CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES: MAPPING THE MALE BODY IN OSCAR ZETA ACOSTA'S *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BROWN BUFFALO*

María Herrera-Sobek
University of California, Santa Barbara

ABSTRACT

My study posits how Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, The *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972), is structured as a cartography which clearly maps the construction of both masculinity and ethnicity through a series of life experiences. It further examines the various strands configuring and constructing a masculine identity in this fictionalized autobiography by focusing on the multiple manifestations of how masculinities are constructed in society: i.e. school, family, friends, institutions, workplace, the military, and so forth. Acosta's text structures a critique of both Mexican and Anglo American stereotypes of Chicano masculinities while simultaneously deconstructing a unitary meaning of what it is to be a Mexican/Chicano male.

KEY WORDS: Oscar Zeta Acosta, autobiography, ethnicity, masculinity, chicano, Mexican, buffalo.

RESUMEN

Mi estudio presenta cómo la novela de Oscar Zeta Acosta, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) está estructurada como una cartografía que claramente traza un mapa de la construcción de masculinidad y etnicidad a través de una serie de experiencias de vida. Además examina las diferentes ramas que configuran y construyen una identidad masculina en esta autobiografía novelada al centrarse en las múltiples manifestaciones de cómo se construyen las masculinidades en la sociedad: i.e. escuela, familia, amigos, instituciones, trabajo, el ejército, y otros. El texto de Acosta estructura una crítica a los estereotipos mexicanos y anglo-americanos de masculinidades chicanas a la vez que deconstruye un significado unitario de lo que significa ser un hombre mexicano/chicano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Oscar Zeta Acosta, autobiografía, etnicidad, masculinidad, chicano, mexicano, búfalo.

The truth of it was they both conspired
to make men out of two innocent Mexican boys.
It seemed that the sole purpose of childhood
was to train boys how to be men.

(Acosta, *Revolt* 75)

A mapping project entails the drawing of lines from point A to point B and in the process yielding a cohesive, coherent picture of what may have been disparate points in a barren landscape or conversely multiple dots in an urban milieu. A cartographic project selects from the materially specific and abstracts from it while simultaneously making sense of the geometric inscriptions of lines, curves and dots on a flat surface. Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, first published in 1972 and with a second edition appearing in 1989, offers the challenge of deciphering and making sense of the process of engendering a masculine identity while simultaneously constructing and deconstructing Oscar Acosta's (Acosta's protagonist in the fictional autobiography) American identity into its infinite ethnic mutations and permutations.[1]

If humans are socially constructed, Acosta's novel is a cartography which clearly maps the construction of both masculinity and ethnicity through a series of life experiences. In this study I propose to examine the various strands configuring and constructing a masculine identity in Zeta Acosta's fictionalized autobiography focusing on the multiple manifestations of how masculinities are constructed in the text by various sectors of society: i.e. school, family, friends, institutions, workplace, the military, and so forth. In addition, I submit that Oscar Zeta Acosta possessed a parodic consciousness through which and by which he was able to structure a critique of both Mexican and Anglo American stereotypes of Chicano masculinities. Through Acosta's (the author) selection of a specific literary genre, the fictionalized autobiography, and his unique style of writing, what has been described as "gonzo journalism," he is able to deconstruct a unitary meaning of what it is to be a Mexican male and to offer a caustic criticism of Anglo American society and its treatment of this ethnic group.[2] By means of parody, the author both delimits and expands various parameters configuring his protagonist's identity as it relates to his masculinity.

The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo is, as its title indicates, an autobiography. But it is a special type of autobiography —one where fact and fiction are

---

[1] I will be quoting from the 1989 edition of Acosta's *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*, (New York: Vintage Books) throughout my article.

