

Bahena 1

Literature is more than just words on paper. It is a way to present one's creative outlook or history. Poetry is more than just poetic terms, it is a documentation to one's life experiences. Whether it is presented metaphorically, figuratively, or literally. There are many ways to interpret the meaning and significance of poetry.

Poetry has been linked to Before the Common Era, in forms of oral history or musical aspects. There also has been a connection to written poetry on tabs, dated back to ancient civilizations. Humans have been writing literature for a long time, not only documenting the current events but providing a different meaning than the straight forward.

The most common famous poetry can be linked to Ancient Greek, with famous authors such as Sappho and Homer. But the words from another entirely different perspective and people, works from other countries, can be deconstructed to find the truth and significant meanings to their words.

A period I want to talk about specifically is the Chicano/Chicana Literature Movement that began in the 1960's. This was a time of change and a time to fight for equal rights. This is why this moment in Art History is pivotal and crucial to mention. It was not just an art or literature movement, it was so much more. It was an act of social justice, a way to state the truth, to bring awareness and cultural experience of the people that were deemed second class citizens on a land that belonged to their ancestors and a land they therefore helped build with their blood, sweat and tears.

A Mexican American poet named Gary Soto, wrote a poem called *The Elements of San Joaquin*, "We enter the fields to hoe, / Row after row, among the small flags of onion, / Waving

Bahena 2

off the dragonflies / That ladder the air. / And tears the onions raise / Do not begin in your eyes
but in ours, / In the salt blown / From one blister into another; / They begin in knowing / You
will never waken to bear / The hour timed to a heart beat, / The wind pressing us closer to the
ground. / When the season ends, / And the onions are unplugged from their sleep, / We won't
forget what you failed to see, / And nothing will heal / Under the rain's broken fingers."

This poetic work emphasized and portrayed the life of a fellow Mexican American living on industrialized American land and the life of being a migrant worker. He added the different elements a worker would endure working outside, the scenic surroundings, the poverty, the hard labor, the differences in society hierarchy, the awareness of being disposable and not being treated like a human being.

Another Chicano/Chicana poet who used their words to not only share their life experiences, but open the portal to social realities of being a Chicana, queer and a feminist in a society that was culturally biased. The author Gloria Anzaldua, wrote a poem called *The New Speakers*, "Words are our trade / we speak them soft / we speak them hard / we do not push the hand / that writes, the times do that."

"Critics label the speakers: male, female. / They assign genitals to our words / but we're not just penises or vaginas / nor are our words easy to classify / Some of us are still hung- / up on the art-for-art trip / and feel that the poet / is forever alone. / Separate. / More sensitive. / An outcast."

"What we want is to become / part of the common consumption / like coffee with morning paper.
/ We don't want to be / Stars but parts / of constellations."

Bahena 3

In this poem, she presents how society at the time, creates authority over people. She introduces how words are used to do that on the first lines of her poem. In the next two sections, she shows the struggles of wanting to be seen, understood and part of society but instead biases of colors of skin and genders cause a separation and she and others are forced to become outcasts in a land/society they are and want to be a part of.

One more Chicano Poet that really sparked a movement was famous writer and activist, Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales. His poem, *I Am Joaquín*, was a poetic time through history, a revelation of social injustice and a proclamation of Native self-awareness and pride.

“I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion, / caught up in the whirl of a gringo society, / confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes, suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society. / My fathers have lost the economic battle / and won the struggle of cultural survival. / And now! I must choose between the paradox of / victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger, / or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis, / sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.”

“I, / Of the same name, / Joaquín, / In a country that has wiped out / All my history, / Stifled all my pride, / In a country that has placed a / Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back. / Inferiority is the new load . . . / The Indian has endured and still / Emerged the winner, / The Mestizo must yet overcome, / And the gachupín will just ignore. / I look at myself / And see part of me / Who rejects my father and my mother / dissolves into the melting pot / To disappear in shame.”

“I am Joaquín. / I must fight / and win this struggle / for my sons, and they / must know from me / who I am. / Part of the blood that runs deep in me / could not be vanquished by the Moors. / I

Bahena 4

defeated them after five hundred years, / and I have endured. / Part of the blood that is mine / has labored endlessly four hundred / years under the heel of lustful / Europeans. / I am still here!”

“Soft brown eyes of expectation for a / Better life. / And in all the fertile farmlands, / the barren plains, / the mountain villages, / smoke-smearred cities, / we start to MOVE. / La raza! / Méjicano! / Español! / Latino! / Chicano! / Or whatever I call myself, / I look the same / I feel the same / I cry / And / Sing the same. / I am the masses of my people and / I refuse to be absorbed. / I am Joaquín. / The odds are great / But my spirit is strong, / My faith unbreakable, / My blood is pure. / I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ. / I SHALL ENDURE! / I WILL ENDURE!”

Corky Gonzales' poem was an anthem for Chicanismo. This poem is liberation in literacy form with its truth and raw format. It speaks of a group of people who have endured hardships for hundreds of years. The struggles still remain but the people have been fighting and will continue to fight. The use of Ancient Civilizations mythology in the poem sparks not only a connection to strong roots but a way to reclaim self-determination.

