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In the shadows: the search for identity in the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez

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In the Shadows: The Search for Identity in the Writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by **Marcy Benincasa** entitled **"In the Shadows: The Search for Identity in the Novels of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moreaga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez"** be accepted in partial fulfillment of the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN HUMANITIES.

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For my husband, Armando, and my parents, Dave and Vicki Wood, who helped me see this project to completion.

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Preface

For years, the voice of the Chicana has been silenced by oppression. Anglos, Mexicans, and Chicanos have intentionally created such an oppression upon Chicanas that they were never allowed to tell stories of their own ideas, fears, and dreams. They were merely meant to be a voiceless servant to the male gender.

This master's thesis will examine the racial and gender oppression that Chicanas have faced over the centuries, beginning with the days of Malintzín and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and continuing until the present day. In this study, the themes and techniques of four Chicana authors will be examined -- Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez -- focusing primarily on their attempts to establish a gender and racial identity for their female protagonists.

This thesis will also examine the works of feminist theorists such as Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Elaine Showalter, and Patrocino Schweickart in an attempt to show how feminism serves to critique and explain the Chicana author's desire to write and the meaning behind her writings.

Chapter 1: The Historical Oppression of Chicanas

The Story of La Malinche

In order to understand Chicanas' reasoning for wishing to define themselves, it is first necessary to understand the historical background of the Chicana race and gender. Chicano culture came about from the forced union between European *conquistadores* and Aztec women. Chicanos and Chicanas are "inheritors of the dichotomy between conditions of power and powerlessness," as they are the result of the rapes of Indian women who lived in what is now Mexico (Fisher 307). Today's descendents trace their roots back to the Spanish *conquistador* Hernan Cortés and Malintzín. According to historical accounts, Malintzín, or "La Malinche," as she is sometimes called in literature, was an Aztec woman of noble birth who was sold into slavery by her family. When she was fourteen, she and twenty other Indian women were given to Hernan Cortés when he arrived in Mexico. Because she could speak both Maya and Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, Malintzín played a central role as a translator in the Conquest of Mexico. Named Doña Marina by the Spainards, she later became Cortés's mistress and had several children by him. (Rebolledo 62).

References to La Malinche in Mexican history and literature can be traced as far back as the earliest eyewitness accounts of the Conquest of Mexico by Cortés and his men. Perhaps the earliest reference to Malinche came from Cortés himself in the dispatch of 1520, written after the retreat from Tenochtitlán on the so-called "*Noche triste* ("Sad Night"). Cortés was gathering his forces for a counterattack on Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital, and had sought help from the chiefs of Cholula, a neighboring city-state. Believing that Cortés was vulnerable, the chiefs planned a surprise attack which would have wiped out Cortés and all of his men, had Malinche not found out about and warned him of the attack:

> In the three days I was there, they [the Cholulans] provided poorly for us, and worse each day, and the lords and important people of the city came to see and talk to me only rarely. And while I was puzzling over this state of affairs one of the women of this city confided in my interpreter, who is an Indian of this region whom I got in Putunchan, the big river which I mentioned in the first letter to Your Majesty. The Cholulan told her that a large force of Moctezuma's warriors was nearby, and that the Cholulans had evacuated their women and children and were about to fall on us and kill us all. The Cholulan tried to persuade her to save herself and leave with her, promising to provide for her. And all this she told to Jeronimo de Aguilar, the interpreter I acquired in Yucatan. . .and he told it to me. . . (qtd in Phillips 99).

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the last survivor of the Spanish *conquistadores*, wrote an account of Malintzín in The Conquest of New Spain, his chronicle of the Conquest of Mexico. He called "Doña Marina" a "great lady and a *cacique* over town and vassals since her childhood" (85). Malintzín's parents were lords and *caciques* of a town called Paynala. Her father died when she was young, and her mother married another *cacique* and bore a son to him. Her mother and stepfather agreed that the son should succeed his stepfather to the *caciqueship* when they died. To avoid any problems with the succession of her half-brother to the caciqueship, they gave Malintzín to some Indians from Xicalango and spread the word throughout their town that Malintzín had died. Malintzín was thus disinherited from her family's fortune, perhaps signifying the first traces of the unfair, unequal treatment of the Chicana female at the hands of the males in her family. The Indians of Xicalango gave Malintzín to the people of Tabasco, and the Tabascans gave her to Cortés (85).

Díaz called Malintzín a "person of great importance." He said that she was "obeyed without question by all the Indians of New Spain" (86). She was also a compassionate person, perhaps as a result of her conversion to Christianity. When Cortés was in the town of Coatzacoalcos, near the town of Paynala, he summoned all of the *caciques* of the province in order to address them on the subject of Christianity. Malintzín's mother and half-brother Lazaro were among those who came. When they saw Malintzín, they wept, believing that she would have them put to death. Instead, Malintzín comforted them, telling them they did not know what they were doing when they gave her away to the Indians of Xicalango. She pardoned them and gave them many jewels and clothes, and said that she was grateful to God for freeing her from idol worship and making her a Christian (Díaz 86-87).

Días del Castillo seemed to be quite taken by Malintzín, for she occupies a large scene in his chronicle of the Conquest. He described her as a brave woman:

> Let us tell how Doña Marina who was a woman of these parts, resisted manfully even though she was hearing daily that they would kill us and eat our flesh, and had seen us hard pressed in battle. And though she now saw us wounded and in pain, she never let us see any weaknesses in her, rather a strength far surpassing that of a woman (qtd. in Phillips 105).

Díaz del Castillo also saw Malintzín as an intelligent woman:

> And Moctezuma saw our captains in anger, and asked Doña Marina what they were saying with those heated words; and as Doña Marina was very intelligent, she said to him, "Lord Moctezuma, what I advise to you is to go with them to your chamber with no fuss or bother . . . (qtd. in Phillips 105-06).

In the centuries that followed, Malintzín became a negative image in Chicano literature. She has been called *La Chingada* (the "Violated One") because of her forced

sexual submission to the Spainards. The term "La Malinche" has become synonymous with a betrayer of one's country, presumably because she served as a translator to the Spainards, thus facilitating the Conquest of Mexico.

Many historical literary terms have come from the name Malintzín or Malinche. One such term is *malinchista*, coined by twentieth century Mexican novelist Octavio Paz in his Labyrinth of Solitude. Paz describes *malinchista* as a "contemptuous adjective. . .recently put into circulation by the newspapers to denounce all those who have been corrupted by foreign influences" (qtd. in Phillips 97). The word *malinchista*, Paz continues, comes from Malinche. Paz continues thus in his description of La Malinche as "La Chingada":

> If the *Chingada* is a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. The symbol of this violation is doña Marina, the mistress of Cortés. . . .Doña Marina becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced by the Spainards. And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal (qtd. in Phillips 97-98).

Cherrie Moraga believes that Malintzín can be compared to Eve in Christianity (From a Long Line of Vendidas 175). Eve, the sexual betrayer in Biblical tradition, used her feminine wiles to seduce Adam to eat the apple, which ultimately led to the Fall of Man. Thus, just as Eve betrayed Christians with her femininity, Malintzín betrayed the Aztec people. Her feminine ways allowed Cortés to manipulate her into leading her people into the hands of the Spainards.

To Tey Diana Rebolledo, Malintzín represents the complete subordination of the Indian race to the European white race (64). Margarita Cota-Càrdenas sees Malintzín as a woman trapped between two cultures. She is caught in the crisis of her identity of and with her beliefs:

> Initially the crisis was that of the Indians caught, as they were during the Conquest, between the prophecies that said the god Quetzalcoatl would return, and their belief that Cortéz was that god. Later they were caught between their native religions and Christianity. The Chicano is also caught between two cultural systems, and the Chicana is then caught between those two, and, additionally, between gender differences in Chicano culture. Thus La Malinche becomes the formative symbol for all Chicanas caught "between two cultural systems in a conflictive state." (qtd. in Rebolledo 72).

Some critics believe that the Malinche myth exploits the image of Chicana women as passive and inferior to men. In her essay entitled "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision Through Malintzín/or Malintzín: Putting Flesh Back On the Object," Norma Alarcón states that the myth of Malintzín portrays women as sexually passive and thus always open to seduction or rape by men (184). Alarcón emphasizes that "since woman is seen as highly pawnable, nothing she does is perceived as a choice. Because Malintzín aided Cortés in the Conquest of the New World, she is seen as concretizing women's sexual weakness and interchangeability, always open to sexual exploitation" (184).

The Malintzin story demonstrates the oppression of the Chicana in family and society through the issue of abandonment. Malintzín was abandoned by her mother when she was given away to an Indian tribe so her stepbrother could succeed her stepfather to the caciqueship. The practice of disposing of the daughter in favor of the son furthers the

notion of inferiority of the female to the male. Not only is she inferior to her male counterpart in social circles, but she is also inferior in familial circles as well. The favoring of the male child over the female child is an age-old practice that exists in many third world cultures because the male is thought of as the one that carries the family bloodlines throughout generations. Once the female marries, she becomes part of her husband's family. If she is an only child, the family bloodline stops with her father. Thus, it was not unusual in many cultures to sacrifice the female child in favor of the male child, as in Malintzin's case.

Chicana feminist critic Cherríe Moraga discusses the Malintzín story in terms of betrayal of the daughter by the mother in her essay "A Long Line of Vendidas." She states that Malintzín's mother's selling her daughter into slavery so that her stepson can succeed Malintzín's stepfather to the caciqueship was the normal treatment of the female, and this treatment has existed for centuries:

> Ask, for example, any Chicana mother about her children and she is quick to tell you she loves them all the same, but she doesn't. *The boys are different*. Sometimes I sense that she feels this way because she wants to believe that through her mothering, she can develop the kind of man she would have liked to have married, or even have been. That through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege. . . . The daughter can never offer the mother such hope, saddled by the same forces that saddle the mother. As a result, the daughter must constantly earn the mother's love, prove her fidelity to her. The son -- he gets her love for free (Loving in the War Years 101-02).

Chicanas have always had to earn the love of their mothers, while the sons are accepted and loved just for being themselves. Moraga herself felt this same subjugation in her own family, and she recounts a story of a telephone conversation with her

estranged mother that attempted at reconciliation and ended abruptly when her brother called:

> Three days ago, my mother called me long distance full of tears, loving me, wanting me back in her life after such a long period of separation. . . . My mother's tears succeed in getting me to break down the edge in my voice, the protective distance. . . . This woman is my mother. There is no love as strong as this . . . . And then suddenly, over the phone, I hear another ring. My mother tells me to wait. There is a call on my father's work phone. Moments later, "It's your brother," she says. My knees lock under me, bracing myself for the fall. . . . "Okay, m'jita. I love you. I'll talk to you later," cutting off the line in the middle of the connection. . . . This man doesn't have to earn her love. The brother has always come first (Loving in the War Years 102-03).

The betrayal of Malinche by her mother sparked a culture built upon the subjection and sacrifice at the expense of its women. Chicanas feel like they must prove themselves worthy of their mother's love, instead of experiencing the unconditional love that Chicana mothers heap upon their sons. Perhaps this is one reason why Chicanas like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga began questioning their sexuality and may have turned to lesbianism in an effort to become accepted by their mothers and other family members.

Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz

The first mestiza, or woman born of both Anglo and Mexican blood, to speak out against Mexican-American women's oppression in her writings was Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz. Born around 1648, Sor Juana fought the myth of Malintzín a mere one hundred years after the Conquest of Mexico. She defended education for women by emphasizing the importance of formal training, as well as empirical knowledge. Sor Juana believed

that if she accepted the traditional norms for women, such as marriage and raising a family, she would have no time for reflection and intellectual pursuits (Rebolledo 58).

Sor Juana always had a great thirst for knowledge, although she was keenly aware that women were not allowed to study in institutions of higher learning at that time. In 1655, Sor Juana asked her mother to dress her in men's clothing and take her to the University of Mexico:

> When I was about six or seven, having already learned to read and write, along with other skills such as embroidery and dressmaking which were considered appropriate for women, I heard that in Mexico City there was a university and schools where one could learn science. As soon as I heard that, I began to torture my mother with insistent and annoying pleas that she change my clothes and send me to live with relatives of hers in Mexico City so I could study at the university (qtd. in Arenal 168).

Despite her efforts at higher education, Sor Juana failed to attain it, so in 1665, at the age of seventeen, she became a lady-in-waiting at the court of the Marquises of Mancera; and despite the fact that she developed a close and loving relationship with them, the court treated her as a freak, presumably because of her love for learning (Arenal 168).

