Poetry

CRITICISM

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Poetry Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature

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Preface

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Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, *PC* is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *PC* volume.

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Each *PC* entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.

- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order all individual poems, book-length poems, and collection titles contained in the *PC* series. Titles of poetry collections and separately published poems are printed in italics, while titles of individual poems are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

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Linden Peach, "Man, Nature and Wordsworth: American Versions," *British Influence on the Birth of American Literature,* (Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 29-57; reprinted in *Poetry Criticism,* vol. 20, ed. Ellen McGeagh (Detroit: The Gale Group), 37-40.

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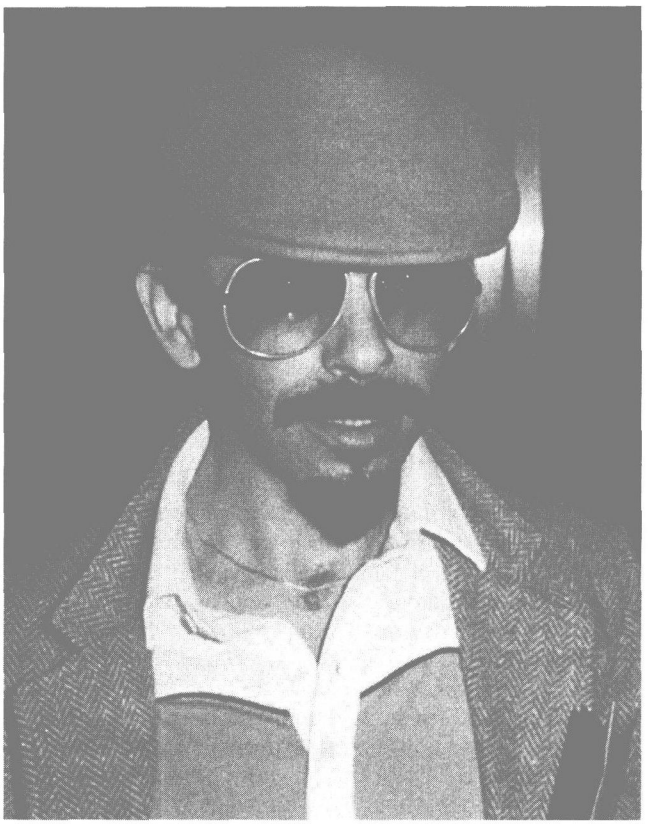
Alurista
1947-

(Full name Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia) American poet, playwright, and educator



INTRODUCTION

A seminal poet, theorist, and teacher of Chicano cultural nationalism, Alurista is important for his contribution to the development of an "interlingual" poetry fashioned from a blend of Spanish, English, and pre-Columbian languages, and for his incorporation of pre-Columbian religion and mythology into his poetry. He has also played a vital role in introducing Chicano studies into universities in the United States. Over the course of his career he has evolved from a politically militant opponent of Anglo domination of Mexican and Chicano people to a proponent of spiritual transformation of vision and consciousness as essential to effecting social change for all people. Throughout his poetry he reiterates that corporate commercial values and practices lie at the root of political, social, and economic exploitation and have imposed denatured lives on people. To this alienated condition he opposes the myth of a lost paradise called Aztlán, and of a pre-Columbian golden age, when cosmic forces and daily routines were in tune. Through the force of his poetry, founded on his faith that language creates reality, Alurista attempts to stimulate a return to a spiritual connection he believes people must have with each other and with cosmic processes in order for there to be just and harmonious societies.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The eldest of six children, Aurista was born in Mexico City and lived in the Mexican states of Morelos and Guerrero until he was thirteen, when the family moved to San Diego, California. His parents spoke English as well as Spanish, although they thought English a cold language, useful only for business transactions. Alurista grew up fluent in both, as well as in various dialects of each language; his poetry reflects his polyglot origins. His poetry also reflects his spirituality and his attachment to ritual. Raised Roman Catholic, in his youth he considered being a priest, but a crisis of faith, engendered by his view that "the Church was big business," set him to investigate other varieties of Christian religion, secular philosophy, non-Christian faiths, and, especially, pre-Columbian history and religion. His college career, too, was made up of a series of explorations; he changed his course of study from business administration to the study of religion, then to sociology, then to social welfare. From 1965 to 1968 he worked as a counselor and psychiatric child-care worker, and in 1970 he graduated from San Diego State College with a B.A. in psychology. In 1978 he earned an M.A. and in 1983 a Ph.D. in Chicano literature. Perhaps more formative for Alurista than his schooling was the Chicano movement of the 1960s, especially the farm workers movement led by César Chávez, whose combination of spirituality, cultural nationalism, and non-violent political engagement were formative influences on Alurista. In 1968 and 1969 Alurista participated in founding the Chicano Studies Department and the Chicano Studies Center at San Diego State College, where he lectured from 1968 through 1974, and again from 1976 until 1979. In the 1970s he also founded *Maize,* a Chicano journal of literature and criticism, and he organized the annual Festival Floricanto, which draws Chicano poets and critics together for several days of performance and discussion. He was also a co-founder of MECHA, *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán* (Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán).