The Chicano/Chicana literature movement lives on, as social injustice still prevails to this day. Spoken word and poetry in relation to the Mexican American voice is starting back up in San Diego, California. A group by the name of Firme Voices is making way for fellow members of the community to speak out loud and share their stories. They are also in collaborations with other organizations and regions located in and outside San Diego County/California that work with their communities to spread awareness and support.

I have been going to almost all of their events and been supportive of their efforts since the beginning of this year. I am grateful for this group, they helped me by having a voice in a

Bahena 5

time of my life when I had to start over and I had to start the journey of rediscovering myself. Since then, so many other people have joined their events and I can see the impact they are making for the community and nation wide.

One of the first poems I wrote and read outloud was in a similar fashion of *I Am Joaquin*. It was a long complex poem that featured from start to finish life experiences, self-identity, injustices, pain and finally triumph. I have featured parts of the poem and interpreted each part. The poem is called, *The Death of a marriage*.

“The end of our ten year reign / All the pain, sadness, the trauma / I was in mourning / After all the tears subsided, only anger was left.”

“I was so lost for so long, I was still a child when I met you ,even though I was an adult when I made the decision to marry you / I couldn’t of known how much anguish followed you”

“You were raised by drugs and violence / Oh how can I have known? / The man I fell in love with was not real / You were a monster in hiding / I was belittled and berated on the daily”

“You entangled with a woman born of mud / What shame you brought upon the tribal id / Pit river blood, is wasted on thee / Your whole f***ing family , generations down the line of pitiful addicts / Cry wolf and blame it on me / B***h, I know the difference between human and animal”

“All my life I knew what I could be / I would not conform to society / Even when my own family pushed me / I know now why I wouldn’t stay down / My roots run deeper than the ground / My heart, mind and eyes open / But my spirit protected by my ancestors / You did not kill it, I am still f***king here / I stand tall, in pride and in strength / Through your hell and back , you

Bahena 6

burned me but I saved our children / Even with my hands full, I came back for the dogs and the cats / Mi familia, that's my f**king family / You have no damn claim, even though they have your last name / I'm taking it back / I am their mother and father"

"A single woman and Mother / It's not a discouragement / But a title of honor / No man's land, I ride alone / I am healing, through this self guided journey I am me authentically / Always and forever / I knew I was made for better things / My ancestors chose me / I followed the signs when they showed me / I am clear headed , no drugs numb me / Pure heart, soul and body / I am one , I am many, I am love / I don't want the whole world / I just want a piece of it / I'm not the u.s, I'm not greedy / I am coming for you / I get what I want because I am resilient /Nothing holding me back now / The truth is I"

"I am part of history / I am product of genocide, dehumanization, oppression, suppression, discrimination, keep me in poverty , take back what little money I had, drain my energy and attack my mentality. / Every no said to me, rights denied me, drown me in paperwork. All in relation to the hypocrisy lead by the U.S domination"

"I touch the foreheads of my son and daughter / This is real, it is pure love, all worthy to fight life for, to continue to live and find joy in / Love yourself, love your kids and family"

"I understand life is hard, but we are free / Even though we have to literally pay for everything / We are alive today, the past cannot be undone, and the future can still be made"

"I choose to work hard, to earn it , my way / Real life - without being at the top, i feel embarrassed for those who have so many riches and choose to keep it to themselves / Y'all know who I'm talking about, celebrities, politicians, wannabe royalty, call yourselves kings and queens

Bahena 7

/ Holding onto your millions and billions / You look idiotic to me, nothing but clowns you are /
My version of wealth is different / Enjoy the little things in life, there is still so much beauty left
/ Go outside and soak up nature / Say thank you, be grateful for the sun and moon alike / Birds
and insects are singing, enjoy their songs / Stars twinkle and light up your dark / Yes there is
beauty around, you just have to look hard enough / I will end this poem with love and peace /
Thank you ❤️”

This poem paints a picture of a ten year marriage of pain and trauma that has ended. A young woman married another person before she had enough life experience to know what would make a good life partner. The woman married a man who had an unfortunate life and it connects to why he was abusive and that it ran in his family. This poem portrays a woman reclaiming herself, her roots, her family, her life back. She is a stronger woman now, she is not letting anything stop her, there are hints of injustice in relation to society and U.S history. There is self-awareness in relation to self-identity and social injustice. Looking into the past gives a glimpse of why things are in the present. The ending message of the poem is that what matters in life is love, why one must continue to ‘fight for love’. To keep persevering and keep living, that even though there is still injustice, there is more to life than money, there is wealth in love, nature and peace.

In conclusion, the art of literacy is more than just words. It is an expression of life and unique experiences that taps into the truths of each artist who uses literature to communicate and exhibit their own interpretations, meanings of life as they know it to be.

Works Cited:

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *The New Speakers*.

Gary Soto, "The Elements of San Joaquin" from *Gary Soto: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1995 by Gary Soto.

Jessica Bahena, "The Death of A Marriage" from *Jessica Bahena*, year 2023.

Soto, Gary. *The Elements of San Joaquin*. 1977, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA87266350.

Yongli. "Rodolfo 'Corky' Gonzales." *Articles | Colorado Encyclopedia*, coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/rodolfo-%E2%80%99Corky%E2%80%99D-gonzales.