Writing played a major role in Sor Juana's life from her teens to her early forties, when shortly after composing her Respuesta a Sor Filotea, she signed away in blood -- literally -- her earthly pursuits and in effect her life (Arenal 169). Although she did not commit suicide, as some myths state, Sor Juana resigned herself to living a sad and solitary life in the convent. Electa Arenal calls Sor Juana's Respuesta a Sor Filotea "the major and most direct source of her autobiographical writing, and [an] essential document of seventeenth century feminism" (174).

Sor Juana wrote her Respuesta a Sor Filotea in 1651, after she was highly criticized for writing a disagreement with a sermon written in 1650 by Portuguese Jesuit priest Antonio Vieyra. Don Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, bishop of Puebla and one of Sor Juana's powerful friends, had asked Sor Juana to record her disagreement for him because he was impressed with her theological reasoning in conversation (Arenal 174). Her text Respuesta a Sor Filotea is filled with Latin quotations, and it has "tight scholastic logic, classical aphorism, Renaissance harmonic play, and, in a few instances, familiar and popular expressions" (Arenal 177). Sor Juana describes emotions of anger, defiance, challenge, humility, tenderness, and despair as she describes her childhood struggles to educate herself. She affirms her love of study and defends the right of women to learn and to exercise the freedom to think and opine, as well as her right to refute the statements of Antonio Vieyra and assert her own opinions, such as "it was bold of me to oppose Vieyra?. . . .My mind is not as free as his, though it derives from the same Source?" (qtd. in Arenal 177).

Sor Juana's Respuesta a Sor Filotea was not published, only circulated, during her lifetime, and her confessor, Father Antonio Nuñez de Miranda, withdrew his support from her soon after the letter began to circulate (Bergmann 155). The high criticism generated by Sor Juana's Respuesta a Sor Filotea forced church authorities to order her to put away her books. She complied, but continued her empirical studies of physics and other sciences by observing their role in regular household duties, made scientific observations in the cooking of an egg, and jokingly speculated on how much more Aristotle would have written had he entered the kitchen (Bergmann 155). Sor Juana was finally ordered to end her studies as an act of obedience. She gave away her book collection, nursed her sister nuns during an epidemic, and died at the age of forty-four (Rebolledo 58).

Rebolledo believes that Sor Juana through her silence embodies all of the negative and repressed characteristics of mestiza women. Thus, she is often a source of inspiration for contemporary mestiza writers:

> . . . Sor Juana's other qualities -- her fierce love of knowledge, the brilliance of her writing, the power of her language, and her independent spirit -- intrigue and inspire contemporary writers. She was not a quiet, long-suffering woman, but an intellectual who, for most of her life, made and lived her own choices (59).

Estela Portillo Trambley's play, Sor Juana, is inspired by the nun's life. Trambley presents Sor Juana as a woman who resolves her internal conflict between the life of the mind and life itself with the help of her confessor, Father Antonio. In the play, Sor Juana believes that knowledge is the path to salvation, and she feels guilty because of her lack of humility, i.e. her faith in herself as an intellectual (qtd. in Rebolledo 59).

Because Sor Juana herself was the daughter of a Spanish nobleman and a Mexican woman, she seemed to understand the mestiza's plight for self-definition better than most writers. According to Emilie Bergmann in "Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz: Dreaming in a Double Voice," Sor Juana exposes contradictions in contemporary Hispanic culture in her *redondilla* entitled "Hombres necios" (foolish men):

> You foolish men who accuse
> Women without good reason,
> You are the cause of what you blame,
> Yours the guilt you deny.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> When each is guilty of sin,
> Which is the most to blame:
> She who sins for payment,

one is inclined to wonder if Sor Juana felt something stronger than platonic friendship for Leonor Carreto.

As with Leonor Carreto, Sor Juana also devoted an elegiac sonnet to Vicereine María Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga, and used the conventional seventeenth century name "Phyllis" to describe her:

> But to what end do I go on?
> Just so, my Phyllis, do I love you;
> with your considerable worth,
> this is merely an endearment.
> Your being a woman, your being gone
> neither hinders my love for you,
> for who knows better than our souls
> notice neither geography nor sex (qtd. in Arenal 11, 9-16).

As with the sonnet to Leonor, the tone of this sonnet implies a strong romantic love. Sor Juana admits in the poem that "Phyllis's" femininity does not hinder the nun's love for her because "our souls notice neither geography nor sex." This sonnet is perhaps Sor Juana's treatise on lesbianism. She speaks as a member of the Catholic Church that lesbianism is not a sin, which in itself is reason for the priests to force her to take a vow of silence. Perhaps to Sor Juana, love has no gender barriers. Clearly her two sonnets illustrate this point quite well.

Chapter 2: The Chicana's Search for Identity: An Historical Perspective

Centuries after Sor Juana's death, racial, class and gender oppression of the Chicana continues, and it intensifies after the Mexican-American War of 1848. By 1836, Texas had broken from Mexico to form its own republic. During this time, the Texas Mexicans suffered expulsion, forced marches, and random violence at the hands of the Anglo Texans. In 1848 Mexico and the United States signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, whereby Mexico surrendered all claims to Texas and ceded to the United States the territories of California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah. With the signing of this treaty the United States fulfilled its "manifest destiny" to extend its political, economic and ideological hegemony over the North American continent.

After the Treaty was signed, Mexican-Americans living in the borderlands of Texas and the other conquered territories became an ethnic minority under United States political control. According to Ramon Saldívar, "the Mexican-American people were created as a people: Mexican by birth, language and culture, United States citizens by the might of arms" (17). In addition to the inability or unwillingness of Mexican-Americans to give up their traditional ways, racial and class differences between the Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans created a certain significant tension between the two cultural groups. Mexican-Americans thus began to develop a sense of loss of identity; they were and after still are torn between two cultures to which they do not belong. Mexican culture no longer wants them, and they cannot seem to absorb themselves into American culture. Because they do not speak complete English or Spanish, but a mixture of both called "Spanglish," they have a hard time communicating in each of the cultures. Also, because they are not Latin/mestizo or Anglo, but a combination of both races, they are not fully accepted by either culture.

According to Américo Paredes, this sense of an in-between existence characterizes Mexican-American border culture from Escandon's establishment of the Nuevo Santander settlement in 1749 and becomes greatly intensified after 1835 (qtd. in Saldívar 17). This sense of an in-between existence also characterizes the issue of polarity of identity that is very often addressed in the Chicano narrative.

According to Ramón Saldívar, one of the most problematic issues that must be dealt with when discussing the history of Mexican-Americans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the question of gender (20). Although women mostly worked at home throughout the nineteenth century, in the 1880's entire families began to enter the work force. Chicanas began to find employment in fruit canneries and other food processing plants, and by the early twentieth century they were employed as domestic servants, in textile and light manufacturing work, as clerical workers, and in other service industries (Saldívar 20-21).

As a result, Mexican-American family structure began to change drastically:

> As women entered the work force, they raised important questions concerning the traditional division of labor in the home; they demanded a greater role in the economic decision-making within the family, and they desired a different status in relation to family elders, fathers- and mothers-in-law, who required that their sons' wives be subordinate, submissive, and decorously respectful (Saldívar 21).

When women began working outside the home, they became actively aware of the oppression that their gender has faced for centuries, economically, politically, and socially. This knowledge seemed to amplify the gender oppression to the female in Mexican-American culture and is reflected to a great extent in Chicana literature.

After the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Mexican women followed Mexican-American women living in U. S. territories in trying to construct a form of

identity. The war dramatically altered feminine roles. During the revolution, men had to leave their employment in order to fight for their nation. In their absence and in order to meet the demands of society and the economy, women had to fill men's employment posts. They began working in the factories, the canneries, and the fruit orchards, to name a few positions.

As with the Chicanas, employment outside the home gave the Mexicanas a new-found sense of financial independence. Making their own money caused women to begin to demand independence in other areas, such as politics. It is during this time period that the women's suffrage movement in Mexico begins. Interestingly, the women's suffrage movement in Mexico coincided with the women's suffrage movement in the United States, which led to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, giving women the right to vote.

The advent of Chicana and Mexicana feminism led to a certain amount of activism among women, not only in Mexico and the borderlands, but all over Latin America. Women in Buenos Aires, Argentina, established their own anarchist newspapers and spoke freely against the repressive structures of the family and the authoritarian-paternalist model of government. They questioned women's civil rights in society and investigated the idea of marriage as a hindrance to the progress of women's equality (Masiello 29). They also became involved in labor strikes and acts of sabotage. According to Francine Masiello, "women in lower class neighborhoods of Buenos Aires organized the largest strike in Argentina before the decade of the 1920's. This strike, perpetrated by women tenants who demanded rent stabilization in poor neighborhoods, represented one of the most successful grass-root urban movements of modern times" (29).

Also between 1910 and 1919, feminist literature had begun to spring up in Mexico and the borderlands. Two such feminist journals, *Mujer Moderna* and *Revista de*

Revistas, published essays and short stories which romanticized the woman's role in the Mexican Revolution (Gonzales 83). These literary journals signified the beginnings of literacy and literature for Mexicanas and Chicanas.

The goal of Chicana literature in the 1920s was "to produce an autonomous female subject, one that escapes the deadening effects of a repressive nationalist discourse, and one in which woman resists her status as an object within the abstract rhetorical programs of men" (Masiello 36-37). Some Chicana writers of the 1920s included María Luisa Bombal, Norah Lange, and Teresa de la Parra. Francine Masiello describes their writings in the following manner:

> Together the fiction of these women reflects the constant displacement or homelessness of the female intellectual, as much as it voices an opposition to the masculinist avant-garde programs. What we see, then, are women who used their status as exiles to resist the containment of an encroaching nationalist rhetoric. They refused the unifying discourse that maintains the female body in place, limiting woman to reproductive functions or domestic labor. Indeed, almost as a correlative of the anarchist activities described earlier, women writers engaged in a series of deconstructive challenges in which discourses were multiplied and the sites of meaning released from their compartmentalized frames, no longer anchored by male prerogatives in the literary or social domain (37).

According to Masiello, the heroines of Bombal, Lange, and de la Parra's novels are disinherited from family properties, which enables them to find a new freedom that permits them to structure their social world along with their worlds of discourse. Therefore, "their frequently described anonymity allows them to escape the burden of official sanctions or formal institutions that might constrain their activities (Masiello 39).

The decade of the 1930's marked a significant increase in labor activity in Mexico and the borderlands. By this time, however, most Mexicans had moved out of Mexico proper and were now living in the borderlands. By 1930 almost forty percent of Mexicans were living in Texas, and thirty percent were living in California (Calderón 31).

Working conditions were poor for Mexicans during this decade. Mexicans were often discriminated against in their quest for employment; they were denied fair wages and were employed only in menial positions. In 1930, 41 percent of the Mexican work force was in agriculture, 11 percent worked in transportation, 3 percent worked in mining, 23 percent worked in manufacturing, and 10 percent worked in domestic and personal service. Thus, 88 percent of the Mexican labor force in the United States was employed in low-paying, low-status jobs (Calderón 31).

For Mexicanas in the United States, the job situation was far worse. In 1930, 20 percent of Mexicanas were farm laborers, 45 percent were domestic and personal service workers, 5 percent were saleswomen, and the remainder of the Mexicana work force labored in the textiles, food processing, and packing industries (Calderón 31). In terms of discrimination on the job, Mexicana workers faced several problems; not only did they receive lower wages and suffer more distressing working conditions than their Anglo counterparts, but they also were discriminated against because they were female.

During the 1930's the union movement became strong among Chicanos and Chicanas. Unions such as the Workers' Alliance of America and the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA), and the South Texas Agricultural Workers' Union (STAWU) in Corpus Christi were established. Two key individuals in the development of these unions were Manuela Solis Sager and Emma Tenayuca (Calderón 32).

Solis Segar became a labor activist in Laredo, Texas, in 1932 and 1933, when she helped organize unions and strikes among textile and agricultural workers. In 1934 she was awarded a year-long scholarship by the *Asociaction de Jornaleros* to attend the *Universidad Obrera*, a leftist labor school in Mexico City. She then returned to Laredo and with the help of her husband, James Sager, she led a consolidation of labor activists in Laredo into a statewide Mexican Labor movement. Solis Segar and her husband successfully assisted workers in organizing several Mexican unions with a total membership of over 1,000 workers (Calderón 32).

Emma Tenayuca joined the labor movement at the age of sixteen after she read about the 1932 and 1933 strikes against the Finck Cigar Company of San Antonio. During 1934 and 1935 she was also instrumental in the formation of two locals of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. In 1937 she became a member of the Executive Committee of the Workers' Alliance of America, a national federation of unemployed workers. She had also become general secretary of at least ten Alliance chapters in San Antonio. In January 1938 approximately 2,000 pecan shelling workers decided to strike against the local industry and asked Tenayuca to be their strike representative. After that strike, Tenayuca was nicknamed "*La Pasionaria*" (Calderón 33).