MAJOR WORKS

Alurista is best known for *Floricanto en Aztlán* (1971), his first book of poetry, in which he introduced the blended use of English, Spanish, and pre-Columbian languages. The volume incorporates images drawn from pre-Columbian culture as well as scenes of the *barrio* and treats the themes of alienation, exploitation, and the challenge of regaining the lost paradise of the indigenous people of the American Southwest and Mexico. His second book, *Nationchild Plumaroja, 1969-1972* (1972) continues his exhortation to his people to embrace their Chicano cultural identity as a strategy of opposition to Anglo corporate oppression, characterized as "mr. jones" or "the man." His subsequent poetry shows more sharply Alurista's involvement with pure language, especially evident in *Spik in Glyph?*(1981), a book full of broken syllables and complex puns which cross linguistic barriers. In *Dawn's Eye: 1979-1981* (1982) and *As the Barrio Turns Who the Yoke B On* (2000) Alurista returns to a more accessible style, and to poems of personal experience.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Alurista's early volumes, *Floricanto en Aztlán* and *Nationchild Plumaroja,* are regarded highly for their accessibility, for their blending of languages and dialects, for their concern with immediate experience, and for taking a cultural/political stand. His subsequent volumes, *A'nque/Alurista: Acuarelas hechas por Delilah Merriman-Montoya* (1979) and *Spik in Glyph?,* have met with much less critical acclaim, however, and are generally seen as a weakening of Alurista's poetic powers. Experiments with form and linguistic dexterity, the poems in these volumes are considered less accessible and less immediately concerned with experience than his early poems. Cordelia Candelaria expresses the general critical relation to these two periods in *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction,* when she writes that "[t]he fact that the poet has remained a respected figure among Chicano writers despite the dropping off in quality of . . . [his] later volumes reconfirms the greatness of his earlier work." Alurista seems to have returned in his poetry to a sensibility more to critics' liking. Judith Ginsberg argues that although "verbal pyrotechnics . . . threatened to diminish the power of his expression," she finds that the new poems in *Return: Poems Collected and New,* (1982) "suggest a reengagement with more accessible language and human themes and a movement away from the often brittle and obscure wordplay of *A'nque/Alurista* and *Spik in Glyph?.*" Gary Keller focuses on another aspect of Alurista's poetry which has generated critical concern when he writes that Alurista represents the past with a carelessly uncritical eye, and thus romanticizes and falsifies it. These various objections, however, do not detract from Alurista's importance as a poet. Not only is he, as Luis Leal and Pepe Baron argue, "the best known and most prolific Chicano poet," he has been a significant model for many emerging Chicano poets and has played a leading role in shaping a literary context for their writings.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Floricanto en Aztlán 1971
Nationchild Plumaroja, 1969-1972 1972
Collecion Tula y Tonan: Textos generativos (poems for children) 1973
Timespace Huracán: Poems 1972-1975 1976
A'nque/Alurista: Acuarelas hechas por Delilah Merriman-Montoya 1979
Spik in Glyph? 1981
**Return: Poems Collected and New* 1982
Tremble Purple: Seven Poems 1986
Z Eros 1995
Et Tú .. Raza? 1996
As the Barrio Turns Who the Yoke B On 2000

*This volume includes *Dawn's Eye: 1979-1981* together with a new edition of *Nationchild Plumaroja, 1969-1972.*

CRITICISM

Juan Gómez-Quiñones (essay date 1971)

SOURCE: A Preface to *Floricanto en Aztlán,* The Chicano Studies Center: University of California, Los Angeles, 1971.