[2] Gonzo journalism can be defined as a new methodology for writing journalistic reports popularlized during the 1960 and 1970s. This methodology entails a participant observer type of activity as well as a realistic style of writing. The *American Heritage College Dictionary* (Third Edition) defines it as: 1. exaggerated, highly subjective, and unconventional in style, es. in journalism. 2. bizarre; unconventional.

weaved into a tantalizing maze of both self aggrandizement and caricature. It is not, as some readers accustomed to canonical biographies might surmise, "an untroubled reflection of identity as the surface of a mirror provides" and it certainly does not adhere to the view that "an autobiography is a transparency through which we perceive the life, unmediated and undistorted" (Brodzki and Schenck 1). Acosta's autobiography does not fit the canonical autobiographical format since the subject, a Chicano, belongs to the marginalized sector of American society and is not representative of the hegemonic class. As Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck point out:

> The masculine tradition of autobiography beginning with Augustine had taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiographer: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* role as a spokesman for the community. But only a critical ideology that reifies a unified, transcendent self can expect to see in the mirror of autobiography a self whose depths can be plumbed, whose heart can be discovered, and whose essence can be definitively known. No mirror of *her* era, the female autobiographer takes as a given that selfhood is mediated; her invisibility results from her lack of a tradition, her marginality in male-dominated culture, her fragmentation —social and political as well as psychic. At both extremes of subjectivity and publicity, the female autobiographer has lacked the sense of radical individuality, duplicitous but useful, that empowered Augustine and Henry Adams to write their representative lives large.

Acosta is able to use the literary genre of autobiography and to deconstruct the canonical version of the genre for his autobiography will be used to inscribe a damaging critique of Anglo American capitalist society since the autobiography offers a perfect medium for constructing a life history and at the same time comment on this life history as it unfolds. As the first person narrator describes his life and the factors that impinged on the development of that life, the reader is able to perceive how race and gender are affected by the social structures surrounding the individual. As the child begins to mature, issues of race and gender come to the fore and influence the individual either positively or negatively. Autobiography as a literary genre lends itself perfectly to serve as a venue to a critique of those societal forces that lead to the degradation and destruction, both physical and psychological, of an individual. Acosta, therefore, uses his life story —one that is full of pain and degradation— to comment negatively on the effects of a racist, sexist, classist and capitalist society which cares very little for the weak, the different, and the marginal.

There is, nevertheless, a fundamental difference between women's autobiographies and Oscar Zeta Acosta's narrative. Due to sexism, women have a difficult time aspiring to be representatives of their society while Acosta's autobiography certainly seeks to be representative of his specific community and a reflection of his time and space. Even though Acosta does not have the privileges of a white male he does have the privilege of a brown one. As a male in a patriarchal society, Acosta's voice was not silenced in his community as a Chicana wishing to write in the style of gonzo journalism in the 1970s would most likely have been. Furthermore, while white women did not have as rich a tradition of autobiographical

writings as their white male counterparts, the Hispanic male could and did avail himself of autobiographical writings from the *Lazarillo de Tormes* to *Don Quixote* in addition to having at his disposal other Western European and Latin American male canonical writings such those of Montaigne and Rousseau. As a matter of fact, Osvaldo Romero in a review of Acosta's novel links the *Autobiography* with canonical Hispanic texts:

> Posiblemente haya empezado con *El Lazarillo de Tormes* o con los escritos de Cervantes y Quevedo, pero la verdad es que la literatura hispánica está plagada de antihéroes, hombres subhumanos que ridiculizan no tan solo su propia humanidad, sino la de todo el mundo. Tesis y antitesis del ser hispánico, nos debatimos entre la realidad sanchopancesca de nuestras vidas y las ilusiones desequilibradas de Don Quixote. (Romero141)
> [Perhaps it started with the *Lazarillo de Tormes* or with the writings of Cervantes and Quevedo, but the truth is that Hispanic literature is full of antiheroes, subhuman men who ridiculize not only their own humanity but also that of the rest of the world's humanity. Thesis and antithesis of the Hispanic being we debate the Sancho Panza-like reality of our lives and the crazy illusions of Don Quixote].