Following the 1938 strike, Emma Tenayuca became the chair of the Texas Communist Party and authored a book on the struggle of the Mexican people. Years later she returned to San Antonio and taught until her retirement. Manuela Solis Segar remained with her husband in San Antonio and continued to be involved in progressive causes related to the Chicano movement, such as the women's movement, immigrant rights, electoral politics, and opposition to U.S. interventionist foreign policy (Calderón 35). Through their active involvement in the labor movement, both of these women

began projecting an identity of the Chicana as a creature who would no longer be submissive to the male.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States, once an isolationist nation, became embroiled in a war with both Asia and Europe. Chicanos played an important role during World War II because they filed the job void created when male Americans went to war. Also, many Chicanos found their way into the United States military during this decade. Chicanos were eligible for the draft, and many youths who did not have jobs that would have deferred them from the draft were automatically inducted into the military. According to Manuel Machado, Jr., Chicanos were quite patriotic, even more so than other Americans, as "they volunteered more readily for the more hazardous branches of government, such as the paratroopers. Motivated in part by an unassailable machismo, Mexican-Americans during the war garnered the highest percentage of military honors, and their patriotism during a time of intense international strife was and is unquestioned" (75).

Also in the 1940s, the United States began regulating migratory labor. Public Law 45, passed by Congress in April 1943, allowed up to 50,000 Mexican workers to cross into the United States each year until December 1947 (Machado 76). The bulk of the labor from the *braceros* (Mexicans who entered the United States for the purposes of looking for work) was in agriculture, although some were eventually diverted to industry, especially the railroad.

In the early 1940s, social, political, and racial tensions had begun to mount between the Chicanos and the Anglos throughout the Southwest. On August 1, 1942, that tension came to a breaking point in Sleepy Lagoon, a Mexican-American area of Los Angeles. The 38th Street Gang, a Chicano group, arrived at a party in search of someone who had allegedly beaten up one of their members. The next day, a Chicano by the name of José Díaz was found dead, and the entire 38th Street Gang was arrested (Machado 81).

The Los Angeles press sensationalized the event, which persuaded the Grand Jury to take an anti-Mexican stance. Also, the head of the Foreign Relations Bureau of the Los Angeles Police Department submitted a report to the Grand Jury that "depicted Mexicans as innately cruel and possessing a total indifference toward human life" (Machado 82). The report attributed the Mexicans' cruelty to the fact that they descended from the Aztecs, who performed human sacrifices. In January 1943 the twenty-two members of the 38th Street Gang were found guilty of crimes ranging from conspiracy to first-degree murder (Machado 82).

The judicial treatment of the members of the 38th Street Gang outraged many liberal-minded individuals in Los Angeles. The Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, a mostly Anglo group led by Carey McWilliams, set out to prove that the members of the 38th Street Gang had been framed. Many individuals did not take kindly to the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee's endeavors and harassed and investigated the Committee. Despite flagrant opposition, the Committee's efforts were successful. In October 1944 the Second District Court of Appeals unanimously held that the Sleepy Lagoon defendants' case had been handled in a prejudicial manner, that their constitutional rights had been violated, and that no evidence existed to link the 38th Street Gang with the death of José Díaz.

The actions of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee to acquit the 38th Street Gang of Díaz's murder incited anger among many Anglos in eastern Los Angeles, who had begun to perceive the Mexican-Americans as a threat to Anglo purity. In June 1943 police began to arrest Mexican-Americans, primarily for burglary, and began searching Mexican-Americans for suspicion of larceny. These actions received massive headlines in the Los Angeles press and aggravated racial/ethnic tensions between Mexican-Americans and Anglos. These tensions were especially great between Mexican-Americans and Anglo sailors, who often came to Long Beach and San Pedro on

short furlough, looking for a good time. They would pick up Mexican-American girls, who reminded them of prostitutes in Tijuana, Mexico. As a result, Mexican-American men became increasingly protective of their women, and fights often broke out. These fights continued until June 4, 1943, when Anglo sailors descended into the Mexican-American section of Los Angeles and started a rampage. The Los Angeles press got wind of the riots and began sensational news coverage of the conflicts between the servicemen and the Mexican-Americans. As a result, racial tensions erupted and threatened to destroy forever the once-peaceful co-existence that Anglos and Mexican-Americans had shared in Southern California.

After Japan fell to the United States in 1945, many Mexican-American war veterans returned home, hoping that their status had improved, now that they were war heroes. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The events stemming from Sleepy Lagoon had made many Anglos suspicious of Chicanos, particularly those with combat experience. As a result, Chicanos began to form groups that were oriented toward fulfillment and protection of their civil rights. Organizations such as the Mexican-American Political Organization, the American GI Forum, and the Political Association of Spanish-Speaking Organizations joined the previously-formed League of United Latin American Citizens in an attempt to assimilate the Chicano into Anglo-American society (Machado 86).

The end of the 1940's saw an influx of illegal immigrant labor from Mexico into the United States, primarily because the returning World War II Anglo G.I.s were loath to perform the menial tasks of working in the fields that the Mexican-Americans had performed. Furthermore, farmers did not want to give up their cheap migrant labor. President Truman commissioned a study to investigate the problem, and on July 12, 1951, a Migratory Labor Agreement was signed. Also called Public Law 78, this agreement made the Department of Labor responsible for overseeing the immigrant labor

program. The immigrants "would be contacted for periods ranging from six weeks to six months with guarantees of work for at least 75 percent of the time in the United States and were to receive the prevailing wage as established by the Secretary of Labor" (Machado 89).

In the 1950's "Operation Wetback" was aimed at stopping the large flow of illegal immigrant labor into the United States. According to Machado, over three million wetbacks were deported to Mexico between 1950 and 1955, but still the illegal flood continued, because farmers were unwilling to cooperate with migratory labor laws. No penalties existed for the use of illegal labor, and illegal immigrants were willing to live in treacherous conditions and work for practically no wages, as they perceived their American living situation as a vast improvement over conditions in Mexico (89).

For Mexican-Americans, Operation Wetback was a positive socio-political decision. It removed illegal immigrants from jobs that Mexican-Americans could have had. However, the deportation of illegals had a down-side for Mexican-Americans. While they were in the United States, illegal immigrants provided cultural stability to many Mexican-American communities, as they gave strong support to their language and customs. When illegal immigrants were deported, stability began to weaken in Mexican-American communities as their population numbers decreased. Also, the callous deportation of many illegal immigrants caused Mexican-Americans to develop a distrust of U.S. government officials, which exists to this day (Machado 90).

The 1950's were a turbulent decade for Mexican-Americans, especially with Senator Joseph McCarthy's crusades advocating Anglo purity and conformism. The McCarran Walter Immigration Act of 1952 complicated some of the naturalization procedures and provided for denaturalization and deportation of undesirables (Machado 92). Despite some setbacks, the 1950's saw certain opportunities for Mexican-American advancement. Both men and women received opportunities for education, which had

been previously denied them. With their education, they were eligible to be considered for jobs in the factories; they could now work side by side with Anglos.

Educational opportunities caused Mexican-Americans to become more aware of their situation and gave them the knowledge to do something about it. During the 1960's Mexican-American nationalists became articulate, and the Anglo world had no choice but to stand up and take notice. One such nationalist was César Chávez. Born the son of a poor migrant family in San José, California, Chávez became famous for his success in bringing unionization to the grape fields of Delano, California.

In 1962 Chávez moved his family to Delano to organize the National Farm Workers' Association (NFWA). As he was organizing his union, he learned that the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) in Delano, led by Larry Itionez, voted to strike against Di Giorgio Corporation, one of the world's largest grape growers. In September 1965 the NFWA voted to support the AWOC move (Machado 99). Because the NFWA and the AWOC appeared to be outnumbered against the company, Chávez appealed to outside groups, namely college students and civil rights militants, to come to the aid of the strikers. The grape workers' strike proved successful, and Chávez then moved on to organizing California vineyards and lettuce fields.

Chávez's success at unionization attracted much attention to the Mexican-Americans, particularly through the news media and the liberal community. The humility and quiet strength that Chávez projected served him well among his less analytical admirers (Machado 103).

Chávez was instrumental in bringing solidarity and militancy to the Mexican-American people. In 1966 Chávez and his union workers decided to march on Sacramento to underscore the plight of the farm workers. On March 16 Chávez informed the police department of Delano, California, of his intentions. The Delano police chief told Chávez that he needed a parade permit to have a march. However, Chávez did not

have time to obtain the permit, and the police chief told him that he should have his people walk on the sidewalk instead of down the street, so that he would not be in violation of the law. The next morning, Chávez and sixty people gathered outside the union headquarters, armed with media representatives. The Delano police department recognized that Chávez wanted the march disbanded by brutal force so he could capture it on film and demonstrate to the world the oppressive force that was being heaped on the helpless Mexican-American people. However, the marchers were not disbanded, and Chávez and his group were forced to continue the march to Sacramento, a distance for which they were not prepared. By the time the marchers reached Sacramento on April 10, 1966, most of the original contingent was nowhere in sight. Chávez proved to have an ulterior motive behind the march. Although he "wrapped his cause in the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe and posited the march as a symbolic gathering of the Mexican-American people," he used the cause of the pickers and the growers to attract the attention of a national audience, including Governor Brown of California and the United States Congress (Machado 104).

The advent of the new militancy of the Mexican-American started when Cesar Chávez thrust the Chicano into the political limelight in the Southwest. A wave of Chicano consciousness began sweeping the region, and the Chicano became the second largest identifiable ethnic minority in the United States, next to the African-American.

Chávez's endeavors encouraged the literate Mexican-Americans, or "Chicanos," as they were now affectionately called, to put their thoughts and experiences into writing. Thus emerged a culture of "modern" Chicano writers, including Chicana writers. However, this did not evolve easily, mostly because of language difficulties and a lack of educational opportunities for Chicanas. From 1948 to 1960, Mexican-American women were mostly unable to read or write unless they came from wealthy families, because formal education was considered a frivolity and thus unnecessary for women. Another

reason that counted for the high illiteracy rate among Mexican-American women at the beginning of the twentieth century was because Mexican-Americans often had to learn to survive on isolated ranches, or to go to work in urbanized areas, in order to make a living. Therefore, these women often had no time to learn to read and write.

The earliest form of Chicana literature is contained in oral histories. These were collected in the 1870's by historian Hubert H. Barncroft in an attempt to document the early history of California and the Southwest. Although the histories were "double-voiced" because they were filtered first through the recording by a second person, and then filtered again when they were translated into English, the reader of the histories is still able to discern a distinct, though muted, female voice (Rebolledo 12).

In the 1930's and 1940's, a great deal of interest in the Southwest was sparked by the Federal Writers' Project, part of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930's. In Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, program participants collected oral histories in an attempt to preserve the history and culture of their ancestors. Because the oral histories were given by older Mexican-American women, the participants collected valuable information about their lives, education and traditions (Rebolledo 3). It is from these oral histories that contemporary Chicana writers find inspiration.

Chapter 3: Feminist Criticism and Chicana Writers

Modern feminist criticism seems to be deeply embedded in the works of two major authors, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. In A Room of One's Own, Woolf demonstrates how writing by women takes on a distinctively feminist discourse. Written in 1924, A Room of One's Own "describes female writing "as shaped primarily by its subject and less by the 'shadow across the page' (the imposition of ego) characteristic of male discourse" (Davis and Schleifer 509). Woolf's "room of one's own" suggests a sanctuary in which women may attain both privacy and economic freedom, a place where she may develop the strength to develop a distinctively female discourse, free from male influences.

In A Room of One's Own, Woolf also discusses the discrimination that early twentieth century women faced in the university:

> It was thus that I found myself walking with extreme rapidity across a grass plot. Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle, I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. . . . The only charge I could bring against the Fellows and Scholars of whatever the college might happen to be was that in protection of their turf, which has been rolled for 300 years in succession, they had sent my little fish into hiding (6).

During this period, it was taboo for a woman to even walk across the hallowed ground of a university. For a woman to be seen on university grounds is to taint the

school's reputation for allowing something as inferior as a woman to stroll unattended through the campus.

Woolf continues with the idea of female discrimination in the university with her discussion of women not being allowed in the library at Oxford:

> . . . but here I was at the door which leads into the library itself. I must have opened it, for instantly there issued, like a guardian angel barring the way with a flutter of black gown instead of white wings, a deprecating, silvery, kindly gentleman, who regretted in a low voice as he waved me back that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction (7-8).

Woolf also believes that men have intentionally kept women inferior to them for all these centuries because it makes them seem all the more superior:

> Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle. The glories of all of our wars would be unknown. . . . The Czar and Kaiser would have never worn their crowns or lost them. Whatever may be their use in civilised societies, mirrors are essential to all violent and heroic action. That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge (35-36).

