking as a Romantic when he used a popular term of his time, “Spanish,” in referring to Mexicans or Mexican-Americans in the Southwest; but he was dead on the mark in his observation that the “splendor and sterling value” of the Chicano element would “emerge in broadest flow and permanent action.” Indeed, Chicanos, or Mexican-Americans as they are also called, have made their presence felt in the last few decades in many areas of modern American life, including music, art, politics, motion pictures and television, education, labor, and, the impetus for this book, literature—prose, poetry and drama.¹

This volume introduces the general reader to the fascinating creative writing of a cultural entity within the United States that is native yet seems foreign to those who have grown up in regions where few Chica-