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María Yolanda Godsey

May 2016

U.S. LATINA THEATER: SCRIPTING FEMININE SUBJECTIVITY

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A Dissertation Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department  
of Hispanic Studies  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, U.S. Latina Theater has focused on presenting realistic portrayals of the feminine subject on stage. Such an undertaking by Latina playwrights has been to challenge to the representations of women in traditional male-centered and male-created theater. This dissertation studies the strategies and sites that playwrights Cherríe Moraga in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Shadow of a Man*, Odalys Nanín in *The Nun and the Countess*, Carmen Rivera in *La Gringa*, and Dolores Prida in *Coser y Cantar* employ to stage authentic feminine subjects. The plays are analyzed through the lens of three locales customarily imagined and structured by patriarchy: mythmaking, the traditional Chicano family hierarchy, and the subject's quest to identity formation. By taking control of the pen, these Latinas displace the traditional organization and invert the power structure of said sites. In mythmaking, patriarchy has customarily punished the rebellious woman by depicting her as monstrous. This study takes the position that by reinventing myths, Latina playwrights expose the frailty of male-created myths that would vilify women and in turn have gained the authority of authorship, to the benefit of mythical feminine icons. Within the space of the plays, women freely explore themes that tradition expects them to accept without interrogation. Analysis of said themes employs the deconstruction of patriarchal institutions such as familial and Church hierarchies. The female protagonists make a quest to subjectivity construction, a luxury usually reserved for male protagonists. This dissertation suggests that a theory specific to female fiction is essential in reading the feminine journey to subjectivity. Consequently, the writings of Dana A. Heller have been adopted in the analysis of quest subjectivity construction.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter summaries.....	7
1.0 Chapter I. Theories and methods .....	15
1.1 Theories: Promoting patriarch through mythmaking .....	15
1.2 Methods: Reinvented mythology contest patriarchy .....	20
1.3 Theories: Traditional family structure of patriarchy .....	29
1.4 Methods: Displacing the family hierarchy .....	32
1.5 Theories: Classic Bildungsroman unsuitable for female fiction .....	34
1.6 Methods: Feminization of quest for subjectivity.....	37
2.0 Chapter II. Reconstruction of the myth .....	43
2.1 Introduction .....	43
2.2 Traditional myths .....	45
2.3 Play summary .....	49
2.4 Myths in the text .....	51
2.5 Play summary.....	71
2.6 Sexual Juana .....	72
2.7 Sor Juana feminist .....	79

3.0 Chapter III. Entre familia: re-imaginings of subjectivity .....	84
3.1 Introduction .....	84
3.2 Play summary .....	89
3.3 The women of <i>Shadow</i> .....	90
4.0 Chapter IV. Woman on a quest .....	119
4.1 Introduction.....	119
4.2 Play summary.....	125
4.3 Myth and magic as strategies to subjectivity .....	126
4.4 Coser y Cantar .....	141
4.5 Play summary .....	142
4.6 Mapping SHE, ELLA and community .....	143
Conclusion .....	157
Bibliography.....	161

## **Dedication**

For Ricky, Sammy, and Victoria - the light  
in your eyes is my beacon.

## Introduction

“The lighting, setting, costumes, blocking, text all the material aspects of theatre are manipulated so that the performance's meanings are intelligible to a particular spectator... Historically, in North American culture, this spectator has been assumed to be white, middle-class, heterosexual, and male. That theatre creates an ideal spectator carved in the likeness of the dominant culture whose ideology he represents...”

--Jill Dolan in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*

Above, Jill Dolan captures the apparatus by which mainstream theater in the United States has traditionally cultivated and normalized the dominant culture's philosophy; this “ideal spectator” embodies the traits that define the essence of being American (*The Feminist Spectator* 1). The model spectator is white, male, middle-class, and heterosexual; on-stage representations reflect his perspective while it fortifies the underlying messages valued by the dominant culture. Consequently, the viewpoints of individuals who find themselves outside looking in of said signifiers are marginalized and rendered invisible within American society and by extension within U.S. mainstream theater. Dolan writes that the feminist spectator finds herself in “the outsider's critical position” unable to “find a comfortable way into the representation” because she may belong to the working class, identify as lesbian, a woman of color or a combination of the race, gender, and sexuality descriptors (2). Plainly stated, theater failed to address her directly; it did not recognize her necessity to self-define. Hence, it is understandable why heightened by the social movements of the 1960s the U.S. experienced a burgeoning of

alternative theaters through the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, five dramatic works written by four U.S. Latinas will be examined focusing on the construction of alternative subjectivities that challenge assumptions normalized by the ideal spectator as noted above by Jill Dolan.