Acosta writes both within and outside the tradition. His *Autobiography* has the structure of the quest formulated by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1973) where the hero (in this case antihero) goes forth into the world in search of knowledge and after a series of trials returns to his community. His protagonist is more in line with the 1950s antiheroes of the beat generation such as Jack Kerouac who he cites in his novel.

Acosta's autobiographical novel was first published in the Chicano literary magazine *Con Safos* 7 (1971) and was presented in serialized form, although only one section of the work appeared in this issue. The first (and only) installment published consisting of twelve pages (34-46) differs markedly from the eventual publication of the complete novel. Nevertheless, what is interesting in both with respect to the construction of masculinity is the iconic figure of the American buffalo which is prominently displayed in the *Con Safos* issue as well as the two editions. The American plains buffalo certainly elicits an image of strength, power, wildness —in fact it epitomizes masculinity *par excellence*. Acosta deftly connects the buffalo with his character, Oscar, joining both ethnicity —brown, the skin color of most Mexicans/Chicanos— and masculinity as well as Indigeneity. The buffalo is a native of the North American soil and Acosta links them together asserting the Chicano's native roots in the American continent.

The *Con Safos* issue featuring a segment of an early draft of the *Autobiography* displays on its cover a drawing of an image composed of three brown buffalos standing upright with the buffalo at the forefront having the face of a mischievous devil and painted in red. Inside the magazine, where the section of the *Autobiography* appears, there are three full pages of cartoons featuring upright anthropomorphized buffalos. Some of the animals are naked bearing a small penis while others are half clothed; other buffalo-like figures look like lawyers bearing briefcases and wearing suits, while others are featured hugging women alluding to Oscar's wom-

anizing ways. The back of the cover of the *Con Safos* magazine depicts a drawing of a brown buffalo standing upright (the face is painted red with red vomit coming out of his mouth) and the beast holds a *Con Safos* magazine in his left hand.

The first edition of the *Autobiography* published by Straight Arrow Books in San Francisco in 1972, features on its cover a very masculine, but rather sleazy-looking Oscar Zeta Acosta. The cover of the book (soft cover version) is a very dark brown and an imposing photograph-like image of Acosta fills most of the page. He is featured wearing a sleeveless t-shirt with his exposed, strong, muscular arms crossed over his chest. It is a frontal pose from the waist up. His hair appears somewhat disheveled with black curls falling over his forehead and he is looking straight at the viewer in a nonchalant manner. Although he is slightly smiling he looks like he just woke up from a long hangover. The back cover features 35 photographs of Acosta in various poses: some laughing, some serious, some frontal from the waist up, others full length. Near the center of the page is a picture of a buffalo standing up sideways. Inside the book, the first three pages each bear a drawing of a full size buffalo and later each chapter begins with a drawing of a small buffalo at the beginning of the first paragraph.

The second edition printed by Vintage Books in New York in 1989 is very Dali-like in the sense that it is a surrealistic painting. It features a horse with the face of a woman and a chubby Mexican man floating on top of the woman-horse holding on to a strand of her long, blonde hair. The inside of the book, however, repeats the iconic motif of the buffalo by having several drawings of the animal within the first three pages. Each chapter will begin its first paragraph with a small drawing of the buffalo thus visually reiterating Acosta's masculinity and ethnicity via the pictograph of the animal.

It is instructive that the first image we encounter in Acosta's *Autobiography* is that of the protagonist in front of a mirror on the fateful day he is to resign from his position as a legal aid lawyer and initiate his search for his lost self on July 1, 1967. The narrative begins with the protagonist speaking in the first person: "I stand naked before the mirror. Every morning of my life I have seen that brown belly from every angle. It has not changed that I can remember. I was always a fat kid. I suck it in and expand an enormous chest of two large hunks of brown tit. Possibly a loss of a pound here, a pound there?" (11)

Oscar, the protagonist of the fictionalized autobiography, is constructed in ethnic and masculine terms. His body image is that of a fat, brown person and he views himself negatively. He has incorporated the ruling class's conception of masculine beauty —the tall muscular, masculine body: lean and trim. Oscar proceeds to link his train of thought to Anglo mass media advertising and brainwashing regarding the idealized male physique. "I tighten, suck at the air and recall that Charles Atlas was a ninety-nine-pound weakling when the beach bully kicked sand in his girl's pretty face" (11). The reader, familiar with the Charles Atlas 1950s advertisements, fills in the imagery of a skinny kid transformed into a handsome, well-proportioned muscular young man with "abs of steel." Here in fact, we can make a connection with structuralist and poststructuralist theorists who insist on the complicity of the reader in the configuration of the autobiographical self.

