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QUEER IN AZTLÁN

Chicano Male Recollections of
Consciousness and Coming Out

Edited by
Adelaida R. Del Castillo
and Gibrán Güido



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Consciousness and Coming Out

Edited by
Adelaida R. Del Castillo and Gibrán Güido
San Diego State University
University of California, San Diego

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*To John Rechy and to the youth, butterfly
warriors, who seek a reflection of self.*

Preface

Adelaida R. Del Castillo and Gibrán Güido

The editors of this anthology first met as participants (professor and graduate student) in the master's program of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at San Diego State University. It was there that we began work on ***Queer in Aztlán: Chicano Male Recollections of Consciousness and Coming Out*** in the hope of sharing with a general readership a growing consciousness among a largely younger generation of queer Chicanos absent from the plans, political agendas, and literature of Aztlán, the ironic metaphorical homeland of a people in sociopolitical struggle. Even so, dystopia—source of our social justice commitment to a more expansive liberation ethos—allowed us to envision the queer Chicano/Mexicano male as citizen subject and human rights holder among local communities and cultures in US society. It led us to the crafting of a book representing a greater complexity of queer youth identity, sexuality, masculinities, and political activism yet not forgetting the effects of HIV/AIDS, homophobia, sexism, and violence in Mexican and American culture, which still threaten after having already ended innocent lives. The book resists silence, erasure, innuendo, and practices linked to patriarchy, heterosexuality, and homophobia as definitive of Chicano male subjectivity at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Specifically, our intent for ***Queer in Aztlán*** was to put together a collection of mainly original work by queer Chicanos/Mexicanos that would lend expression to youthful discoveries of sexuality, coming out, and critical moments of identity formation. Capturing the complex

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and varied experiences of young men coming of age and going on to young adulthood in activist, artistic, literary, and academic fields encouraged us to remain open to the different ways our authors chose to communicate their lived experiences. This lends the collection a candid—and at times, unorthodox—raw quality that may be provocative but crucial to conveying a certain sensibility about queer male sexuality. In addition, the framing of experience through varied and hybrid language use (Standard Spanish, Mexican Spanish, Chicano Spanish, Standard English, slang English, Spanglish, etc.) stresses the significance of cultural identity as part of sexual identity and partly explains our use of the term Chicano/Mexicano (see the Introduction). Our contributors make use of autobiography, essays, recipes, poems, plays, and prayer to evoke new possibilities for being and belonging to more inclusive communities of friends, families, and political allies. Later still, some authors withdrew from the project after they found having to recollect and describe disturbing moments in their lives far too difficult to endure as memories gave way to pain, fear, and anxiety.

To date there is no comparable anthology such as *Queer in Aztlán*, which brings to light notions of diversity and lived experience directly related to class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and male queer identity within the context of family and Chicano/Mexicano culture, one of the largest sectors of the Latino population in the United States. The work and personal narratives of a collection such as this on queer male subjectivity and gay consciousness are meant to be accessible to a wide audience to better convey what it means to be a queer male of color in a dominant heterosexual and homophobic society and culture. Lastly, we hope the book encourages current scholarship in Chicana and Chicano studies to expand its conceptualization of the discipline beyond traditional confines of male sexuality and masculinities by including male queer content in course curricula and discourse.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many individuals who helped shepherd this project to its completion. We specially thank our contributors—we are grateful for the trust, compassion, patience, and love that shows in your work and *palabras*, enriching the inspiration for the collection. Your willingness to share your most vulnerable moments with our readers and us serves as a guide for envisioning new possibilities and new beginnings. Omar O. González and Pablo Alvarez kindly took time from their busy writing and teaching schedules to serve as part of our advisory board and meet with us in San Diego and Los Angeles. Thanks also to Rigoberto González, Walter O. Koenig, Rosaura Sanchez, Susan Cayleff, Rodolfo Acuña, and Rosalinda Solorzano for patent, contract, and editorial advice. Walter O. Koenig also took the photographs used in the book. Michael Nava boosted our spirits with his exceptional generosity by allowing us to use material from his unpublished memoirs. Pablo Alvarez made it possible for us to consider the inclusion of works by the late Gil Cuadros and we are indebted to him, Kevin Martin, Terry Wolverton, Robert Blake, and the Gil Cuadros estate for making his unpublished work accessible to us—in particular, the selections “Coming Out” and “Last Supper.” We also thank Robert Drake and Terry Wolverton for permission to reprint the poem “Birth” by Gil Cuadros, which appeared in *His 2: Brilliant New Fiction by Gay Writers*. Yosimar Reyes allowed us to reprint *For colored boys who speak softly*. Thanks also to Carlos Manuel for permission to reprint *La Vida Loca*. At Cognella Publishing senior editor Seidy Cruz found our work worthy, shared tea and coffee with us, and marshaled the publication of the book; project editor Sarah Wheeler’s great sense of humor made working with the press a pleasure, as did the beautiful work of graphic designer Miguel Macias.