It is interesting to note that Woolf indicates that this intentional suppression of women by men actually makes women more powerful than men. Women serve as mirrors to men, reflecting male power at twice its normal size. Thus, in effect, women are beneficial to men because if it were not for women, men may not have been able to

accomplish achievements that they would have been able to do. Thus, women, in effect, are actually superior to men.

Virginia Woolf's theories in A Room of One's Own can be applied to the writings of many female authors, including Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez. Like Woolf, all four of these women have been suppressed by the males in their cultures. Like Woolf, they try to find themselves through their writings, but it has been a difficult journey for them because, like Woolf, they have been constantly denied a voice in their culture. They have no place, no "room of their own," within which they can find themselves, although Anzaldúa and Moraga seem to have found their "room of one's own" through their sexuality. By acknowledging their lesbianism and using it to exert forcefully their individuality in a male-dominated world, Anzaldúa and Moraga utilize their sexual preference as their comfort zone in which to expound their views. Their lesbianism thus becomes their "room of one's own."

Woolf's "room of one's own" concept is important for all aspiring women writers. In order to find themselves, women must first set themselves apart from male society and male-dominated culture so they can collect their thoughts and let them flow from their minds onto paper. Because women have been oppressed by men for so long in nearly every culture, the only way to become themselves is to separate from their male culture into "a room of [their] own" where they can allow their creativity and individuality to flourish in a "wild zone," an area free from male influence, which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

In The Second Sex, published in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir describes "a male discourse in which particular misogynist practices occur." De Beauvoir's literary analysis reflects the socioeconomic injustices affecting women both in literature and in real life (Davis and Schleifer 509). De Beauvoir's work is divided into two sections. Book One considers women abstractedly from three points of view: destiny, history, and myth.

"Destiny" and its three chapters refer to the biological fate of the woman as the weaker sex. "History" and its five chapters describe how men have transformed women's biological dependence into a condition of permanent social, political, and existential dependence and inferiority. Finally, "Myth" and its three chapters refer to myths that men have woven about women over the years which express their profound ambivalence toward their female counterpart. Book Two of The Second Sex is divided into four parts: "the formative years," "situation," "justifications," and "toward liberation." All of these parts propose to explain the development of man's oppression of woman and why man has always been regarded as superior.

Simone de Beauvoir's main thesis in The Second Sex can be summarized as follows: in spite of her biological predicament, she need not be doomed to immanence because it is man who has created artificial distractions between masculine and feminine functions, and thus kept woman in a false, passive role (Leighton 34). In other words, all of a woman's attitudes are simply a result of her situation, i.e., her "place" in a male-dominated society. De Beauvoir's theory can be found most poignantly in her chapter entitled "Childhood":

> One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (267).

De Beauvoir asserts that women understand and accept their passive, oppressive role in society as inferior to men:

> . . . and she knows already that her sex condemns her to a mutilated and fixed existence, which she faces at this time under the form of an impure sickness and a vague guiltiness. Her inferiority was sensed at first merely

> as a deprivation; but the lack of a penis has now become defilement and transgression. So she goes onward toward the future, wounded, shameful, culpable (313).

De Beauvoir's notion that a woman simply learns to accept her place in society can be seen in the works of Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez. Both authors paint a realistic picture of the oppression of the Chicana in her patriarchal family and in Anglo and Latino society, as will be examined later in the thesis, but they do not lash out as openly against the oppression as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga do in their works.

In her conclusion de Beauvoir asserts that male society continues to impede women's liberation, so she believes that women find a place within which to distance themselves from men so that they can thrive in their own right:

> Today the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put man in a prison, woman endeavors to escape from one; she no longer seeks to drag him into the realms of immanence, but to emerge, herself, into the light of transcendence (717).

To solve the problem of the oppression of women by male society, de Beauvoir subscribes to Virginia Woolf's "room of one's own" theory. Her desire to escape from man and set herself apart from male society, to submerge herself into "a room of [her] own" in order to allow her creativity to flourish, is also similar to the way in which Anzaldúa and Moraga utilize their sexual preferences in their works to distance themselves from a male society that continues to attempt to suppress their voices.

In her text Simone de Beauvoir on Woman, Jean Leighton criticizes de Beauvoir and The Second Sex because she believes that the book contains a major paradox; although de Beauvoir professes to have written the book in defense of women and their liberation, she wrote it with the tone of certain implied negativity toward women, or at least "in their present enslaved condition." According to Leighton, "a plangent protest

against the feminine condition itself can be heard distinctively throughout The Second Sex. The 'cri du coeur' about women's 'malediction' which permeates The Second Sex contrasts strangely with Simone de Beauvoir's tranquil insistence that *she* has escaped this scourge by surmounting the 'moral parasitism' of economic dependence" (45). Thus, although she professes to defend the plight of women, Leighton sees de Beauvoir as accepting their oppressive condition as a normal, unchanging mechanism.

The 1970's saw an influx of feminist critics who concerned themselves with interpreting women's writing through women's bodies. In her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," written in 1975, Hélène Cixous discusses writing on both a metaphoric and literal level:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement. . . . I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say "woman," I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history (875).

When Cixous says that "woman must write herself," she means that women must tell their own stories, and also that "woman" as signifier must find a way to be connected to the signifier "I;" that is, woman must become the signifier of "selfhood." It is this use of double meanings that makes Cixous's essay difficult to understand; when she speaks of woman, one cannot be truly certain whether she means woman as a female (individual), or woman as a signifier of self.

Similar to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's beliefs, Cixous believes that writing is very closely linked to sexuality. Like Anzaldúa's and Moraga's equation of

feminine writing with lesbianism, Cixous equates feminine writing with something just as sexually shocking to society -- masturbation:

> Besides, you've written a little, but in secret. And it wasn't good, because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn't go all the way, or because you wrote, irresistibly, as when we would masturbate in secret, not to go further, but to attenuate the tension a bit, just enough to take the edge off. And then as soon as we come, we go and make ourselves feel guilty -- so as to be forgiven; or to forget, to bury it until next time (876).

Since Cixous equates writing with masturbation, something secret and shameful for women, she thus suggests that writing is a shameful act for women, something that should be avoided and not exploited. This suggestion is unlike Anzaldúa and Moraga, who believe that feminine writing, like sexuality, should be exploited, as will be seen later in this thesis.

Cixous also follows Freud's assertion by calling women the "dark continent":

> Here they are, returning over and again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brainwashing. You can incarcerate them, slow them down, get away with old Apartheid routine, but for a time only. As soon as they begin to speak, at the same as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. . . . And so we have internalized this horror of the dark (877).

Here Cixous internalizes the binary oppositions of dark and light to describe gender differences. Men are light, dominant, and easy to understand, while women are

dark, obscure, or "wild," a term discussed later in the works of Edward Ardener and Elaine Showalter. Like the Chicana authors in this thesis, who are dark-skinned, "third world" women, so is Cixous's notion of all women. Patriarchy turns women into a dark, "wilder" sex.

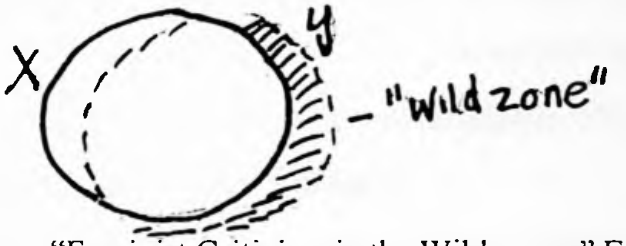
Although Cixous defines the problem of women's writing, she falls short at offering a solution to the problem because she is more passive than active in her interpretation. She recognizes the problem of women being seen as dark, obscure, and outside of the mainstream cultural realm, but she does not seem to incite women to unite and fight against this oppressive interpretation, as the pro-active Anzaldúa and Moraga have done in their writings.

The notion of women being considered as "wild," outside the mainstream culture, is continued in the analysis of Edward Ardener. His two essays "Belief and the Problem of Women" and "The Problem Revisited," published in 1975, address the problem of women in terms of dominant and muted groups:

> Where society is defined by men, some features of women do not fit that definition. In rural societies, the anomaly is experienced as a feature of the 'wild,' for the 'wild' is a metaphor of the non-social which in confusing ways is vouched for by the senses. . . . This confusion of self-definition with geographical reality is avoided when we think not of 'society,' but of a world-structure which defines human reality -- if you like 'relevant' reality. In these terms if the male perception yields a dominant structure, the female one is a muted structure (24).

To illustrate his point, Ardener forms a structure of two interconnecting circles. The dominant circle, *x*, represents the male culture, while the muted circle, *y*, represents the female culture. The shaded area outside the structure is the "wild zone," which represents a society and senses experienced only by women.

In Ardener's diagram, the muted circle *y*, though it mainly falls within the boundary of the dominant *x* (male) circle, there is one small crescent of the circle that falls outside the dominant *x* circle. That crescent is defined by Ardener as "wild." Thus, according to Showalter, using Ardener's theory, for feminist authors, "the wild zone becomes the place for the revolutionary women's language, the language of everything that is repressed, and for the revolutionary women's writing in 'white ink.' It is the Dark Continent in which Cixous' laughing Medusa and Wittig's guérillères reside" (Showalter 66). Moreover, it is a place of freedom where women can speak their minds and be free to develop their own identities without the influence of the male culture.



In her essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," Elaine Showalter expounds on Ardener's theory of dominant and muted groups and coins the term "gynocritics" to discuss her definition of women's writing, which refers to the "history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (55). In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," she attempts to define the difference between women's writing and men's writing. by looking at this difference in four models: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural.

In her biological model, she discusses the theories of Hélène Cixous, although Showalter goes one step further and asserts that feminine writing is like symbolic childbirth:

> Certainly metaphors of literary *maternity* predominated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the process of literary creation is analogically much more similar to gestation, labor, and delivery than it is to

> insemination. . . . If to write is to metaphorically give birth, from what organ can males generate texts? (57).

Showalter's childbirth metaphor can be applied to the works of these four Chicana authors, most especially Gloria Anzaldúa, who herself is considered a feminist critic, and Borderlands/La Frontera is perhaps her best-known gynocritical text. Chapter 6, "Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink," discusses Anzaldúa's feelings and preoccupations about the art of writing as a sensuous act:

> Picking out images from my soul's eye, fishing for the right words to recreate the images. Words are blades of grass, pushing past the obstacles, sprouting on the page; the spirit of the words moving in the body is as concrete as flesh and as palpable; the hunger to create is as substantial as fingers and hand.
>
> . . . . *Escribo con la tinta de me sangre.* I write in red. Ink. Intimately knowing the smooth touch of paper, its speechlessness before I spill myself on the insides of trees. . . . Daily, I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and soul sore from the constant struggle (71-72).

Anzaldúa describes the act of writing much like childbirth in this passage. The spirit of the words moving inside the body palpable and concrete like flesh is much like the movement of a fetus inside its mother's body before it is born. The words "sprouting on the page" like blades of grass, "pushing past the obstacles" are like the fetus pushing itself out of its mother's body to be born. Anzaldúa's statement "*Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre*" (I write with the tint of my blood) also can be traced to a childbirth metaphor; as a fetus is created out of its mother's flesh and blood, so are the words created by the flesh and blood of their author.

This feminist reading of Anzaldúa's treatise on the act of writing adheres to Showalter's gynocritical theory because it is interpreted in a way that only woman can understand. Since a man cannot give birth to an infant, he cannot possibly understand the pain and beauty associated with such a creation, much as he cannot understand Anzaldúa's way of looking at her writing, of her "giving birth" to her works.

Showalter's other model of the difference between women's and men's writing which can be applied to the Chicana authors examined in this thesis is her cultural model of difference. In this model, she expounds on Ardener's concept of male and female culture in terms of dominant and muted groups. An analysis of how this model fits Anzaldúa's writings will be discussed later on in the thesis in the chapter on Gloria Anzaldúa. Showalter, however, inevitably expands this model by determining that it can be applied not only to women, but to nearly any repressed group of individuals, particularly African-Americans. Showalter states "a black American women poet, for example, would have her literary identity formed by the dominant (white male) tradition, by a muted women's culture, and by a black muted culture. She would be affected by both sexual and racial politics in a combination unique to her case" (67). Thus, Showalter takes Ardener's models a step further to demonstrate that the theory of dominant and muted groups can extend beyond gender into culture, such as African-American and Chicana culture.

Another feminist critic worth noting here is Patrocinio Schweickart, a leader in the development of new theories of Reader-Response criticism. In her essay "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," Schweickart calls for a change in the "utopian" nature of standard forms of Reader-Response criticism to include considerations of gender. Schweickart discusses Showalter's theory of "gynocritics," or the study of woman as writer, of the "history, styles, themes, genres, and structure of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the

individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (196).