The mother, in this instance, also becomes an accomplice in the construction of the beautiful male figure as we hear Oscar reminisce: "Perhaps my old mother was right. I should lay off those Snicker bars, those liverwurst sandwiches with gobs of mayonnaise and those damned caramel sundaes" (11). The foods enumerated are associated with Anglo American junk food and not with Mexican food. Up to this point, in the first paragraph, the exact ethnicity of the protagonist is not made evident, only that he is brown. His masculinity, in terms of a stereotypical "macho" self however, is confirmed at the end of the paragraph: "But look, if I suck it in just a wee bit more, push that belly button up against the back; can you see what will surely come to pass if you but rid yourself of this extra flesh? Just think of all the broads you'll get if you trim down to a comfortable 200" (11).

Oscar's masculinity will be constructed throughout the *Autobiography* mostly in terms of language, the body, race, and gender relations. Women, for Oscar, frequently will appear as objects to be desired and used for his sexual gratification, for his male sexuality. They are all minor secondary characters.

We meet the protagonist in the bathroom as he is trying to vomit and defecate. A man with an advance case of ulcers, he is portrayed as a womanizer, mentally unstable with hallucinatory bouts of sexual fantasy and a vocabulary liberally dotted with expletives. The descriptions of his efforts to vomit convey the loathing and disgust he has for himself. "'Puke, you sonofabitch!' I command. 'Aren't you the world's champion pukerupper?'... I think of garbage, dirty toilets, whiskey and gravies, but nothing happens...a meaningless belch and noiseless fart are all I get for my troubles, not even my body obeys me anymore" (12).

In terms of a linguistic register, this is stereotypical masculine discourse where the eschatological, the grotesque, the vulgar, the sordid, the unseemly are the order of the day. It is a stereotypical men's world where the tough talk and tough actions of the protagonist and secondary characters supply the vectors needed to configure a "man's" world, a macho world. Imaginary antihero models such as Steve McQueen, Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson populate Oscar's fantasy world. This is fitting since Oscar is a resident of California, the land of the make-believe, hyper-masculine Hollywood heroes.

In Lacanian terms the mirror is the perfect prop for Oscar's search for identity. If, according to Lacan, the mirror stage provides the human subject with an unauthentic sense of self, with a mis-recognition, Oscar will receive inauthentic images of self as he searches in the mirror for answers. The mirror will be a recurring leit motif throughout the novel and the space where Oscar will vainly seek a reflection of his true identity, his authentic self. At one point in the beginning of the novel Oscar states: "I stare into the mirror for an answer. See the man with the insignificant eyes drawn back, lips thinned down tight? That suave motherfucker is Mister Joe Cool himself. Yes, old Bogey..." (12). This discourse is followed by the ironical, mocking question Oscar has for his three imaginary macho heroes: "Constipation? How in the fuck can I be constipated when I have so much to offer?" (12).

Acosta maps the construction of masculinity throughout the narrative beginning with a description of the type of parenting his mother and father inflicted on him. To both parents, making a man out of their son was a primary objective.

Oscar narrates: "The truth of it was they both conspired to make men out of two innocent Mexican boys. It seemed that the sole purpose of childhood was to train boys how to be men. Not men of the future but *now*. We had to get up early, run home from school, work on weekends, holidays and during vacations, all for the purpose of being a man. We were supposed to talk like *un hombre*, walk like a man, and think like a man" (75).