[*In the following foreword to Alurista's first collection of poems, Gómez-Quiñones introduces Alurista to the reader, speaks of the importance of poetry to Chicano culture, and of Alurista's importance to Chicano poetry.*]

Alurista has had a major impact on the Movement in poetry, symbols, views. His influence demands attention, hence the following presentation of one hundred of the poet's earliest work written during times seminal to the current renaissance, 1968-1969. Clearly the writings parallel the altering dynamic within the Movement. The collection is poetry and testimony. Let it be said that the collection is of the writings of that time, Alurista has written more and has gone beyond in theme and style.

Literature reflects time and place; poetry is consciousness, spoken in beauty, our consciousness, as the poetry of Alurista attests, is the realization of our social and historical reality. The words, then, are trumpets and drums with harkening of sadden flutes far off. In time of crisis the poet has a trust with the people, to transform the experience and aspiration of the community into art.

Poetry through the centuries has been a favored medium of the Mexican, conveying as it does beauty, sentiment,

idea and injunction. Noticeable today among the Chicano youth is the outpouring of poetry, exuberant, nostalgic, angry, loving. Alurista is one of those poets and in his art is said what all our poets are saying: reverence, unity, thought, action.

Poetry transcends history, it announces, doing this even as it mirrors the past and as in final liberating catharsis it seeks to relive it again, thereby overcoming and transcending the past and enabling the resumption of the march. For those concerned about validating bilingualism-biculturalism and/or defining *Chicanismo,* hear the *canto de Aztlán* not only of one but all the singers. Our people, our culture have no need of validation or definition, *sencillamente Somos—y seremos.*

Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia is the oldest of six in the family and has lived in various parts of Mexico and the United States. San Diego is where he is from now. He graduated from San Diego High School in 1965 and that summer enrolled at Chapman College, two years later thought better of it, transferred to San Diego State College where he taught Chicano Culture and Thought and Creative Writing. His education has been in life, philosophy, psychology, Latin American Studies and in *la escuela del movimiento.* He has been and is a voracious reader and conversationalist, he transmutes into his all influences he contacts. Always close to the family, he has begun one of his own. Neither recluse, nor patron, Alurista is among the many who live the struggle daily. He doesn't wish, speculate, criticize, nor lament; he organizes, in the fullest sense of the word.

Joel Hancock (essay date 1972)

SOURCE: A review of *Floricanto in Aztlán,* in *Modern Language Journal,* Vol. 56, No. 3, March 1972, pp. 181-82.

[*In the following review, Hancock enumerates some charcteristic strengths of Alurista's poetry.*]

Emerging from the Chicano movement is a distinctive literature which depicts the conditions of the Chicano and expresses his anxieties and expectations. In poetry, the best-known voice is Alurista (Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia), and his ***Floricanto en Aztlán*** evinces the unique ness of Chicano writing with its rich cultural and linguistic legacies. The one hundred poems comprised in this collection represent the early period of the young poet—written in 1968 and 1969—and as such mark the appearance of a talented and sensitive writer.

Alurista's poetry is a call to action. He urges brotherhood and solidarity among Chicanos in their struggle for liberation. The Chicano must regain his dignity and oppose the oppression of his exploiter; he must feel proud of his heritage and combat the cultural assassination of his people. With these themes, Alurista's poems describe aspects of Chicano life: the *pizca,* the cannery, activity in the *barrio,* the neighborhood dances, the games of the children, and so on. His anger is felt when he relates the injustices committed against the Chicano. There is love in his poems to the Chicana *madre* and *abuela,* and passion in the erotic evocation of his *mujer.* Pride and exaltation pervade the tributes to the Aztec and Mexican forefathers. Often there is despair when lamenting certain conditions but, in spite of it all, there is hope: the Chicano shall flourish.

Although a number of poems are written in Spanish, most of them reflect the linguistic peculiarity of the Chicano and appear in a mixture of Spanish and English. The result of the hybrid is poetically effective: striking, sometimes beautiful, sounds and rhythms are created. This is intensified by the presence of words from the exotic Aztec language. The slang of the "now" generation, both Spanish and English, is another dimension of this singular linguistic expression, and its impact is especially felt in the flowing dialogues recreated in some of the poems.