Schweickart calls for a change in the literary canon to include feminist interpretations of works. She believes that the canon is too androcentric; it concentrates too much on reading and interpreting texts solely from the male point of view, and this perspective is very damaging to women. She quotes feminist critic Judith Fetterly, who believes that women have been *immasculated* [sic.] by the canon:

> The cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women, but the *immasculation* of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, one of whose central principles is misogyny (qtd. in Schweikart 199).

As a consequence of this immasculation process, Schweickart believes that women are not given power to think as men, but rather are doubly oppressed. In other words, she suffers "not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly, the powerless which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male -- to be universal -- is to be *not female*" (qtd. in Schweickart 200).

In addition, Schweickart offers an analysis of feminist reading of female writings through the employment of three metaphors. The first is a judicial metaphor, namely, the feminist reader is a witness in defense of the feminist writer. She "takes the part of the woman writer against patriarchal misreadings that trivialize or distort her work" (203). The second refers to a principal tenet of feminist criticism: a literary work cannot be understood apart from the social, historical, and cultural context within which it was written (203). In other words, in order to understand authors like Anzaldúa, Moraga,

Cisneros, and Alvarez, the reader needs to travel to "their world" in the borderlands, to visit their homes, to talk with their friends and family, all in an effort to ponder the questions such as why do they write as they do? what are they feeling when they write? what type of an audience are they trying to reach? what do the descriptive images in their writings mean for them? what are they trying to convey by them? Schweickart's third metaphor is the realization that visiting with Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez is only a metaphor for reading their works. It is not possible to visit with these authors; rather, one can only enter their minds through reading their works. In other words, "in reading, one encounters only a text, the trail of an absent author" (Schweickart 204). Although the authors cannot be present while we are reading their texts, we can *feel* their presence in their works.

A final feminist critic whose works can be directly applied to Chicana authors is Leela Gandhi. In Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction she examines postcolonialism and feminism and how it applies to third world women writers. Gandhi cites feminist critic Trinh T. Minh-ha, who attributes the rise of the "third world woman" to the ideological tourism of Western/liberal feminism. Trinh believes that the ideological differences between Western women and third-world women that are set up by Western feminists foster the stereotype of the third-world woman as being inferior to their Western counterpart. As Trinh says, "by claiming the dubious privilege of 'preparing the way for one's more "unfortunate" sisters,' the Western feminist creates an insuperable division between 'I-who-have-made-it' and 'You-who-cannot-make-it'" (qtd. in Gandhi 85). Thus, Chicana writers are faced with the challenge of disputing these stereotypes in their writings. Chicana essayist Pat Mora describes the Chicana writer's reasoning for wanting to rise to these challenges in the following manner:

> Writers of Color, Chicana writers, feel a moral responsibility to serve their own. Just as the *curandera* uses white magic, manipulates the symbols

that are part of her patients' experience base to ease communication, the Chicana writer seeks to heal the wounds of historical neglect by providing opportunities to remember the past, to share and ease bitterness, to describe what has been viewed as unworthy of description, to cure by incantations and rhythms, by listening with her entire being and responding. She then gathers the tales and myths, weaves them together, and, if lucky, casts spells (131).

Chapter 4: The Identity Crisis in Chicana Literature

1. The Works of Gloria Anzaldúa

Gloria Anzaldúa is perhaps one of the best-known contemporary Chicana authors, presumably because she was one of the first to enter the mainstream canon with her essays about the Chicana experience in a Chicano world. Anzaldúa is known for her poetry and her short fiction, and has been a contributing editor for Sinister Magazine since 1984. Anzaldúa is also a lesbian and a feminist, a fact that she emphasizes in her writings. In 1986 she co-wrote This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color with Cherrie Moraga. This anthology won the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award because it was the first text written by colored females that lashed out at mainstream culture and thrust the plight of third-world women into the cultural spotlight.

A year after publishing This Bridge Called My Back, Anzaldúa wrote Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, perhaps her most definitive work on what it means to live in the "borderlands." Gloria Anzaldúa pays strict attention to the development of Chicana identity in her writings, particularly the theme of lesbianism. She often addresses the evils of lesbianism perceived by society in her writings. "La Prieta" (the Dark Skinned One), published in This Bridge Called My Back, contains an interesting play on words, associating being "prieta" (dark-skinned) with being "queer," in the sense that it means to be different, but it also means to be homosexual:

> In her eyes and in the eyes of others I saw myself reflected as "strange," "abnormal," "QUEER." I saw no other reflection. Helpless to change that image, I retreated into books and solitude and kept away from others (199).

It is interesting to note that Anzaldúa has put the word "queer" in all capital letters to draw quickly the reader's attention to it. She equates being different, or "queer," with being dark skinned. She is "queer" because she is not a part of the white Anglo majority in society. By placing the word "queer" in all capital letters, however, Anzaldúa also asserts her own political statement about being dark-skinned, being a woman, and being a lesbian. She is "abnormal," not part of the majority, because she is female and "QUEER," a lesbian. In other words, Anzaldúa deconstructs the effectual meaning of the word "queer" as "homosexual," and reconstructs her own meaning of "queer" as "abnormal," not part of the social majority.

Anzaldúa incorporates another play on words when she uses the word "queer" at the end of the essay; "we are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures" (209). She is probably discussing the oppressive nature of the Chicana world and equating it with oppressive nature of the lesbian world. Like the Chicana, lesbians do not belong anywhere. They are shunned in society and denied by their respective cultures. Had she not meant to create this analogy, Anzaldúa could have used a descriptive term such as "different" or "peculiar." Because she chose the term "queer," her motive behind this writing seems quite clear.

Anzaldúa again alludes to the problem facing dark-skinned lesbians in her essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers." She says that dark-skinned lesbians face problems, as they are shunned by society both for being dark-skinned, and for being lesbians:

> The *lesbian* of color is not only invisible, she doesn't even exist. Our speech, too is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane. Because white eyes did not want to know us, they do not bother to

> learn our language, the language which reflects us, our culture, our spirit (Anzaldúa, Bridge 165).

Anzaldúa states that lesbians of color are not only "nonpersons," but they truly do not exist. Their voices are "inaudible" because society refuses to hear them. To be a Chicana or any woman of color is bad enough, but to be a woman of color and to love women is a social outrage, according to the laws of American society.

Catherine Helen Palczewski comments on Anzaldúa's use of the letter form as the forum in which to expound her views. Palczewski calls the letter form an appropriate means of writing for Chicana authors because the letter has been a significant means of discourse for Hispanic women, both historically and in contemporary times. To illustrate her point, Palczewski discusses Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's "Respuesta a Sor Filotea," her written response to a bishop who had chastized her for writing a critique of a sermon. Contemporary Chicana author Ana Castillo also uses the letter form in her novel The Mixquiahuala Letters, which portray the correspondence between two Chicana friends who are trying to create their own identities by examining similarities and differences between Anglo and Mexican cultures. Palczewski notes that the letter form has historically been an argument for the education of women, and as a genre it is now part of the Mexican literary and historical canon (3).

Anzaldúa again comments on lesbianism and the Chicana in her essay entitled "La Consciencia de la Mestiza/Toward a New Consciousness," an essay appearing in Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color. Anzaldúa reiterates her analogy of the oppression suffered by lesbians to the oppression suffered by women of color:

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a

> lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) (380).

In this essay Anzaldúa narrows her analogy to include only mestizas, another term for Chicana. She comments on the power of lesbianism and "*Chicanisma*," for lack of a better term; lesbianism and *Chicanisma* have the power to transcend cultures, while heterosexuality does not possess that power. If Chicanas are shunned by their own culture for being Chicana and for being lesbian, they can go to another culture because they will find a common thread among women and lesbians, regardless of culture.

Shane Phelan comments on Anzaldúa's discussions of this "mestiza consciousness" as providing new interpretations for understanding lesbian subjectivity and politics (766). Phelan states that "while [Anzaldúa] refrains from adopting the poststructuralist language of 'subject positions' or 'deconstructive identities,' Anzaldúa's 'new mestiza' does not transcend race but transgresses it, refusing to collude in the homophobic demands of some Chicanas/os or in the racist invisibility that is too much a part of white lesbian communities" (781).

Phalen also interestingly describes lesbianism as a form of resistance to a perceived majority; " lesbianism is not simply sexual but is a matter of resistance to patriarchy. Lesbianism is about being fully oneself rather than the stunted person society thinks of as 'woman'" (771-2). This view reflects back to Alarcón's sexual themes in Chicano/a literature that are connected to the myth of Malintzín. One of Alarcón's themes is that women are seen by all patriarchies as rapeable and sexually exploitable (187). By acknowledging their lesbianism, women assert that they will not be submissive to men. They have their own identity, and if they are to be exploited, they will exploit themselves. They will not allow themselves to be exploited by others. Thus, by acknowledging and asserting their lesbianism, women refuse the symbol of Malinztín. While she may have been the previous icon for the representation of women in society,

particularly Chicana women, she holds this position no longer. This assertion is especially evident in the writings of Anzaldúa and Moraga.

Cheryl Clarke agrees with Shane Phelan's argument that lesbianism in itself is a form of resistance. She states that "no matter how a woman lives out her lesbianism -- in the closet, in the state legislature, in the bedroom -- she has rebelled against becoming the slave master's concubine, viz. the male-dependent female, the female heterosexual" (128). This statement clutches at the very heart of the Malintzín myth. As Malintzín was Cortés's slave and concubine, had she been a lesbian, or asserted her lesbianism if she were in fact a homosexual, she would not have been in the situation that she was in because she would have been more forceful and protective of her own sexuality, and thus would not have allowed herself to be undermined by males. She also would not have aided in the development of the stereotype of women, particularly Chicana women, solely as objects for men's use and pleasure. Although Clarke is an African-American lesbian, her dilemma is very similar to the Chicana dilemma voiced by Anzaldúa and Moraga in This Bridge Called My Back. In fact, her essay, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," is included in Anzaldúa's and Moraga's anthology.

Alvina Quintana suggests that This Bridge Called My Back is a monumental breakthrough in feminist texts, particularly feminist texts for women of color:

> In coordinating the voices and experiences of many women writers of color, Moraga and Anzaldúa were among the first to produce a text that contemplated critical issues concerning the relationship between linguistics, identity politics, sexuality, cultural heterogeneity, and hybridity -- categories of *difference* that surpass simplistic binary paradigms (115).

Gloria Anzaldúa continues her discussion of "mestiza consciousness" in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. Published in 1987, one year after This

Bridge Called My Back was published, Borderlands/La Frontera has been described by several literary theorists as Anzaldúa's autobiography. Anzaldúa invites this description in her preface, in which she notes that "this book speaks of my existence. My preoccupations with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self amidst adversity and violation" (Preface n.p.).

In Borderlands, Anzaldúa alludes to the fear of homosexuality in most cultures, particularly Chicano and Mexican cultures, noting their desire to purge from their culture anything that strays from the perceived "norm":

> The Chicano, mexicano, and some Indian cultures have no tolerance for deviance. Deviance is whatever is condemned by the community. Most societies try to get rid of their deviants. Most cultures have burned and beaten their homosexuals and others who deviate from the sexual common. The queer are the mirror reflecting the heterosexual tribe's fear: being different, being other and therefore lesser, therefore sub-human, in-human, non-human (18).

Here Anzaldúa comments on the dangers of being homosexual in a heterosexual world. A homosexual runs the risk of being condemned and shunned by his or her own culture merely for not being "like everyone else." She furthers her discussion of the homosexual's fear of abandonment in a description of her experiences while teaching at a New England college. The very few lesbian students enrolled there met and discussed their fears of going home after coming to a realization of their sexual preferences. They feared returning home and being shunned -- by their families, by their race, even by their culture -- for preferring the company of women to men (19-20).

The question is then, why would Anzaldúa want to flaunt her own lesbianism in her writings, if she believed that lesbians faced condemnation and abandonment by

society? Anzaldúa calls attention to her lesbianism because it helps her to understand the historical oppression of the Chicana and other women of color:

> For the lesbians of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality. Being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I *made the choice to be queer*. It's an interesting path,one that continually slips in and out of the white, the Catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. . . .It is a path of knowledge -- one of knowing (and of learning) the history of oppression of our *raza*. It is a way of balancing, of mitigating duality (19).

Again, Anzaldúa reiterates the idea of lesbianism as a form of resistance. She calls lesbianism the "ultimate rebellion against one's native culture. Anzaldúa also equates the idea of lesbian oppression with Chicana oppression. Thus to Anzaldúa, lesbianism plays two roles in her writings: it is her way of rebelling against the historically white, male majority that has suppressed Chicanas since the days of Malintzín, and it is a way of comparing cultural oppressions of lesbians and Chicanas so that a non-colored culture can better understand the societal suffering that Chicanas and other women of color have endured for centuries. Thus, Anzaldúa's reasons for exploiting her sexual preference agrees with Moraga's assertion that lesbianism is a valuable teaching aid for social oppression.