Thus the beatings, the constant sermons, the memorization of the *Seabees Manual* (obtained from the father's hyper-masculine experience while doing military service in the United States Navy), the trails of manhood such as eating as many spoonfuls of hot pepper as you could stand, were inflicted on Oscar and his brothers.

But while the Mexican home instructed the boys on how to be men, society at large, particularly Anglo society, was more than eager to take away this manhood. As adolescents, the Anglos torture Oscar by beating him up and spitting on his male member semiotically denoting their contempt for his Mexican masculinity. The young Anglo thugs scream upon seeing Acosta's small and hairless dark penis: "Whooee! Look at that. This nigger ain't even a man" (88).

Oscar, as an adult, will suffer from bouts of impotence and frequently will be unable to perform the sexual act. He will suffer from an inferiority complex due to what he perceives to be a deficiency with respect to the size of his penis. The size of his male member and his failure to summon an erection are two recurrent themes throughout the novel. While the mapping of masculinity will reside mostly in psychological events, all transpire in specific geographic locations. The mapping of ethnicity likewise will be associated with definite geographic points located throughout the United States and Mexico and will be associated with supposedly masculine attributes.

At about the middle of the novel, Oscar, the protagonist, provides the reader with a description of his Mexican origins. He narrates that we was born in El Paso, Texas and later he accompanies his parents when the family moves to Riverbanks in central near California near Sacramento where he grew up. He states that, "Although I was born in El Paso, Texas, I am actually a small town kid. A hick from the sticks, a Mexican boy from the other side of the tracks" (71). Furthermore, he characterizes his father as an *Indio* from Durango. The description given of his father as an *Indio* once again confers a hyper-masculinity on his origins.

In Riverbanks, he is not accepted as a Mexican by the California Pochos (Mexican Americans) and is considered an Easterner. While the Pochos do not view him as a Mexican, the Okies and "Americans" do. Anglo society in the town classified Mexicans as "greasers," spics, and as blacks using the pejorative word for them, i.e. as "niggers". Geography and skin pigmentation in Riverbanks was destiny. Oscar recounts: "Riverbanks is divided into three parts and in my corner of the world there were only three kinds of people: Mexican, Okies, and Americans" (178). To the Okies, Oscar was constructed as an African American due to his dark brown complexion and was called racists epithets related to African Americans.

However, by the time Oscar is in high school he is an accomplished clarinet player, Junior class president, and a member of the football team. His accomplish-

ments make him forget he was a Mexican and soon becomes an *agringado* (gringo-like) or assimilated Mexican. He abandons his Mexican American friends and hangs out with Anglos. His dream girl or *Miss It* as he called his fantasy girl, is a typical blonde, Anglo young lady. Oscar narrates: "I never went out with the few Mexican girls in school because they always stuck to themselves and refused to participate in the various activities. Also they were square and homely" (112). It is clear the protagonist by this time has been socialized into accepting Eurocentric concepts of female beauty.

After a stint in the military, Oscar studies law in San Francisco and becomes a lawyer serving the poor in the Oakland district. It is here that he begins to identify as a Samoan to those who inquire about his ethnicity. Once again, in a similar manner to the stereotypical conceptualization of the *Indio* as a hyper-masculine being (feo, fuerte, y formal) the Samoan male likewise conjures up images of strength and masculinity. Although he identifies himself as a Samoan, he chafes under this ethnic label not for what it is but for what it implies: "All my life strangers have been interested in my ancestry. There is something about my bearing that cries out for history. I've been mistaken for American Indian, Spanish, Filipino, Hawaiian, Samoan and Arabian. No one has ever asked me if I'm a spic or a greaser. Am I Samoan?" (68).