Alurista's poetic language lends itself quite naturally to the dream-like, nightmarish visions which are at times elaborated in his poems. And sensorial descriptions play an important role in this technique. Visual and olfactory images predominate. Bright and vivid colors abound: oranges, browns, reds, and blacks, never the shades and blends. The stench of the factories figures as prominently as the perfume of roses. Synesthetic combinations are also employed to produce clever and original images.

Musical motifs are another important ingredient of Alurista's poetry. There are frequent allusions to Mexican *música ranchera,* and at times these references are significant. Verses from *La cucaracha, La cama de piedra,* and *No vale nada la vida,* for example, have important functions in some of the poems. Lyrics from hard rock pieces are also present, and in the case of the poem "You know that I would be untrue," the words to the rock-and-roll song "Light my fire" are adopted to describe a Chicano situation. Beethoven, Orf, and Villalobos are mentioned in various poems, and one in particular is dedicated to the late Jimi Hendrix. But the rhythms of the poems themselves also suggest musical compositions. Evocations of Aztec grandeur sound like marches and hymns, and in other poems litanies or religious chants are insinuated. On occasion Alurista will break up lines from popular songs and insert grave, sententious remarks, much like those in T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men."

The structure of the verses is perhaps the element which contributes most to the strong cadences of the poems. Alurista's parallel constructions are especially effective in terms of emphasis and rhythm. The listing of certain words, the repetition of specific phrases, and the alteration of word order are other techniques which also enhance the rhythmic effects.

Floricanto en Aztlán is filled with a vitality which corresponds to the dynamism of the Chicano movement today. This handsome volume, illustrated by Judith Hernández,

announces the presence of a promising poet and proclaims the advent of a new literary tradition—Chicano literature.

Juan Bruce-Novoa (essay date 1982)

SOURCE: "The Teachings of Alurista: A Chicano Way of Knowledge," in *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos,* University of Texas Press, pp. 69-93, 1982.

[*In the following essay, Bruce-Novoa offers a thematic reading of the first ten poems of* Floricanto en Aztlán.]

> Quetzalcóatl-Nanauatzin is the sun-god of the priests [Tlamatinime], who consider voluntary self-sacrifice the highest expression of their doctrine of the world and of life.
>
> —Jacques Soustelle, *La Pensée Cosmologique des Anciens Mexicains*[1]

Alberto Urista, known as Alurista, has published three collections of poetry, ***Floricanto en Aztlán*** (1971), ***Nationchild Plumaroja*** (1972), and ***Timespace Huracán*** (1976). They are didactic books that attempt to teach Chicanos to understand themselves and their situation, and to overcome the threats to their existence. Alurista shares the anti-industrialist, anti-technological, anti-capitalist attitude of *I Am Joaquín,* as well as the purpose of consciousness-raising through an appeal to self-knowledge and ethnic pride. However, his use of pre-Columbian philosophy, an emphasis on mythical time, a third-worldist view of universal harmony, and an acceptance of all races in the formation of a new culture of pluralism make his heroic system markedly different from Gonzales'. To understand Alurista we must explore two sources of his vision: Carlos Castaneda and Nahuatl poetics.

Alurista's first two books begin with epigraphs from Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (*TDJ*).[2] (The third book was to include a third citation, but the editor refused to use it.)[3] The epigraphs come from Don Juan's explanation of the "enemies of a man of knowledge"; that is, what prevents people from becoming, like Don Juan, beings in harmony with the cosmos. Men of knowledge renounce rational thought in favor of a separate spiritual reality, the truth of life, becoming free and self-fulfilled, even within the restrictions of modern society. Don Juan explains that when a man begins to learn, the unexpected newness of the experience produces fear, the first enemy.

> Fear! A terrible enemy . . . concealed at every turn of the way, prowling, waiting. And if the man, terrified in its presence, runs away, his enemy will have put an end to his quest.
>
> (*TDJ,* p. 84; cited on the title page of ***Floricanto***)

Fear can turn the man into "a bully, or a harmless, scared," defeated man; but if he accepts it fully and continues to learn, fear will give way to clarity. Yet clarity blinds him by erasing doubt.