In American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity, Naomi Zack discusses Anzaldúa's Borderlands/La Frontera and comments about Anzaldúa's worries that the mestizo race's shame and lack of a deep-rooted ancestry can lead to excessive compensation in other areas, particularly in the form of *machismo*. Therefore, for Anzaldúa, "an alternative positive articulation of mestiza consciousness and identity must be developed to provide some degree of coherence, and to avoid the incessant cultural

collisions or violent compensations that result from the shame and frustration of self-negation" (276).

Zack provides an interesting description of her own mestizo race by labeling the mixed-race person a "border-crosser," a negotiator, and a mediator between races, and sometimes also between cultures, nations, and linguistic communities. To Zack, "the mixed person is a traveler often within her own home or neighborhood, translating and negotiating the diversity of meanings, practices, and forms of life" (276). Thus, she continues with and reiterates Anzaldúa's analysis of the mestizo/a as a "bridge" between cultures.

Anzaldúa's borderlands concept in her closing poem in Borderlands/La Frontera can be equated to Showalter's and Ardener's "wild zone" discussed in Chapter 3:

> To live in the Borderlands means you
> are neither hispania india negra española
> ni gabacha eres mestiza, mulata half-breed
> caught in the crossfire between camps
> while carrying all five races on your back
> not knowing which side to turn to; run from (194).

For Anzaldúa, the culture that exists in the borderlands is one that people outside of the Chicano race cannot understand. To keep in line with Showalter's analysis, the dominant *x* culture for Anzaldúa represents the Anglo culture, the muted *y* represents the Chicano culture, and the crescent outside the *y* circle represents the border culture, a mixture of the Anglo and Mexican cultures, yet it does not really belong to either culture. Anzaldúa's mixing of language is a prime example of a border culture that does not seem to fit into either the dominant *x* culture or the muted *y* culture. A border language is neither English nor Spanish, but a combination of both, "Spanglish," a language all its

own, one that resides in the "wild" no-man's land outside the two cultures from which it was formed.

In "Toward a Mestiza Feminist Politics," Maria C. Gonzales concurs that Anzaldúa's borderlands is like Showalter's wild zone. To Gonzales, Anzaldúa's borderland or *la frontera* "becomes both the concrete, geographical space and the culture symbolic space occupied by the new mestiza. Beginning with the history of Mexican culture, exploring the myths of the indigenous populations, moving in time between ancient history and yesterday, Anzaldúa attempts a large vision that encompasses a whole culture" (28). Anzaldúa first concentrates on the physical border that exists between the U.S. and Mexico. She describes the history of the border culture -- the racial/ethnic tensions between the two cultures -- and the people caught in between the cultures.

Anzaldúa also introduces the concept of a "new mestiza," a woman who is formed from the Mexican mestizo, and maintains a Mexican heritage, but lives in the United States and occupies the borderland. The new mestiza is defined by both the old traditions of her Mexican homeland and the new modern technology of the American culture. Thus, the convergence of old and new has caused the new mestiza to create a culture all its own, and the borderland "becomes the symbol for this culture that is multicultural and yet a separate culture as well" (Gonzáles 28).

Gloria Anzaldúa has been classified by some critics as a "border feminist," and her text Borderlands/La Frontera is a perfect example of this border feminism. In her essay "Feminism on the Border," Sonia Saldívar-Hull defines border feminism as a specifically Chicana feminism that only authors such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez can understand. She defines Anzaldúa's theory of feminism as "the force that gives rise to her origins as 'the new mestiza.' This 'new mestiza' is a woman alienated from her own, often homophobic culture, as well as from the hegemonic culture" (211). Anzaldúa's border feminism is "a feminism that exists in a borderland not limited to

geographic spaces, a feminism that resides in a space not acknowledged by hegemonic culture. Its inhabitants are what Anzaldúa calls '*Los atravesados*. . . . squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead, in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (211).

Saldívar-Hull also states that Anzaldúa's border feminism is a break from the dominant Anglo feminism, and by invoking racist, homophobic epithets in her works, Anzaldúa "explodes the power that the dominant culture holds over what is 'normal' or acceptable" (211). By discussing such issues as homosexuality and racism in her writings, Anzaldúa's forceful words and topics give other Chicana authors the power to break the stagnant 'normalcy' that Anglo authors try to impress upon ethnic writers and give them a powerful voice of their own in literature.

2. The Works of Cherríe Moraga

A second Chicana author to wrestle with the identity crisis in Chicana literature is Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa's co-editor of This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color. Also a lesbian, Moraga believes that women utilize their sexuality in an effort to define themselves. In her essay "La Guera," included in This Bridge Called My Back, Moraga states her belief that lesbianism has taught her a great deal about oppression in society:

> It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression -- due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana -- was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings (28-29).

Moraga also believes that lesbianism is often equated with poverty, and the failure to get beyond this stereotype will lead to cultural ignorance:

> In this country, lesbianism is a poverty -- as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression. The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place (29).

Moraga believes that lesbians, like all women, are often dismissed by society as being weak. She argues that if society does not stop considering lesbians and women as half-persons or non-persons, society will continue to be oppressive and ignorant. To Moraga, her lesbianism is a metaphor for her womanhood, particularly her colored, Chicana womanhood. Lesbianism is also all about forging bonds with a community of women, beginning with Moraga's own mother (Foster 47).

Moraga attacks society's attitudes that lesbians are "different" from the rest of the people, as is evident in her poem "The Welder":

> We plead to each other,
> *we all come from the same rock*
> *we all come from the same rock*
> ignoring the fact that we bend
> at different temperatures
> that each of us is malleable
> up to a point (Anzaldua, Bridge 219 10-16).

Moraga states that we "all come from the same rock"; that is, we are all created in the same way. However, we are shaped and developed in different ways. We "bend at different temperatures," meaning that our hopes, desires, and even sexual preferences are unique to ourselves. It takes many different individuals to make up a society, and without those different individuals, we would all be clones of each other, or machines, similar to the "hands" which Charles Dickens uses to describe his listless, non-unique, machine-ridden Victorian society in his novel Hard Times.

It is interesting to note Moraga's use of metaphor in this poem. She uses the act of welding to explain effectively her desire to incorporate all individuals, including lesbians, into society. A welder is someone who fuses two or more metals together to form one object. In this poem, Moraga is "welding," or attempting to weld, homosexuals and heterosexuals together to form one society. She notes that it will not be easy; -- "fusion is possible/but only if things get hot enough" (ll 17-18) -- yet she is willing to take the risk ("I am the welder/I am taking the power/ into my own hands") (ll 45-47).

Moraga also believes that sexuality is an aspect of Chicana identity which has been consistently ignored by political movements in the United States, both as a source of oppression, and as a means of liberation. She addresses this belief in "From a Long Line of Vendidas: Chicanas and Feminism":

> Although other movements have dealt with this issue, sexual oppression and desire have never been considered specifically in relation to the lives of women of color. Sexuality, race and sex have usually been presented in contradiction to each other, rather than as part and parcel of a complex web of personal and political identity and oppression (181).

Also, Moraga opines that heterosexuality implies the control of women. She believes that social rules, reinforced by the Catholic Church, prohibit Chicanas from choosing their own sexuality:

> For without male imposed social and legal control of our reproductive function, reinforced by the Catholic Church, and the social institutions of our roles as sexual and domestic servants to men, Chicanas must very freely "choose" to do otherwise, including being sexually independent *from* and/or *with* men. In fact, the forced "choice" of the gender of our sexual/love partner seems to precede the forced "choice" of the form (marriage and family) that partnership might take (181-82).

If Chicanas do not adhere to the rules of society and/or the Catholic Church, they are ostracized for being different. Moraga points out that the same rules do not apply for males. She believes that society is much more tolerant of male homosexuality than female homosexuality. Lesbianism, however, "challenges the very foundation of la familia" (Moraga, From a Long Line of Vendidas 182). Thus, Chicanas do not have a choice of their sexuality; if they are not heterosexual, they are traitors to the family unit.

Moraga's "A Long Line of Vendidas" is included in her collection of essays Loving in the War Years: *Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*. Written in 1983, it has been labeled by some critics as Moraga's treatise on Chicana identity and sexuality and what it means to be a Chicana in an Chicano world.

In the first part of "A Long Line of Vendidas," entitled "My Brother's Sex was White; Mine, Brown," Moraga describes the iniquities that Chicanas face from their male counterparts and describes how she and her sisters always had to wait on her brother and his friends when they came over for a visit:

> It was Saturday afternoon. My brother, then seventeen years old, came into the house with a pile of friends. . . .They were hot, sweaty, and exhausted from an afternoon's basketball and plopped themselves down in the front room, my brother demanding, "Girls, bring us something to drink."

> "Get it yourself, pig," I thought, but I held those words from ever forming inside my mouth. . . ."We're really thirsty." I'm sure it took everything in his power *not* to snap his fingers. But my mother was out in the yard working and to refuse him would have brought her into the house with a scene before these boys' eyes which would have made it impossible for us to show our faces at school that following Monday (Moraga, Loving in the War Years 91).

While Moraga notes that in her mind she refused to wait on her brothers and their friends, she always succumbed:

> I wanted to machine-gun them all down, but swallowed that fantasy as I swallowed making the boy's bed every day, cleaning his room each week, shining his shoes and ironing his shirts before dates with girls, some of whom *I* had crushes on (Moraga, Loving in the War Years 92).

Moraga describes an interesting analysis in the opening section about sexuality and cultural identity:

> I remember my brother saying to me "*I've* never felt 'culturally deprived,'" which I guess is the term "white" people use to describe Third World people being denied access to *their* culture. At the time, I wasn't exactly sure what he meant, but I remember in re-telling the story to my sister, she responded, "Of course he didn't. He grew up male in our house. He got the best of both worlds." And yes, I can see now that that's true. *Male in a man's world. Light-skinned in a white world. Why change?* (Moraga, Loving in the War Years 92).

Because her brother was a male, he got the full benefits of his culture and the Anglo culture as well. He grew up in a male-dominated society, and he was encouraged to exert his male-dominant powers over his sisters. They had to cater to his every whim, not

because they wanted to, but because that was what was expected of them. As Moraga put it, the brother's sex, "white," because he is male, he fits into the mainstream white Anglo culture, while Moraga and her sisters fall behind in the subservient Third World culture. Thus, unlike her brother, Moraga and her sisters' sex is "brown," like the repressed Chicana.

In Loving in the War Years, Moraga also discusses the concept of la Malinche and Malinchista in her essay "La Malinchista." She notes that the woman who defies her role as subservient to her husband, father, brother, or son by taking control of her own sexual destiny is purported to be a "traitor to her race" by contributing to the genocide of her people. Moraga, however, equates Malinche with the concept of lesbianism. Lesbians are traitors to the traditional female gender roles of subservience and passivity to men. Thus, "like Malinche of Mexican history, [the lesbian] is corrupted by foreign influences which threaten to destroy her people (113).

Moraga agrees with Elaine Showalter's idea that the concept of men's and women's cultures is defined in terms of dominant and muted groups. For women to be known as "women," she believes that they have to be acculturated in a certain fashion:

> I don't mean to imply that women need to have men around to feel at home in our culture, but that the way one understands culture is influenced by men. The fact that some aspects of that culture are indeed oppressive does not imply, as a solution, throwing out the entire business of racial/ethnic culture. To do so would mean risking the loss of some very essential aspects of identity, especially for Third World women (Moraga, Loving in the War Years 127).

In short, Moraga's analysis of women's culture parallels that of Showalter. Like Showalter, she believes that culture is defined and reflected in terms of dominant and muted groups, and that women's culture is defined and influenced by men's culture. The

male culture is dominant while the female culture is muted. This analysis again demonstrates how female identity is contingent upon the male definition of female identity.

Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez, like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, as we shall explore in the next two chapters, also focus on the oppressiveness of the Chicana in their writings, although they are not quite as forceful and radical as Anzaldúa and Moraga. Also, their writing forum is slightly different from Anzaldúa and Moraga: while Anzaldúa and Moraga wrote mostly essays and poetry, Cisneros and Alvarez wrote fiction. Thus, Cisneros' and Alvarez's works tend to read more like autobiographies, which gives the reader more freedom to explore the true meaning behind their writings than Anzaldúa's and Moraga's works, which tend to tell the reader point-blank the author's beliefs.

Chapter 5: The Desire for Escape: The Writings of Sandra Cisneros

A third Chicana author who explores the mestiza's search for identity in her works is Sandra Cisneros. Born in 1954 to a Mexican father and Mexican-American mother, Cisneros is the author of four novels: The House on Mango Street, (1984), Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories, (1991), My Wicked, Wicked Ways (1992), and Loose Woman (1994). Of her four novels, perhaps the most famous is The House on Mango Street.