Oscar eventually drops out of the mad scene transpiring in San Francisco and embarks on a self exploratory journey by driving across the United States in search of his "true identity." In Ajax, a town in Northern Nevada, he picks up a blonde, young, wealthy woman hitch hiker and identifies himself as Henry Hawk, again a Samoan. The assumed name reiterates the search for a masculine self. A few miles later, in Ketchum, Idaho, where Hemingway (another hyper-masculine male) is buried, he informs the local bartender he is a Blackfoot Indian. As he treks across the Northwest, Acosta continues to change racial identities; all however, are linked to a stereotypical conceptualization of masculinity. In Sun Valley, Idaho he assumes the Samoan identity again but as he resumes his travels in the Western part of the United States he reverts back to an Indian racial identification. In Alpine, Wyoming he constructs himself as an Aztec. It is not until the final chapter, at the end of his journey as he returns to the United States from Juárez, Mexico that Oscar finds the answer to his identity. He is a Chicano and a Brown Buffalo although his answer, in the Bakhtinian sense, will be ambiguous.

As delineated above, *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* encompasses a Bakhtinian world of the absurd, the grotesque, and the carnivalesque. The Bakhtinian concept of carnivalization can be employed in the hermeneutics of Acosta's narrative vis-a-vis a social revolutionary project. I am aware of the controversy regarding the Bakhtinian carnivalesque and its connection to political and social revolutionary movements for as L.E. Pinsky cautions: "Bakhtin's work is exciting precisely because of its contradictoriness and ability to spark different and unexpected interpretations, and that one should thus be careful not to assign his writings any single, authoritative interpretation" (Booker 105). Ambivalence is an important if not the most important component of the carnivalesque. "Simple choices between opposing alternatives" are an integral part of this style of writing, M. Keith Booker notes,

and he underscores how "Bakhtin's historical mission crucially relies on a sense of continued becoming which requires that final conclusions and interpretations be perpetually deferred in favor of an ongoing potentiality" (105).

What is useful for this study in understanding the construction of masculinity as it is linked to lower stratum bodily functions and bodily fluids as well as the hallucinatory world in which Acosta frequently found himself is the innate subversiveness of the carnivalesque as Bakhtin has so seminally posited. Carnivalesque imagery is "exuberant, exorbitant, transgressive, [and] emancipatory rhetoric [it is] an imagery that... parallels those that informed the oppositional political movements of the 1960s" (106). The 1960s in the USA, like the 1920s of Bakhtin's generation in Russia, was a period of social upheavals and transformations. It was a historical period where marginalized groups challenged the established hierarchies of the status quo. The Chicano, the black, the feminist, the gay and lesbian liberation movements were radical movements which sought to transform society by collapsing social boundaries of all kinds. Love-ins, sit-ins, rock concerts, demonstrations, protest marches, boycotts, strikes, and so forth were transgressive acts and fall within the purview of the carnivalesque. Booker points out how the carnival is "a time when normal rules and hierarchies are suspended, when boundaries are transgressed, and when the energies of life erupt without regard for conventional decorum" (106).

Three characteristics of the Bahktinian carnivalesque are pertinent to the present study: (1) the linguistic strategies, (2) grotesque bodily functions of vomiting, and voiding, and (3) the use of the fantastic. Acosta's use of expletives throughout the narrative, his obsession with bodily functions of expelling and inhaling, and his imagination gone wild through the use of drugs, i.e. peyote, LSD, metamphatamines, and his mental instability are in accord with Bakhtin's view of the grotesque body. The human excrement, sex, and ulcerating stomach which appear in the novel are all associated with the material body's lower stratum. The use of transgressive linguistic codes both subvert and destabilize the body politics and hegemonic structures by humanizing the body. If early Greek philosophers and early Christian tradition sought to separate the body from the spirit; the carnivalesque encouraged an integration of the two by underscoring bodily functions as part and parcel of the human condition —of the body being-in-the-world. In Bakhtin's highly influential work, *Rabelais and His World*, the author discusses various concepts related to the body, the grotesque and the carnivalesque. In his study he points out how "The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (26-27). Bakhtin further amplifies that "the material bodily lower stratum and the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presented this essential relation to time and to social and historical transformations" (81; see also Booker 106-107)

Acosta's preoccupation with the body and its excretory and imbibing functions serve to situate the human body within the world. The linkage between interior and exterior Booker acknowledges, "provides a graphic reminder that human beings are part of the world and undermine the Kantian duality of subject and

object that underlie conventional Western approaches to the relationship between individuals and their surroundings" (107).