In *The Drama of Gender: Feminist Theater by Women of the Americas* Yolanda Flores reiterates the “inseparable” nature between the origin of Chicano theater and “political and social ideals” of the Chicano Movement (74). Ironically, despite its emergence, in the mid-1960s, as a response to social injustice experienced by the Chicano community, Chicano theater also drew criticism for its patriarchal and narrow vision in depicting women. This condemnation was directed mainly at *El Teatro Campesino* and its director Luis Valdez. In *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* Yolanda Broyles-González published excerpts from interviews that she conducted with female informants who participated in the theater company. In the following, Socorro Valdez describes her frustration with the feminine roles she encountered:

It was like walking the same path over and over. There was the mother, the sister, or the grandmother or the girlfriend. Only four. You were either the *novia*, *la mama*, *al abuela*, or *la hermana*... And most of the time these characters were passive. The way those females were laid out are for the

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<sup>1</sup> Dolan addresses various alternative theaters such as Afro-American, Asian, and Latina Theater, cultural feminist theater, lesbian theater throughout her book. She argues the importance of highlighting difference in drama to avoid replicating and replacing the “universality of man” with the “universality of women” in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* 92.

most part very passive laid back, y *aguantaban todo* I think that is what really chewed me up at the time. (140)

Similarly, Yolanda Parra recollects the limited roles available to female actors within the company; the “his” referred to by Parra is Luis Valdez:

There is this constant stereotypical portrayal of women. His women characters are virgins, whores, or mothers...women don't come like that. Women are all three, not one or the other. And they are more things; they are men, too, and they are children. It's not just three separate things. Like “I'm a Virgin!”...Who's going to buy that? See, that's the real problem. (143)

Weary of the feminine images created for U.S. mainstream theater as well as Chicano theater; by the mid 1980s, university educated Chicanas had transformed themselves into scholars and burgeoning playwrights. They assumed responsibility for creating representations of women from a woman's point of view. Latina playwrights from other ethnic groups, grappling with similar issues of subjugation and subjectivity in both American society and within their own communities joined their voices to those of Chicanas, bringing forth the next evolution of theater, Latina Theater. Sandoval-Sánchez and Sternbach contend that Latina Theater is composed of three main ethnic groups, Chicanas, Puerto Rican women and Cuban-American women (*Stages of Life* 42). The works examined in this study were penned by playwrights that self-identify with at least one of each ethnic group. For our purposes the designation “Latina” is a term of plurality

and it is used in the same sense as used by scholars pertinent to the discussion of this analysis, it references individuals of Latin-American decent, born or living in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Since various depictions of feminine identity are the focus of this study, a brief discussion of the term “subjectivity” is warranted. In his 1984 article *Subjectivity*, Albert Shalom states that “personal identity” is the key-term to define subjectivity (273). He precedes to draft his thesis with a discussion on the shortcomings of neurologist R. W. Sperry's effort to define subjectivity through the function and language of neurology; he is equally critical of psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's use of conscious and unconscious to do the same. The crux of Shalom's argument rests on his re-examination of the Aristotle and Descartes philosophical models that explicate awareness of self. He reasons that the lexicon of *psyche* and *matter* are inadequate and in its stead postulates *permanence* and *change* or *process* (262). According to Shalom, the entity or subject has permanence so long it exists or is alive. He challenges us to view this permanence within the space of time; it is neither static nor powerless but rather active as it matures from “ovum” into adulthood and “*becomes* observer” as it undergoes processes or changes (264-266). He argues that identity resulting from experience “will emerge as a specific