> It [clarity] gives him the assurance he can do anything he pleases, for he sees clearly into everything. And he is courageous because he is clear and he stops at nothing because he is clear. But all that is a mistake; it is like something incomplete. If the man yields to this make-believe power, he has succumbed to his second enemy and will fumble with learning. He will rush when he should be patient, or he will be patient when he should rush.
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> (*TDJ,* p. 85; cited in ***Nationchild,*** p. [12])

Trapped by clarity, a man becomes a *buoyant warrior* or a *clown.* To avoid it he must defy clarity, using it only to see, wait, and move carefully; he must think "that his clarity was a mistake" (*TDJ,* p. 85). Then he will have true power—enemy number three.

> Power is the strongest of all enemies. And naturally the easiest thing to do is to give in; after all, the man is truly invincible. He commands; he begins by taking calculated risks, and ends in making rules, because he is a master. [Power will turn] him into a cruel, capricious man.
>
> (*TDJ,* p. 86)

He must control himself carefully, realizing that power is never really his; he must "reach a point where everything is held in check" (*TDJ,* p. 87), where power is used wisely.

The last enemy, old age, one must resist by not surrendering to fatigue; constant struggle will produce one brief moment of fulfillment.

Each confrontation is a rite of passage; together they form a maturation process. Alurista offers it as an alternative to the "American way of life." In this he adopts a typical 1960's attitude: the whiteman's materialistic, rationalized society is decadent, self-destructive, and alienated from nature. Alurista pictures him as trapped by inorganic possessions which he thinks he controls. As victim of the enemy power, Anglo Americans create a cruel, capricious society, powerful but doomed. Survival requires a withdrawal from it and a return to a spiritual harmony with nature. Castaneda provides a model—an Amerindian "way of knowledge" and a guide to a "separate reality." Moreover, since Indians have survived the genocidal European conquest, in spite of being powerless, they can be a model for Chicanos. However, Castaneda provides no aesthetic theory, and his character Don Juan preaches noninvolvement in any social system, even alternative ones, which negates Alurista's social commitment.

Pre-Columbian Nahuatl culture, a highly organized society with a philosophical-aesthetic system, provides Alurista with a spiritualized poetics. The title of his first book explicitly names its source: *flor i canto,* "flower and song," a Spanish version of the Nahuatl term for poetry, connoting

the entire system of Nahuatl thought, in which poetry was considered the key to knowledge.

A *tlamatini*—Nahuatl for philosopher or wise man—was a combination teacher, psychologist, moralist, cosmologist, metaphysician, humanist, historian, and genealogist. Moreover, according to Miguel León-Portilla's *Aztec Thought and Culture* (*ATC*), the *tlamatinime* were "responsible for composing, painting, knowing, and teaching the songs and poems in which they preserved their scientific knowledge" (*ATC,* p. 16). Poetry, which facilitated oral teaching, was more than a useful vehicle, however, it was "the only true thing on earth" (*ATC,* p. 75). The ephemerality of existence made the possibility of knowing any truth doubtful. Poetry was the only source, "a peculiar type of knowledge, the fruit of authentic inner experience, the result of intuition. . . . which, through symbol and metaphor, allows man to discover himself and then to talk about what he has intuitively and mysteriously perceived" (*ATC,* p. 76). This vision of divine origin makes poetry one of the few things that could escape destruction in a world of fleeting existence. Poetry was an attempt to transcend evanescent being. This quality made the *tlamatini* a sacred bard, through whom man is "able to communicate with the Divine" (*ATC,* p. 79). "Only he who comes under the divine influence which scatters flowers and songs among man is able to speak of 'truth on earth.' . . . [He possesses] 'a heart made divine (yoltéotl)'" (*ATC,* pp. 77-78).

A fundamental concept of the *tlamatinime* was that of the face and heart. Alurista explains it and its relationship to poetry when he writes about the Nahuas' sense of the ephemeral existence of things and the underlying eternal movement.