Needless to say, this also underscores our biological nature and situates us within the coordinates of time and space. By stressing the commonalities we have as biological organisms, it reminds us of our human condition; of our humanity. For as we all are acutely aware, death does not respect race, class, or gender. We are all brothers and sisters under the polychromatic hues of skin color.

CONCLUSION

I submit that Acosta's *Autobiography* both constructs and deconstructs masculinity and concepts associated with the masculine. The author both associates his constructed self as masculine/non-masculine. While the protagonist surrounds himself with male oriented icons (the buffalo, the Samoan, the Indian); with a macho discourse (expletives, descriptions of body fluids and male genitalia) and a world suffused with alcohol and permeated with drugs, he deconstructs his protagonist by making him at times impotent and possessing a small male member.

The fictionalized autobiography which is frequently used in Chicano/a literature provides Acosta a narrative structure through which he can interrogate his personal identity and simultaneously challenge and defy hegemonic society —that is the Anglo world that discriminates, oppresses and exploits the Chicano population. Through his narrative Acosta, the author, has his protagonist Oscar embark on a personal quest of self discovery. Oscar's personal quest takes him from California to his place of origin; to the geographic spot where he was born, El Paso, Texas. From there his journey into Juárez, Mexico and into a more metaphysical originary womb leads him to an ultimate self discovery. After being thrown into a dark, infested hole of a jail in Juárez, Oscar will be "reborn" into a new man —a Chicano/ Brown Buffalo.

The fictional autobiography in Chicano narrative provides the protagonist a forum through which he can explore both his masculinity and his ethnicity at times perceived to be one and the same. This existential journey via discourse and narration leads to finding a new understanding of the self vis-à-vis Anglo American and Mexican society. Frequently the protagonist finds that he cannot be an Anglo-American nor a Mexican national; that he is a Mexican American —more precisely a Chicano. We see this at the end of the novel where Oscar Acosta empathically asserts: "My single mistake has been to seek an identity with any one person or nation or with any part of history... what I see now, on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither a Mexican nor an American. I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by Choice" (199). Oscar Acosta after this self discovery returns to his true home —Los Angeles— and he does this with a stronger sense of self not necessarily based on nationality nor masculinity. And in a similar manner to Joseph Campbell's "hero with a thousand faces," Acosta returns to Los Angeles a wiser man, a more knowledgeable man ready to help his Chicano community.

WORKS CITED

Acosta, Oscar Zeta. *Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972

—— *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Bakhtin, M.M. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.

Beaujour, Michel. *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*. Trans. Yara Milos. New York: New York UP, 1991.

Booker, M. Keith. *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*. New York: Longman, 1996.

Brodzki, Bella and Celeste Schenck, eds. *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988.

Calderón, Hector. *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.

—— "To Read Chicano Narrative: Commentary and Metacommentary." *Mester* (1983): 3-14.

Campbell, Joseph. *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973.

Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist. *Mikail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 1984.

Gutmann, Matthew C. *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1996.

Kawalczyk, Kimberly A. "Oscar Zeta Acosta: The Brown Buffalo and His Search for Identity." *The Americas Review* 19.3-4 (1989):199-209.

Lionnet, Francoise. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989.

Romero, Oswaldo. Review of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo*. *Mester* 4.2 (1974):141.

Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-representation*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

Stavans, Ilan. *Bandido: Oscar "Zeta" Acosta and the Chicano Experience*. New York: Icon Harper Collins, 1995.

—— ed. *Oscar "Zeta" Acosta: The Uncollected Works*. Houston: Arte Público, 1996.

Zamora, Bernice. *Restless Serpents*. Menlo Park: Diseños Literarios, 1976.