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<sup>2</sup> Alicia Arrizón and Lillian Manzor in *Latinas on Stage* 13, Elizabeth Ramírez in *Chicanas/Latinas in American Theatre*,10, Luis Ramos-García, in *The State of Latino Theater in the United States* p. xiv. Albetto Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Sternbach in *Puro Teatro* sum up the basic ideological elements of the “Latina” descriptor, “This term refers to all persons who ethnically, racially, nationally, and culturally identify with Latin American origins or roots and who reside permanently in geographically dispersed locations within the U.S.” 42.

identity...conditioned by the specific history of its particular sorts of internalizations” (272). Finally, he concludes that *body* and *mind* are derived from the “basic reality of subjectivity as personal identity” (273).

The Shalom model expresses a post-structural, postmodern understanding of subjectivity construction that simultaneously challenges notions of the unitary and the universal subject. On the condition that the permanence of an individual or entity, as described by Shalom, is in constant processes of flux, identity cannot be thought of in terms of complete or unitary. Additionally, because personal identity is formed by specific experiences and personal internalizations Shalom's framework equally disputes the concept of a universal subject as an all-encompassing ideal.

In *Feminist practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Chris Weedon reiterates Shalom's reasoning of conscious and unconscious thoughts as well as emotions that construct for the individual “her sense of herself” (32). Weedon writes that feminist poststructuralism examines subjectivity beyond poststructuralism in that it acknowledges that the individual “is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity” (32-33). These contradictions are exposed when the individual “moves out of familiar circles” by means of education or becoming politicized (32-33). The educational and political changes that Latinas experienced due to the social movements of the 1960s prepared them to explore the inconsistencies between a traditional definition of womanhood and how they understood themselves.

Quick to realize that challenging patriarchal images of women lay in taking control of the narrative, Latinas set out to reimagine on-stage feminine subjectivity. In *“Teatropoesía by Chicanas in the Bay Area: Tongues of Fire”* Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano

describes the experimental combination of stage performance and poetry taking place in the early 80s, as a means of presenting alternative feminine images, to theater audiences. It was during this epoch that Chicano theater was experiencing a noticeable decline since its apex in the late 60s to early 70s, as Yarbrow-Bejarano explains, this waning was due largely to the shortage of trained Chicano playwrights. Chicanas found in *teatropoesía* their artistic solution to that immediate problem. “While they are committed to dealing with women’s issues in *teatro*, most have no playwriting skills. Writing poetry involves less technical training making it an accessible vehicle for the direct expression of emotions and experience” (78-79).

The focus of Yarbrow-Bejarano’s essay is the *teatropoesía* titled *Tongues of Fire*, it was written by Barbara Brinson-Pineda and based on Chicana feminist thought and writings published in *This Bridge Called My Back* (83). The *teatropoesía* urges Chicana authors “to cultivate their own voice” as opposed to simply mimicking the writing style of the dominant white culture. It encourages authors to draw from their lived experience as their source of creative inspiration, to use “Her sex, her culture, and her class, which place obstacles in the path of the Chicana writer, must ultimately become the source of her strength the ‘deep core’ from which she writes” (84). Yarbrow-Bejarano writes, “The strength of *Tongues of Fire* lies in its successful combination of theatrical experience, literary training, and familiarity with recent publications by Chicana feminists” (82). Writing from such experiences is writing from her core and it illustrates the post-structural position that personal internalizations as well as specific experience form subjectivity.

*Tongues of Fire* presents various themes in five sections highlighting distinct actors. To emphasize the image of female authors creating their own story each actor takes her turn at a writing table on stage for each segment (82-83). According to Alicia Arrizón, the works of Latina playwrights became the site of creation that birthed representations of subjectivity not previously conceived. She writes, “Latinas in contemporary theater emphatically rejected the marginal spaces and narrow roles meted out to them. Instead, they insist on a new vision—one that pushes back the limits of patriarchy and creates an open site for proud bodies, strong voices” (*Latina Performance*, 28).