> En el mismo ser humano se postula esta dialéctica entre lo eterno y lo efímero a través de la metáfora "corazón" y nos mueve dentro, es el continuum de la vida que se transforma con la muerte para retornar a su eterno origen divino, por lo tanto, "corazón" es lo que dura. "Rostro" es lo que perece, es la personalidad, el cuerpo y la mente, vehículos del corazón eterno del Dador de la Vida. El rostro nos abandona día a día, mas el corazón continúa su movimiento dentro y fuera de su manifestación corpórea e intelectual. La "flor" es el rostro y el "canto," el corazón. La Flor y el Canto han de humanizar, enseñar y alegrar al corazón y al rostro de los pueblos acercándoles así a la creación, al Creador y a sí mismos a través del movimiento y la medida que cause harmonía perodicidad, dialéctica relación entre los pueblos dando lugar así a la unidad de todos los seres.[4]

Through his poetry Alurista aims at forming the Chicanos' face in accordance with the transcendent values of the Nahuatl heart, the philosophy of the spiritual harmony of all creation. Poetry is a sacred act capable of revealing truth, transcending the chaos of ephemeral life. To do so the poet must be a *tlamatini.* The consciousness of the sacredness of his words—the sincere belief that these words do not simply reflect reality, but create it—leads to the messianic tone of Alurista's work. At its best, it touches reservoirs of intuitive revelation; at its worst, it sounds preachy and arrogant.

Of Alurista's books, ***Floricanto en Aztlán*** is still the best example of his poetics and the most widely read as well as the most influential. Also, it is the source of everything he has produced since. Therefore I have chosen to dedicate my limited space to the analysis of ***Floricanto.***[5]

As its epigraph announces, ***Floricanto en Aztlán*** analyzes and counters fear, specifically the Chicanos' fear of the Anglo American, presented in the book as the Man or Mr. Jones. The quest referred to in it is the realization of freedom from fear. Chicanos must actively pursue it, but without knowledge it is unattainable. They must, first, know what they fear; second, know that their tradition provides responses to the threat; and, third, overcome it. Alurista analyzes the situation; attempts to debunk the oppressor; and offers an alternative drawn from Chicano roots, but consonant with their contemporary state. Analysis demonstrates how he goes about it. It would be too lengthy to study all one hundred poems, so close textual reading will be done on the first ten. With the techniques and motifs established, their further development will be discussed to show how he realizes his project.

The first two poems appear side by side, a graphic placement pertinent to the discussion after each has been analyzed separately.

"when raza?"

when raza?
when . . .
yesterday's gone
and
mañana
mañana doesn't come
for he who waits
no morrow
only for he who is now
to whom when equals now
he will see a morrow
mañana la Raza
la gente que espera
no verá mañana
our tomorrow es hoy

ahorita
que VIVA LA RAZA
mi gente
our people to freedom
when?
now, ahorita define tu
mañana hoy

"la canería y el sol"

la canería y el sol
la mata seca, red fruits
the sweat
the death

el quince la raya
juanito will get shoes
and maría
maría a bottle of perfume
y yo me mato
y mi familia
también suda sangre
our blood boils
and the wages
cover little
only the lining of our
stomachs
we pang
but mr. jones is fat
with money
with our sweat
our blood

why?

(1) "WHEN RAZA?"

Taken at its simplest, the first poem [**"When Raza"**] asks, *When will we achieve freedom*? It urges Chicanos to make today the awaited tomorrow by defining it so, ("ahorita define tu mañana hoy" [right now define your tomorrow today]); an act of will and interpretation imparts meaning to reality. The poet plays with signs of temporality until their meaning blurs, the signs becoming *words* defined by human action, and now the action is writing. Life defines words and life can only be lived in the present; tomorrow is possible only if now is not postponed. Inactivity makes all time disappear ("la gente que espera / no verá mañana" [the people that wait / will not see tomorrow]). *When* comes to equal a time chosen and realized through self-assertion, which, in turn, is freedom. Fulfillment is to grasp time and define it through action.

The poem's introductory status allows only brief reference to causal factors: "when . . . / yesterday's gone." When the historical perspective disappears, the future loses meaning—"and mañana / mañana doesn't come"—and the present is nullified. The two lost times bracket a nonexistent present. The motif of the loss of historical identity is linked to possible extermination. To prevent the latter, Chicanos must define the present as theirs; but since it lies invisible, they must first recover history. To retrieve the past while creating the present means to find one's living heritage, a historical now, a true mythical sense of paradigmatic time.