The House on Mango Street is actually a series of forty-four poetically-charged vignettes centering on women's experiences. All of the vignettes have one central protagonist, a little girl named Esperanza, and they are all told from an innocent, child-like point of view. Ironically, in Spanish, "*esperanza*" means "hope"; therefore, perhaps Cisneros is suggesting with the name of her protagonist that there is hope that mestizas will eventually find their voice and an identity in American history and literature.

The reader catches a glimpse of the Chicana role in a machismo world in one of the first vignettes "Alicia Who Sees Mice":

> Alicia, whose mama died, is sorry there is no one older to rise and make the lunchbox tortillas. Alicia, who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin. Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist. Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers. (Mango Street, 31-32).

In this vignette, young Alicia is fighting the stereotype of the female as the subservient sex whose job is to cook and care for the male gender. With sad irony Cisneros gives this female character intelligence, she is a university student who studies all night and dreams of a better life for herself, one that does not entail being "behind a rolling pin." This image shows the struggle that Chicanas continuously face, wanting to better themselves by studying and working hard, only to be dismissed by the males in society. Perhaps her father's dismissing the mice that she insists that she sees as a mere figment of her imagination is his way of keeping control over her, of dismissing her intelligence as something that does not exist.

In his essay "Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street and the Poetics of Space," Julian Olivares believes "Alicia Who Sees Mice" is a vignette which notes a space of misery and subjugation. To Olivares, the tortilla image is a particularly poignant one because it is not a symbol of cultural identity, but rather one of a subjugating ideology. It is an image of "sexual domination -- of the imposition of a role that a young woman must assume" (237). The tortilla represents the role of the young woman as cook and servant to the man.

Another vignette that describes the role of the female as subservient to that of the male is "Linoleum Roses":

> Sally got married. . . .She says she is in love but I think she did it to escape. Sally says she likes being married. . . .She is happy, except sometimes her husband gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through. . . .Except he won't let her talk on the telephone. And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working. . . . She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission. She looks at all the things they own: the towels and the toaster, the alarm clock and the

> drapes. She likes looking at the walls. . .the ceiling smooth as wedding cake (Mango Street, 101-02).

In this episode, Cisneros clearly demonstrates the oppression that women face by men. Sally's husband's refusal to let her talk on the telephone, look out the window, or let friends visit demonstrates the male's way of trying to control the female. It is machismo taken to an illegal and perhaps psychotic extreme. To the husband, Sally is a mere possession, like their towels, toaster, alarm clock, and drapes. The sad irony to this vignette is Esperanza's belief that Sally married to escape, for now it seems as though she has become a greater prisoner than she ever was before.

According to Olivares, the title, "Linoleum Roses," is an oxymoron which expresses an inversion of the positive semes of house and reveals a dialectic of inside/outside. It is a "trope for household confinement and drudgery, in which the semes of rose -- beauty, femininity, garden (the outside) -- and rose as a metaphor for woman are ironically treated" (238). The linoleum represents the house, more particularly, the kitchen, where a woman is confined, in order to carry out her role as cook, servant, and housekeeper. By contrast, the rose image represents the metaphor throughout literature of woman as an image of beauty and fragility, as something pure, virgin, and worthy of being placed on a pedestal. To put the two images together connotes a conflicting representation of women in culture. Like the "tortilla star," the "linoleum roses" image is one that only a woman like Cisneros can create. This imagery is culturally inscribed in a culture where the home is a patriarchal domain (Olivares 238).

Esperanza's own desire to escape is almost always quelled by one of the characters in the novel, as evidenced in "The Three Sisters" when Lucy and Rachel tell Esperanza "you will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (Mango Street 105). Her desire for escape is further silenced by Alicia in "Alicia and I Talking on Edna's Steps":

> You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house that I am ashamed of.
>
> No, this isn't my house, I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph. . .only one I dream of (Mango Street, 106-07).

Here Esperanza tries desperately to forge a new identity for herself by denying her own, but to no avail. Her identity is one of a Chicana living in a barrio neighborhood on Mango Street, whether she likes it or not,. She cannot change her heritage; she cannot deny who she is.

In her essay "Chicana Literature From a Chicana Feminist Perspective," Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano believes that writing is a very important factor in the work. The short sections that make up The House on Mango Street are "marvels of poetic language that capture a young girl's vision of herself and the world she lives in" (216). Although she is but a young girl, Esperanza is acutely aware of the racial and economic oppression that her community suffers. It is the fate of the women of her community, however, that impacts her the most, particularly as she begins her sexual development:

> Esperanza gathers strength from the experiences of these women to reject the imposition of rigid gender roles predetermined for her by her culture. Her escape is linked in the text to education and above all to writing. Besides finding her path to self-definition through the women she sees victimized, Esperanza also has positive models who encourage her interest in studying and writing (Yarbro-Bejarano 217).

In "The House on Mango Street: An Appropriation of Word, Space, and Sign," Alvina Quintana believes that Cisneros' vignettes serve as an ethnographic allegory of

female humanity by providing a critique of the traditional Mexican female experiences. To Quintana, they "simultaneously describe real cultural events and make additional moral, ideological, and even cosmological statements" (61). This form of cultural critique is something that literary critic Adrienne Rich calls revision, "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (qtd in Quintana 61). Thus, Esperanza's desire to re-name herself and replace her surroundings represents her attempt to understand and redefine her cultural background into one that is more befitting to a Chicana trying to find her place in a male-dominated world.

Quintana compares Cisneros' Mango Street to Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own. In "A House of My Own," the house, to Esperanza, becomes like Woolf's room:

> Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as the paper before the poem (qtd in Quintana 66).

To Esperanza, a house is the symbol for female identity, as a room is to Woolf. A house of her own would allow Esperanza to escape from the drab, oppressive reality that is heaped on her by males, and would also give her space to allow for the creation of personal and intellectual freedom. As with Woolf, Esperanza can create her own reality and identity if she has a place, such as a house of her own, to escape to and become herself.

Cisneros' concept of feminine subjectivity in defining an identity continues in her collection of short stories Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories. The first such story where this concept is explored is "My Friend Lucy Who Smells Like Corn":

> Lucy Anguliano, Texas girl who smells like corn, like Frito Bandito chips, like tortillas, something like that warm smell of *nixtamal* or bread the way her head smells when she's leaning close to you over a paper cut-out doll or on the porch when we are squatting over marbles. . . . (3).

This story contains tortilla imagery similar to that in "Alicia Who Sees Mice" in Mango Street. The "corn smell", like the "tortilla star," is a cultural/sexual identifier, which represents the passive female in Chicano culture, the female who cooks and serves the corn and tortillas for her husband, father, brothers, and sons. Furthermore, the image of the female as a negative object in Chicano culture is seen in "Mericans":

> Girl. We can't play with a girl. Girl. It's my brother's favorite insult now, instead of "sissy." "You *girl*," they yell at each other. "You throw that ball like a *girl*." (Cisneros, Woman Hollering Creek 18).

In this story, the image of the female has a significant connotation. The term "girl" is used as an insulting phrase that boys throw at one another. The use of "girl" here connotes an image of the female as a subjective and inferior to the male. Sandra Cisneros discusses the concept of female oppression more from a domestic point of view, rather than from a social point of view, as is evident in Anzaldúa's and Moraga's writings. Her presentation of the female plight makes The House on Mango Street much more believable as an autobiography, although it is not known that the work actually is an autobiography. Julia Alvarez, as we will see in the next chapter, also looks at female oppression from a familial point of view, paying particular attention to how Chicanas are treated by their fathers, brothers, and spouses, as Cisneros demonstrated in Mango Street.

CHAPTER 6: The Works of Julia Alvarez

A fourth contemporary Chicana author who explores the concept of feminine identity in her writings is Julia Alvarez. Born in the Dominican Republic, Alvarez came to the United States when she was ten years old. Alvarez received a Bachelor of Arts from Middlebury College in 1971 and a Masters in Creative Writing in 1975. Currently she is an Associate Professor of English at Middlebury College. Alvarez won the Benjamin T. Marshall Prize in poetry in 1968 and 1969 at Connecticut College, and she won the Creative Writing Prize at Middlebury College in 1971. In 1974 she won the American Academy of Poetry Prize at Syracuse University.

Alvarez wrote How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, her first book of fiction, in 1991. The novel is a collection of linked stories about a family of four girls who leave their native home of the Dominican Republic in 1960 to live in the United States, and it demonstrates the concept of lost identity for Chicanas. Alvarez's How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents illustrates a pattern of six sexual-political themes identified by literary critic Norma Alarcon in her essay "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-Vision Through Malintzín/or Malintzín: Putting Flesh Back on the Object." Alarcon's sexual political themes include the following: 1) to choose among extant patriarchies is not a choice at all; 2) woman's abandonment and orphanhood and psychic/emotional starvation occurs even in the midst of tangible family; 3) woman is a slave, emotionally as well as economically; and 4) women are seen not just by one patriarchy but by all as rapeable and sexually exploitable (187). Chicana authors have tried for years to get beyond these sexual stereotypes of women as completely submissive and existing solely for men's use and pleasure.

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents encompasses several of Alarcón's themes. The novel chronicles the life experiences of four sisters -- Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía -- when they are uprooted from their wealthy home in the Dominican

Republic to live in an Hispanic neighborhood in New York City. Although they try desperately to assume their own identities as they mature into young adult women, they are almost always referred to as one entity i.e. "the four girls." A contributing factor in their lack of identity was because as youngsters, the girls were never encouraged, not even in their wardrobes, to assert individuality:

> Each of the four girls had the same party dress, school clothes, underwear, toothbrush, bedspread, nightgown, plastic cup, towel, brush and comb set as the other three, but the first girl brushed in yellow, the second one boarded the school bus in blue, the third one slept in pink, and the baby did everything she pleased in white (41).

By giving the girls uniform clothes and objects, and especially by developing a color code that the girls could not deviate from, the mother suppressed their individuality. They were supposed to look alike, think alike and act alike, and thus they develop no personalites of their own.

Masculine sexuality also permeates Alvarez's novel; never is feminine sexuality discussed. An example of this imbalance occurs when an American man exposes himself to Carla as she is walking home from school:

> The man had tied his two shirtends just above his waist and was naked from there on down. String encircled his waist, the loose ends knotted in front and then looped around his penis. As Carla watched, his big blunt-headed thing grew so that it filled and strained at the lasso it was caught in (157).

Clearly the man was using his sexual organ to exert power over the little girl. Male sexuality is always seen as the dominant force; the woman is always submissive to the man in this novel. Although other modern Chicana writers attack this theme as a form of oppression against Chicana women, Alvarez has chosen to hold with the historical

stereotype of female submission which dates back to the days of the Conquest of Mexico when Cortés and the Spainards used their masculine sexuality to force Malintzín and the other Mexican women to submit to them sexually, in an effort to purify the Mexican race with Anglo blood, and also in an effort to demonstrate the power, both physically and emotionally, of the male over the female. Similarly, the American man who exposes himself to Carla does so in an attempt to demonstrate the power of the male over the female. Alvarez's Carla, however, reacts to the narrator much differently than Anzaldúa or Moraga would have reacted. While the two aforementioned writers would have probably lashed out against the male perpetrator, Carla slinks to the background, unresponsive to the male character's cruel and sexist act.

Although How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents is perhaps Alvarez's strongest novel dealing with the prevalence of masculine sexuality and the identity crisis for Chicanas, she has written two other novels that are of importance in any study of the female protagonist in Chicana literature. ¡Yo!, published in 1997, has been considered by many scholars and critics to be Alvarez's sequel to How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, because it deals with the life of Yolanda Garcia, one of the sisters from Alvarez's first novel, by focusing on how she is viewed by people around her.

An interesting point to notice about ¡Yo! is that, while the novel is all about Yolanda Garcia, the female protagonist is never given a voice of her own; rather, her voice is overheard as others recount her words. In a review of ¡Yo!, Claire Messud states that the novel "is [successfully] devoted to the fully shaded, three-dimensional portrait of Yolanda Garcia. But it achieves this portrait through the voices of men and women who appear only briefly and who, in some instances, have but a tenuous connection to their focus" (1). As a consequence, Yolanda's identity is purposely thwarted because "too often, the speakers themselves remain stereotypes -- the very pitfall which Alvarez, in creating Yolanda, has gone to such measures to avoid" (Messud 1). Therefore, instead of

being seen as individual beings with traits of their own, they are grouped as one entity, the Latinos. Also, Alvarez never gives the speakers their own names; they are always referred to as "the father," "the student," or "the cousin," which further hinders the development of their own identities.