The plays considered in this analysis are *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Shadow of a Man* by Cherríe Morraga, *The Nun and the Countess* by Odalys Nanín, *La Gringa* by Carmen Rivera, and *Coser y Cantar* by Dolores Prida. Of these, the Nanín drama has not been published; however, it has been produced at the playwright’s theater, Macha Theater in Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup>

### **Chapter summaries:**

Chapter 1 lays out the methodological and theoretical frameworks upon which the plays are examined through three distinct themes: feminine mythical figures, traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Details on *The Nun and the Countess* provided by Odalys Nanín in a telephone conversation on March 12, 2015 where she shared her thoughts on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz as an author, an intellectual, as well as the historical importance of the relationship between Sor Juana and the Countess of Paredes. According to Nanín it is due to their “twin soul kind of love”, that Sor Juana’s writings were published and consequently, conserved for posterity.

Chicano family, and the feminization of the *bildungsroman* quest. Gerald A. Larue interprets societal myths as either life affirming or life denying. According to Larue, societal and identity myths work in unison to fix desired social behavior and attitude patterns to create individual and group identity; however, when said patterns become a source of schism to individual members of the group then the myth results life denying. Larue's work demonstrates the processes by which myth functions to prescribe identity upon individuals (*Ancient Myth and Modern Man* 183). Chicanas such as Tey Diana Rebolledo contest the narrative propagated by traditional myths when they impose a negative characterization of women. She suggests in, *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* that in such cases female authors must invent new positive images to combat destructive female representations intended to reinforce patriarchy (49). This chapter discusses Rebolledo's supposition as applied to the literary analysis of feminine mythical icons.

Patrick Geary writes that historical women who did not comport themselves as they were socially expected to were imbued with either great saintliness or extreme wickedness. Geary hypothesizes that by doing so these scribes were restoring the natural order of patriarchy (*Women at the Beginning* 4). Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz may be described as one such historical icon. Her biographers have long grappled to define her; from Diego Calleja who attempted to read into the last years of her life and her writings a sure path to her religious redemption to Octavio Paz's struggle to avoid making yet drawing conclusions about her sexuality from her body of literary works. In "A Shadowy Sequence: Chicana Textual/ Sexual Reinventions of Sor Juana", Paul Allatson illustrates Paz's predicament "And even where Paz seems to prevaricate over Sor Juana... by

claiming that she was bisexual, and in this no different from most members of the 'género humano' (607), this stance at once normalizes and precludes a non-normative reading of his subject" (Allatson 6-7).

Probing the structural hierarchy of the traditional Chicano family becomes the method by which the Moraga challenges prescribed gender roles within the private spaces of home in *Shadow of a Man*. She writes, "We believe the more severely we protect the sex roles within the family, the stronger we will be as a unit in opposition to the Anglo threat. And yet, our refusal to examine *all* the roots of the lovelessness in our families is our weakest link and softest spot" (*Loving in the War Years* 101). By decentering the institutional positions of the church and the males in the Chicano family Moraga creates the site where the feminine characters discuss, and explore the reassess their subjectivity on their own terms and according to their imaginary. Tentatively at first, but with growing confidence these characters speak from a space free of judgment or social rebuke. They voice their sexual desires, relationship needs, and offer solutions that address their social concerns.

The *La Gringa* by Carmen Rivera and *Coser y Cantar* by Dolores Prida are examined in accordance to a restructuring of Jerome Buckley's classic *bildungsroman* definition. Elizabeth Able, Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Langland, and Dana A. Heller argue that Buckley's model of the *bildungsroman* is inadequate for a feminine quest tale because while the social and cultural conventions sanction Buckley's rites of passage into maturity for males the same cannot be said for females. Consequently, a feminine

*bildungsroman* is foremost rooted as an act of rebellion against patriarchy.<sup>4</sup> According to Annie O. Eysturoy the Chicana *bildungsroman* rejects the “traditional male-defined generic paradigm of individual accommodation” and instead turns its attention, “to socio-cultural values and gender role expectations to portray the *Bildung* of a Chicana as a process of self-discovery that is a conscious quest for authentic female selfhood” (*Daughters of Self-Creation* 85).<sup>5</sup> Even though Eysturoy’s study focuses on Chicana works, her observations may equally be applied to the plays by Rivera and Prida.