Cut off from spiritual roots, people find themselves in profane time, in the Other's chaotic territory. Their history will give them the ancestral knowledge of communal rituals they can repeat to cosmicize space, order chaos, and reestablish cultural health. Time becomes again sacred.[6] Alurista sets out to do it.

The title's question assumes more significance when we consider that *raza,* here and elsewhere in the book, is not set off by commas. The "oversight" does not hinder understanding it as direct address, but allows another possibility: "When will there be a race?" asked of the Raza itself. It implies that Chicanos, lacking self-determination, remain, at best, a conglomerate. The goal is to become Raza, to activate the communal ties. With the present bracketed into profane time by the loss of past and future, both *when* and *raza* are put into question; at the same time, they are interdependent—to become community is to control time, to make oneself the center of temporal order.

Alurista calls for radical revolution. Time is society's regulating agent, its organizational infrastructure. Submission to alien time is slavery within the Other's time-space. Alurista's existential reorientation would undermine society. The philosophical (spiritual) essence of the revolution is typical of him; freedom requires spiritual as well as physical harmony with nature, the cosmos. Alurista will reveal that such harmony is a Nahuatl inheritance, based on solarcentrism (the sun as the central hierophany), which he opposes to the artificial divisions of time based on unnatural labor. Hence, the sun will, at times, have negative value, as when labor is exploitative and the laborer an enemy of nature. Self-determined, natural labor harmonizes people into the environment, allying them with the sun, nature's and life's matrix. A return to natural rhythms strikes at the heart of modern society; the return to self-determination strikes at the heart of capitalist society. Alurista is both radical and revolutionary.

(2) "LA CANERÍA Y EL SOL" [THE CANNERY AND THE SUN]

Alurista introduces Mr. Jones, the exploiter "fat with money" produced by Chicanos' sweat and blood. Exploitation here [in **"La Canería Y el Sol"**] explicates the loss of the past and future and the bracketing of the present in poem 1. Jones possesses Chicanos' labor (time plus action), thus controlling their present; however, a temporal subterfuge keeps workers from thinking about their situation. Attention is focused on the future, which never comes. Time is "el quince la raya" [the fifteenth, payday]. The colloquialism for payday, *la raya* [the line], also alludes to the company store, where pay is marked off by a line that never cancels the debt. This form of slave labor is Alurista's metaphor for capitalism. Wages, labor, exploitation, and time are bound in a system controlled by owners. The company store promises an always postponed tomorrow of freedom, the future-oriented time of poem 1. The poem—and all Alurista's poetry—must be read within this context of labor exploitation.

Wages buy necessities, covering the stomach linings, but leaving Chicanos hungry—"we pang"—in contrast to fat Mr. Jones. Hunger, with its concomitant motif of food, repeatedly appears in the book, with food becoming a sign of cultural identity and natural harmony. To *pang* comes to signify hunger for freedom. Yet the laborer here buys shoes for his son and perfume for María, which in light of the above imagery seems contradictory; neither item is absolutely necessary, perfume is a luxury, and both are consumer products of capitalism sold in the company store to

keep the worker bound. Trapped within capitalism, he has accepted as needs unnecessary goods. Alurista concretizes capitalism in these specific, common objects.

At this point in the diachronic reading, shoes and perfume derive significance from the social code within which the family is trapped: children need shoes; women like perfume. But both interpretations cast the Chicano in negative light when explored, and Alurista runs the risk of the negativity being attributed to him. The desire to buy shoes, in spite of poverty, connotes wanting to move into the middle class. Perfume is worse because it seemingly betrays a concept of woman as the passive idol, adored but limited by man, beautiful but frivolous and superfluous. Together the items chauvinistically divide sex roles: men—active in the outside world, practical, down to earth, useful; women—passive, withdrawn from the world, unrealistic, capricious. And the Chicano kills himself (y yo me mato) and makes his family sweat blood (y me familia / también suda sangre) for these items.