Another interesting point to note about ¡Yo! is Alvarez's play-on-words with the title. While Yo is short for "Yolanda," the name of the protagonist, in Spanish, "yo" also means "I." Under normal circumstances "I" would denote a first-person identity, but since "Yo" is denied a voice of her own in this novel, she cannot speak for herself. Her identity is a inconsistent, stereotypical one, formed by other individuals who come in contact with her throughout her lifetime.

As with How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, ¡Yo! presents a mixing of U.S. and Dominican cultures to the reader, thus heightening the protagonist's struggle for identity, particularly in the chapters in which Yolanda interacts with the characters from the Dominican Republic. One particular vignette which illustrates the clash of cultures is "The Cousin," where Yolanda's cousin Lucinda discusses the Garcia girls' visit back to their native land each summer:

> The big question that kept spinning inside me long after the other ones were laid to rest was this one: how could I live in a country where everyone wasn't guaranteed life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? It was always Yo popping that question. She did her arguing with the men, the uncles, and boy cousins, who were the ones responsible, she said. . . .But she said she was raising their consciousness, and the aunts let her get away with it. Those crazy gringa cousins could do what the rest of us would have been put away in a convent for doing (37).

The cousin is angry because Yolanda is permitted to argue with the men in an attempt to raise their consciousness about the iniquities of the island nation when

compared to the United States. Although she has an island background, she is allowed to talk back to the males, while her island cousins would never be allowed to get away with something like that. Yolanda was raised in the United States and is accustomed to speaking her mind and challenging old ideals, a trait which perhaps the elders and cousins find intriguing and threatening. Thus, Yolanda's American traits -- her arguments with her male relatives about politics and the state of the nation -- cause her to take on a more masculine identity in her Dominican relatives' eyes. In stark contrast to her "Latin American Barbie doll" cousins, she is more like her male counterparts for exerting her American tendency to speak her mind.

Alvarez's Yolanda can be compared to Cisneros' Esperanza in The House on Mango Street. Unlike Anzaldúa and Moraga, who create their own identities for their female characters, usually through an interpretation of their own sexuality, the identities of the two main female protagonists in Alvarez's and Cisneros' works are formed by their interactions with other characters. Yolanda and Esperanza serve very much like innocent child narrators, who observe their surroundings rather than actively participate in them.

The blend of American and Dominican cultures in ¡Yo! yields both positive and negative effects. The influence of American culture has a positive effect on Yolanda because it enables her to assert herself socially and emotionally to her elders and male counterparts in Dominican culture, which gives her more freedom to be her own person. However, her American influence causes tension in her relationships with her female relatives in the Dominican Republic, undoubtedly because they are jealous of her identity and independence, which they exhibit in the form of reproachfulness against her for going against tradition. It can be inferred from the characters' comments that they are not as concerned with breaking tradition as they are jealous of Yolanda's ability to argue with male elders.

In a sense, ¡Yo! can be compared to James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. ¡Yo! is a portrait of an artist, the story of the writer Yolanda Garcia growing up. However, unlike Joyce's Portrait of the Artist, which tells the story of Stephen Dedalus in the form of an interior monologue from Stephen's point of view, ¡Yo! tells the artist's story in the form of a reverse-interior monologue. Instead of understanding Yolanda from her own mind, the reader sees her character development through the eyes of those characters around her. Therefore, unlike Stephen Dedalus, Yolanda's identity is a perceived identity instead of a true one, because, again unlike Stephen Dedalus, she is never given the opportunity to speak for herself. The reader understands Yolanda's character quite well from the other characters' descriptions of her, but she never really knows if the person that she is reading about is truly Yolanda Garcia, or the perception of Yolanda Garcia from the people who supposedly know her. Perhaps this question will never be fully resolved.

Of all of the novelists' discourses, Julia Alvarez's novels paint the most poignant picture of the Hispanic woman's quest for identity, perhaps because Alvarez never seemed to feel as if she belonged to any particular culture while growing up. In a 1997 interview with Marny Requia, Alvarez discusses her problems transcending between the cultures of the Dominican Republic and the United States; "the [U.S. culture] had an effect on me -- at the time this country was coming undone with protests and flower children and drugs. Here I was back in the Dominican Republic and I wouldn't keep my mouth shut. I had my own ideas and I had my own politics, and it just didn't gel anymore with the family. I didn't quite feel I ever belonged in this North American culture and I always had this nostalgia that when I went back I'd belong, and then I found out I didn't belong there either" (Requia 1).

Perhaps Alvarez herself is the inspiration for Yolanda Garcia, both in How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents and most especially, ¡Yo!. Like Yolanda, Alvarez is a

writer trying to find a way to express herself. After living for a while in the United States, Alvarez returned to the Dominican Republic, where she argued her own ideas about politics and culture with her family, much like Yolanda did with her uncles, brothers, and cousins, only to discover that she had changed a great deal since living as a child in the Dominican Republic. Alvarez was no longer a "Latin American Barbie doll;" she had opinions and dreams of her own, inspired by living in a country where the word "freedom" was spouted in every direction. Thus, like Yolanda, she begins to realize that she did not belong in her native island nation any longer; no longer does she fit in with her relatives and friends. However, she never quite fits into the North American culture either, because of her lack of proficiency in English speaking and writing skills. Thus, like Yolanda, Alvarez has to carve out an identity for herself, as she does in her writing. In her interview, Alvarez tells Requa, "I write to find out who I am" (2). This, I believe, is the ultimate goal of Alvarez, along with Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and all other current and emerging Chicana and Hispanic authors.

Although Alvarez is the newest of the four Chicana authors examined in this thesis, her attempts at carving an identity for herself bear great similarities to those of her predecessors. Each of the authors in this thesis -- Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez -- have been faced with the same inequities in life. Because they are Chicana, they really have no culture of their own. They are rejected by their ancestral Mexican culture, and yet they do not fit into the U.S. Anglo culture, mostly because of language differences. Further, because they are women, they also suffer oppression by the males in their familles and in society. In their writings, they create a special forum for themselves in which they can discuss their social and cultural oppression and seek out a way to coexist in society and culture with their male counterparts.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

All four of these aforementioned authors -- Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez -- attempt to construct an identity for their female protagonists in their writings. Anzaldúa and Moraga define themselves within feminine sexual identity, specifically, lesbianism or heterosexuality, while Cisneros and Alvarez demonstrate the search for feminine identity in more subtle terms, i.e., the cultural submissiveness of the female in a male "machismo" world.

Linda Alcoff shares her own experiences of discovering her identity in her essay "Mestizo Identity." Born to a Panamanian father and an Anglo-Irish mother, Alcoff is light-skinned with auburn hair. Because of her light features, she is prized in Panama, and her father named her "Linda," which means "pretty" in Spanish. However, when her parents divorced, Alcoff and her sister moved with her mother to her parents' home in central Florida, and her identity was completely transformed. She and her sister were referred to as her mother's "Latin daughters," and their mixed race heritage made them objects of peculiarity (259). Thus, for Alcoff "this coerced incorporation into the white Anglo community induced feelings of self-alienation, inferiority, and a strong desire to gain recognition and acceptance within the white community" (259).

Alcoff believes that mixed-race mestizos face unresolved ambiguities in status. They are rejected by the dominant Anglo race as impure and therefore inferior, but they are also disliked by the oppressed Latino race because of their lighter color, which signifies privileges of closer association with domination (Alcoff 259). Thus, like the protagonists in Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez's writings, they never truly feel like they belong in either culture; they are "border children" who reside in the "wild zone," i.e., the border between Anglo and Latino culture.

In many cultures today, and Chicano culture is no exception, mixed race people are treated as lacking something, as lacking an identity that can provide a public status.

People look away from mixed-race individuals on the street; they are seen as a sign of racial impurity and cultural dilution. Thus, because they have no identity of their own, they must attempt to create one for themselves, precisely as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez attempt to do in their writings.

This struggle to create an identity of one's own is an important aspect of Chicana feminist criticism. According to Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano in "Chicana Literature from a Chicana Feminist Perspective," the exclusion of Chicanas from literary authority is intimately linked to the exclusion of Chicanas from other kinds of power monopolized by white males. Thus, "[the Chicana's] struggle to appropriate the 'I' of literary discourse relates to their struggle for empowerment in the economic, social, and political spheres" (213).

In "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," Gloria Anzaldúa states that in order to find a voice in their writings, Chicana women must draw power from the very conditions that excluded them form writing in the first place, and they must write from the deep core of their identity as working class colored women who belong to a culture that is not the dominant one (qtd. in Yarbro-Bejarano 215). Thus, "by delving into this deep core, the Chicana writer finds that the self that she seeks to define and love is not merely an individual self, but a collective one. In other words, the power, permission, and authority to tell stories about herself and other Chicanas comes from her cultural, racial/ethnic, and linguistic community" (Yarbro-Bejarano 215).

The theme of writing and language is at the central core of the works of Chicana authors, and Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez are no exception. In <u>This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color</u>, Anzaldúa and Moraga discuss the concept of writing and how it influences Chicana identity. In her poem "It's the Poverty," Moraga writes the following:

I lack language.

> The language to clarify
> my resistance to the literate.
> Words are a war to me.
> They threaten my family. (qtd in Yarbro-Bejarano 216).

Language also plays an important part in Sandra Cisneros' writings. The House on Mango Street is a collection of poetic language that captures a young girl's vision of herself and the world she lives in:

> Though young, Esperanza is painfully aware of the racial and economic oppression her community suffers, but it is the fate of the women in her *barrio* that has the most profound impact on her, especially as she begins to develop sexually and learns that the same fate might be hers. Esperanza gathers strength from the experiences of these women to reject the imposition of rigid gender roles predetermined by her culture. Her escape is linked in the text to education and above all to writing (Yarbro-Bejarano 216-217).

Julia Alvarez also utilizes the concept of language in her writings. ¡Yo! is the story of a writer and her attempt at self-expression, although she is given a voice only by the characters around her. How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents is a poetically-charged novel which follows the experiences of four sisters as they attempt to fit into the American language and culture.

Although they are "cutting edge" in terms of the literary canon, these four Chicana authors, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Julia Alvarez, harbor themes and issues in their writings that are permeated by the traits of their ancestors, namely, Malintzín and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Gloria Anzaldúa bears similar characteristics to Sor Juana. She, like Sor Juana, is a feminist, speaking out against female oppression in her writings. Also like Sor Juana, Anzaldúa utilizes the

letter forum as a means within which to express herself. Just as Sor Juana wrote "Respuesta a Sor Filotea," Anzaldúa wrote "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers" to encourage third world minority women to stand up for themselves against the male majority and assume a voice of their own.

Like Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga's writings also contain characteristics of Sor Juana and Malintzín. Again like Anzaldúa, Moraga places most emphasis in her writings upon feminine sexuality, especially lesbianism. This preoccupation with lesbian issues is similar to Sor Juana's perceived preoccupation with lesbianism in her sonnets to Leonor Carreto and Maria Luisa Manrique de Lara y Gonzaga. It is interesting to note that of the four Chicana authors studied, only Moraga and Anzaldúa comment on the issue of lesbianism. Perhaps this is because Anzaldúa and Moraga are lesbians themselves and because they were the first Chicana authors to become well-known; perhaps writing about lesbian issues is their way of demonstrating their radicalness to the public as a means of attracting attention to their writings.

Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez share more of a common bond with Malintzín than with Sor Juana in their writings. Cisneros' The House on Mango Street deals with the Chicana's search for identity in a male-dominated society. The Chicana tries to forage a new identity for herself, but she cannot forget who she is; she is "Mango Street," an oppressed female in a male-dominated society, and she cannot change that, just as Malintzín could not change her identity by commensurating with the Spainards. However, Malintzín suffered a far worse fate; by cooperating with the Spainards, she sells her people out, thus becoming a traitor to her race and sex.

Like Cisneros, Julia Alvarez's works contain traces of the Malintzín myth, particularly in How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents. The scene where Carla is harassed by an Anglo male who exposes himself to her is especially significant to the Malintzín myth because it evidences the utilization of the male sexual organ to

demonstrate male dominance over the female, just as the Spanish *conquistadores* used their sexual organs to rape Malintzín and other Mexican women in an effort to dominate them both physically and emotionally. Thus, although Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez attempt to cross new frontiers or "borders" for Chicanas and other Hispanic women in their writings, echoes of their ancestors are never far behind.

Through their writings, Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez have effectively sought and discovered an identity for their female protagonists. Although their protagonists never seem to become incorporated into the Anglo culture, they learn to live simultaneously with the Anglo and Latino culture, or on the "border" between Anglo and Latin culture. These authors have brought a feminine voice to the borderlands which hopefully can expand in the generations to come. With novelists like Anzaldúa, Moraga, Cisneros, and Alvarez, the Chicana's quest for identity has finally come to be recognized and legitimized.

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