Two works are analyzed in chapter 2, *The Hungry Woman: a Mexican Medea* by Moraga and *The Nun and the Countess* by Nanín. The fundamental thread of commonality between these two dramas is the re-imagination of mythologized literary feminine icons, fictional, and historical, with the purpose of thwarting disparaging yet normative patriarchal narratives about women. Both works create feminine subjectivity by reinventing male created and male-centered myth. In *The Hungry Woman* Moraga combines three mythical women, from Greek mythology Medea, La Llorona, and the Hungry Woman into one character, Medea. This work specifically queries the validity of the traditional La Llorona legend because according to Moraga its premise fails to convince satisfactorily why a mother would commit the heinous act of infanticide as a retort to being scorned in love. In her writing, the playwright suggests that killing a child is too violent a reaction and that it is more likely that her response was prompted by

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<sup>4</sup> In *Daughters of Self-Creation*, Annie O. Eysturoy defines *bildungsroman*: novel of development, coming of age novel, apprenticeship novel, 144.

<sup>5</sup> In *Daughters of Self-Creation*, Annie O. Eysturoy defines *Bidung*: formation, education, development, 144.

something far more sinister (*Loving in the War Years* 145). The play lays out a narrative that explores an alternate reason for this mother's murderous act. The second drama studied in this chapter is Nanín's reinvention of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Customarily, Sorjuanistas such as Octavio Paz and Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel have been hesitant to attribute to Sor Juana or to her writings the late twentieth century terms, feminist and lesbian. Nonetheless, scholars such as Stephanie Merrin embrace the term feminist and argues that feminism need not have been organized in the seventeenth century as it is in present day to convey "a feminist consciousness" (*Early Modern Women's Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz* xxiii). Furthermore, according to Amy Kaminsky when a writer identity is absent, as is the case with Sor Juana, than their texts may be read as feminist or lesbian when their language advances such an oppositional position (*Reading the Body Politic* 117). Nanín's Sor Juana is unapologetic in both her feminism and her sexuality. At the end of the play when she is forced to renounce those aspects of herself, she blames the institution of patriarchy. This Sor Juana belies the traditional narrative about the nun where she is often infantilized or imbued with having been too much of an intellectual to have been corrupted with any hints of carnal desires. In this representation, Nanín has succeeded in constructing an alternate subjectivity for her where she is openly allowed to theorize about her gender, and experience human emotion as well as intimacy.

Chapter 3 focuses on Moraga's play *Shadow of a Man* where the heterosexual hierarchy of the traditional Chicano family is scrutinized. Here, Moraga addresses patriarchal authority ingrained in the familial structure such as the cultural double standard of raising of sons with the benefit of male privilege and daughters with the limitations prescribed to their gender by society. Since the male characters are displaced

from the position of power, the play skillfully reveals that oppressive practices are often enforced upon women by other women. Chris Weedon and Gayatri Spivak argue that the family is the site responsible for seducing women into becoming complicit in social practices that are oppressive to them. Through the interrogation of undisputed social mores, the playwright allows her feminine characters to explore alternative subjectivity options previously off bounds to them. For example, Leticia, the oldest daughter becomes politically aware and positions herself to enact social change for her community. Lupe the youngest daughter becomes conscious of her budding lesbian desire and she starts to accept the “shadow beast” a shadowed part of herself that she does not comprehend and terrifies her when she catches glimpses of it in the mirror at the beginning of the play. Through her work, Moraga confronts sexism and heterosexism embedded in the patriarchal institutions of family and church.

Chapter 4 is the analysis of the plays *La Gringa* by Carmen Rivera and *Coser y Cantar* by Dolores Prida. The protagonists embark on a quest of constructing their own subjectivity. Rivera’s character makes a geographical journey to Puerto Rico in search of identity. She soon understands that her search does not end in a change of locale. Her search for subjectivity demands cultural and psychological exploration. Likewise, Prida’s protagonist makes an internal journey for subjectivity. Due to the overt preoccupation with identity that said characters express and the actual or metaphorical journeys they take, it is appropriate that analysis of these plays turn to theories of *bildungsroman*.