Thanks also to all those who provided counsel, guidance, hope, love, and nurturing, including family members Nazaría Rosa Duarte, Maria Lozano, Omar Guido, Jose Lozano, Elizabeth Lozano, Gina Lozano, Cindy

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Lozano, Rosean Moreno, Rosemary Moreno, Adrian Moreno, David-Alexander Moreno Ramirez, Christian Andrew Ramirez, Castiel Samuel Ramirez, Oscar Christopher Eckroad, and Logan Gabriel Amezcua; and to friends who *are* family—Jonathan Lowe, Sergio Sanchez, Vincent Arreguin, Brandy Garcia, Pablo Alvarez, Omar O. González, Inés Hernández-Ávila, Yvette Flores, Adela de la Torre, Sergio de la Mora, Angie Chabram-Dernesian, Ernesto Martinez, Daniel Enrique Pérez, Michael Nava, Michael Hames-Garcia, Carolina Ramos, Larry Baza, Rosiangela Escamilla, Wendy Aguirre, Alicia Chavez, Francisco Carlos Mendoza, Alicia Valle, Oscar Guerra-Vera, Juan Carlos Espinoza-Cuellar, Yosimar Reyes, Alicia Nunez, Mariela Nunez, Monica Delgadillo, Sara Solaimani, Sherman Lee, Xaime Aceves Equihua, Monica De La Torre, and Roberto Daniel Rodriguez. Thank you also to the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at San Diego State University, Latina/o Services at The Center-San Diego LGBT Community, National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Joto Caucus, and the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism and Scholarship.

Editors' note: The use of accents on an author's name has been decided by the author's personal preference or previous use in print. Therefore, similar names for different authors may or may not have accents.

Birth

Gil Cuadros

I conjure you, Armisael, angel who governs the womb, that you help this woman and the child in her body.

—Rf. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*

I feel it well up inside of me. It grows with every pass of the sun, steals what little energy is left in my beleaguered body. The lesions that spread daily across my testicles and legs now cease to multiply. I sense the formation of an umbilical cord connecting me to another. I am nervous of what it will become and how it will decimate the remnants of my strength. I tell my lover I am carrying a child inside me, demonlike, it drags embryonic nails slowly down my internal organs. Marcus looks skeptical, eyes squint as if thinking, what next, commit me to a home, send me to a spiritual healer. He smolders sage and copal, washes me in their cleansing smoke. He strikes bells to startle me out of my stupefaction but realizes the presence inside me, glides his hand across my stomach, enjoys electricity. With a fit of anger he yells, “How selfish can you be? What if you die before the child is raised?” The neighbors bring sprigs of baby’s breath, castor-bean stems, and nail them to our door. The air smells rancid and cloying.

I will name the creature Armisael. The growing fetus confines me on my balcony all hours reciting Psalms. I burn news articles one at a time on the hibachi: the volcanic eruption on modern Pompeii, a killer virus emerging from the rain forest, the increase of rabid coyotes filtering into the hillside communities, feasting on small children.

Gil Cuadros, “Birth,” Copyright © by Estate of Gil Cuadros. Reprinted with permission.

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The strips of newsprint writhe in my hand as they approach the fire like Swedish fortune fish curling inside a palm's heat. I see an indigo gleam radiating from my fingertips; it garners tear-shaped flames, encapsulating the ardor like the many pills I take. They float away into the atmosphere the way soap bubbles defy gravity, lyrical as Ptolemy's music of spheres.

Walking down the boulevards near my home, I expect the community to revere me, to step aside out of deference. Rather, lips snarl, hands move to strike, filthy looks, the kind I imagine Jesus encountered on his trek to Calvary. The women are the harshest, spitting before me, hacking their phlegm deeply and loudly from inside their corpulent bodies. They turn in disgust as if to deny my existence and my child's potential. It is hard to ignore my aspect, my withered limbs seem to negate any fruitfulness. Still the jacaranda trees blanket the sidewalks with their purple flowers for me; the elms canopy the sun's glare, limbs low enough to grab and even cradle me when I tire.

Returning home, I must lie down. Nausea overwhelms me throughout the day. The only thing that helps is placing ice packs underneath my arms and on the back of my neck. My head swims with sounds: the buzz of EMF high-tension lines. Marcus hangs crystal prisms in the bedroom windows and lights cinnamon candles around our bed. He touches me too gently, nuzzling my side. He licks the well of my ear, says I taste bitter. He wants to gather me up tighter, his arm a vice around my waist. He is afraid he will hurt me, cause some deformation to the child.

The child becomes apparent through translucent skin, jade eyes seem conscious, pierce the iridescence of the amniotic sac. My lover thinks he is a lowly Joseph, not important in the scheme of this miracle. I watch him stare off into the horizon, the sunset nearly blinding. In his hand a cigarette burns, smoke coils from his fingers. He worries what kind of parent would he be and sees all his flaws magnified, especially his lack of patience. I desire to comfort him, go down on my knees and press my face next to his crotch. Strongly, he pulls me up, tells me it's

a piece of immortality, a part of us will survive after we're gone. I warn him not to become too attached, that there might be a chance the child will catch my disease and die early too. Marcus refuses to hear, says he can already see the changes in the world: the sky becoming gentian, the foliage smaragdine, the land ginger. From where I stand, I see darkness drain the landscape's hue, leave somber details, an industrial fog, thick and noxious.

In my dream, I place the child in a basket and float it down a mighty river. Marcus rages at heaven for what I have done, curses me till the day of his death. The child shall never know his real fathers, or have comfort with the toys we would have made, our faces appearing god-like over his crib. How can an infected man like me be worthy of this blessing?

I do not know if the little one will appear launched from my head, or emerge from the muscles of my legs. But when the moment happens it will be as if a part of me dies. When I release him to the river I will surely crumble to the ground, crying out for Marcus, my body disintegrating into the stuff of protons, neutrons, quarks, shattering back into the dark matter of an unforgiving universe.