The synchronic perspective, however, corrects this first impression. Alurista has a penchant for redefining a sign through adjustments, reversals, or inversions in the signified. This is essential to his didactic purpose of offering an alternative vision of reality. *Shoes* and *perfume* are examples; from negative beginnings they become nuclei of motifs in the imagery of liberation. Chicanos will be portrayed as walkers (poems 6, 7, 11, 20, 36, 41, 42, 57, 63, 67, 74, 76, 78, 82, 92, 96, explicitly; implicitly in others); walking assumes the connotation of the pilgrimage-to-a-promised-land tradition of the Aztec ancestors, and, thus, of following in their footsteps, a contemporary action which actualizes a historical heritage. By focusing on *shoes,* Alurista introduces the walking motif through allusion. Simultaneously, he ironically demonstrates how far Chicanos have drifted from their heritage, while staying intuitively within it. That *shoes* are deemed important shows that walking remains central to their life; to assume that the feet need protection shows their unawareness of a centuries-old tradition. As the book progresses, *huaraches* reappear, and the man will be forced into the street barefoot.

Perfume functions similarly. The error is to assume that beauty must be purchased in artificial scents; nature supplies its own aroma. Through a series of metonymies, woman is transformed into—or revealed as—the aromatic flowers (roses) of the goddess Guadalupe-Tonantzin (poems 34, 41). Her skin is aromatic, with "Ponds of azucenas / blancas de nieve en tu voz" [lilies / white as snow in your voice] (45). The aromatic woman, and the Raza, will contrast to the stench of Mr. Jones' society; they compete for the verb *to permeate.* While "the stench / of the cannery permeates / the air" (16) in an image of capitalist pollution, the Raza's self-assertion is "rosas rojas [red roses] . . . alive with scent / to perfume / and permeate amerika / with sarapes aromáticos" (7). The sarape, in turn, becomes the central image of harmonious pluralism based on Chicano humanism. Flowers and "el perfume de mi raza / permeates the free flight / of my . . . solara tradition" (37), a flight that eventually transforms the Chicano poet into the sun itself (98). In "la carne de tus labios" [the flesh of your lips] (41), dedicated to the woman, she is given clearly liberated images: "el plumaje guerrero [the warrior plumage] / in her arrogant walk / to pace / and have / to run behind no more," which could be said to be male-related virtues in Alurista's code. She is then said to have "flores / con aroma / las de tonantzin" [flowers / with aroma / those of Tonantzin] (roses again). And the woman gives birth to the Raza (53), the "Chicano infante" (54), the "brown eyed *sun*" himself. Thus the woman's natural aroma is an essence permeating Alurista's entire imagery and ideological complex. But to know the true significance of *perfume* and *shoes* requires the synchronic perspective. At the risk of appearing chauvinistic at first glance, Alurista teaches us not to accept "reality" at face value, especially when still determined by Mr. Jones, Inc.

The sweat-blood-heat image, central to the poem and the book, traditionally evokes hard work: to sweat blood under the relentless sun. Here it is exploitative; sweat and blood equal money to fatten Mr. Jones. The key image of the sun—which appears in the book explicitly thirty-four times, making it the most used image—is introduced as a power in league with exploitative forces. It dries the *mata* [plant], metaphor for the Chicano laborer who produces "red fruits" of bloody sweat—death. The fruit of labor will later evolve into the *tuna* [prickly pear], symbol of the desert cactus' productivity: a sweet, red food, analogous to the sun itself, which feeds hungry Chicanos. But in the first instance, the sun and fruit are negative. Alurista often begins with negative connotations or stereotypes, only to reverse them through the poem; here, however, there is no reversal in the poem itself. The sun is oppressive here because it is locked into the system of exploitative labor, which structures time so as to rob workers of life; it only marks the passage toward another *quince de raya.* The sun makes Chicanos' blood boil, a negative image here, but one which eventually signifies a positive disposition to resistance.

The sun will be rescued from exploitative forces through the recuperation of the Nahuatl tradition of solarcentrism. Also, in terms of imagery, the book will establish the intricate network of Chicano-sun ties, mentioned above. Thus, at play in the book is the movement of an image from one code to another; in terms of spiritual quest, this means learning how to see reality differently. Alurista utilizes the techniques of interpretation as he teaches them. By poem 10, when the sun next appears explicitly, it has shifted into the Chicanos' column, free from the cannery image. It reappears with negative connotations only when labor resumes an exploitative significance.

Structurally, the poem again brackets the present within images of loss. Whereas absent past and future bracket an implicit today in poem 1, *el quince la raya* and *mr. jones* bracket the Chicanos' daily existence in poem 2. But while poem 1 locates most of the poem outside the brackets,