In his book, *Season of Youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, Jerome Buckley identifies required characteristics or “principal elements” of a “typical *Bildungsroman* plot” (17-18). They are as follows: “childhood, the conflict of

generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation ordeal by love, the search for vocation and a working philosophy” (18). Female literary critics argue the Buckley’s elements are insufficient for a feminine tale of subjectivity since some of the elements do not apply to female literary characters. Dana A. Heller proposes in *The Feminization of Quest-Romance: Radical Departures*, her own definition for a feminized quest of subjectivity as follows: it must strategize on methods of eluding “debilitating structures” towards discovering an “authentic selfhood, a woman must assert her right to “journey into the world” (13). Annie O. Eysturoy, Elizabeth Able, Marianne Hirsch, Elizabeth Langland, and Heller agree that a feminine *bildungsroman* is tantamount to an act of rebellion.

Chapter 5 draws conclusions of the strategies employed to forge feminine subjectivities in the dramatic works examined in this study. These strategies question accepted cultural and patriarchal characterizations of U.S. Latina womanhood. Linda Feyder writes in *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women* that the plays in the anthology represent “something quite recent to contemporary American theater: the Hispanic female voice” (5). While the Latina dramatic expression may be recent to the American stage, Feyder notes that in the form of dramatic dialogue Latina playwrights “unveil the long-hidden Hispanic feminine discourse. They discover that Hispanic women have always been critical and rebellious of their social lot, always creative and subversive” (6).

The obvious drawback to subversive or rebellious acts with limited reach, say the immediate family, is that they are slow to effect social change. On the other hand, the Latina dramatic voice has the capacity to influence a much wider audience. The

communal interaction of experiencing Latina drama in public has the potential to inspire an intelligent examination of cultural feminine stereotypes, which could lead to meaningful social transformation. As Feyder states, “These Hispanic playwrights are the vanguard of not only creating new images-- perhaps new ‘myths’ -- but they are engaged in forging a new culture through art and the empowerment of women” (8). Whether it is through the reinvention of long-accepted mythical or historical icons, relocating traditional family hierarchies, or embarking on a feminine quest of selfhood, these protagonists were written to portray a more realistic vision of womanhood imagined and written from a feminine perspective.

## Chapter I. Theories and methods

“First with the chisel, then with the stylus, then with the pen...and the benefit of the printing press, men have multiplied words into elaborate systems of thought, and the spine and ganglia of all these systems are male presumptions”

--Charles W. Ferguson in *The Male Attitude*

“One began to be tired of ‘I’... this ‘I’ was a most respectable ‘I’; honest and logical; as hard as a nut, and polished for centuries by good teaching and good feeding. I respect and admire that ‘I’ from the bottom of my heart. But — here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter ‘I’ all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. But... she has not a bone in her body”

--Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*

### Theories: Promoting patriarchy through mythmaking

In his book, *Ancient Myth and Modern Man*, Gerald A. Larue defines myth as “a literary vehicle or kind of literature involving divine beings...not limited to what gods and goddess do in their own realms, but also embraces what they do in the world of men”

(5). Larue concedes that this definition is overly simplistic and does not encompass the significant role myths play in the production of cultures. Consequently, he hypothesizes that myths developed out of man’s need to survive, and the desire to comprehend his position in the world in terms of how he is relevant to and within his surroundings.

Furthermore, that myth elevates man from an “animal existence” (9). Larue writes, “Myth may be understood as the human effort to discriminate between an understanding of life, not as bare existence, but as the relationship between the totality of body, mind, spirit, and the world-- the effort to achieve harmonious relationships (peace) within the

totality of one's environment" (9). He elaborates that the purpose of myths is to structure and give order to the human existence that would otherwise render humankind insignificant. In turn, said structures delineate the status quo, which fixes norms, and promotes their acceptance by a given society without question. In Larue's words, "Myth supports existing social structure, patterns of belief and conduct, and the current interpretation of the world. At the same time, myth tends to program attitudes of individuals and groups to encourage an uncritical acceptance of the established norms of the particular society" (9). To explicate his thesis Larue has identified six categories of myths as follows: cosmological myths, societal myths, identity myths, eschatological myths, death of god myths as well as a discussion of future myths (21). He clarifies that these designations will overlap and that myths of identity are present in all categories because "they relate to human efforts at self-understanding and appreciation of the relationship of self and the topocosm" (21). Due to the intersecting nature of identity myths, Larue treats them exclusively in relation to the remaining five. Pertinent to this study are Larue's writings on identity, his analysis of societal myths and the manner in which they promote unquestioned acceptance of a group's established social patterns.

Societal myths sacrifice the freedoms of the individual for the sake of a group; as a result, they define the mores of that community: "They establish the basis for peoplehood; for identity; for acts and attitudes; for the artifacts, experiences that characterize a given group" (64). Thus, individuals become aware of differences that generate "a paradoxical isolation of groups of people" (64). These differences create classifications of humans, which assert the superiority of "a people, faith, and culture" over others and serve to justify abuses and exploitation of certain minorities within the

community or non-group members (15). They represent the tribe's rules and norms which often enjoy divine sanction and any violation or separation of these structures invite "hurt and pain" (65). Accordingly, such myths justify the cruel treatment or killings of those not in the "in-group" (65). As evidence of such patterns at work, Larue points to the "divinely sanctioned" cultural practices perpetrated against Africans and their descendants during the U.S. history of slavery. Along the same vein are the continued male affirmations that women were created by God weak and submissive to men. The purpose for such tenets is to preserve a male-dominated society; as was the case with slavery, they preserved a white male-dominated society. Furthermore, to rebel against divine sanctioned practices is an affront against the will of God (64).

Larue's study of legal codes and the writings of wise men from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel, and the surrounding Near Eastern territories suggest that the relationships that insured the individual's survival were those forged with his family. The familial unit included the father, his wife or wives, and his children. Each culture had its own particular nuances, although they shared the common thread of placing the male-father at the top of the hierarchal tier in both the public and the private spheres. The morality of the community was the responsibility of wise men who wrote down formulaic advice for good living such as how to select a good wife, discipline children, or pursue an acceptable career. Larue writes, "Young men aspiring to public office were instructed by the wise, whose observations about life were set forth as aphorisms and in manuals of behavior" (67).

Larue asserts that myths thousands of years old evolved in ancient centers and have highly influenced modern societies through the spread of Judaism and Christianity.

Their impact on modern lives arrived in slightly altered forms, “at times subtly” (2). Often hardly noticed the continued acceptance of social myths as unmitigated truths assure an uncontested authority to delineate what is acceptable and unacceptable for communities.

While gender disparity is not the prominent concern of the Larue study, but rather to inform and comment on the construction of social patterns, it does stress that such mores were male-created and male-enforced. Norms were established and recorded by the wise men or the “literate priesthood” of said cultures to secure the status quo, namely patriarchal authority (6). Accordingly, these patterns became so ingrained in western social structures due to the “dynamic acceptance and promotion of mythic concepts by both state and church” that they continue to influence present-day customs (2). In essence, religion institutes and fortifies patriarchy through myths and modes of appropriate communal conduct.

As previously discussed, Larue does not treat his proposed category of identity myths in isolation, but instead as to how they relate to the other five. Of societal myths, he writes that they provide “the basis of peoplehood” and expounds that behavior, attitudes, and interpretation of lived experience form the character of the group (64). Thus, they explicate his identity to the individual. For those accepting of the myth and able to “expand” within it, the myth becomes life-affirming (183). On the other hand, if it has the opposite effect, then the myth becomes restrictive or limiting it, therefore having a “life-denying impact” (183). Larue considers the influence of societal myths on the identity of the group and by extension on the individual. Both he and the aforementioned Shalom ponder subjectivity formation. Although, blatantly missing from their

conversation is an awareness that this subject is conjured solely from a male-centered personal experience or even that a woman's experience may be separate from masculine suppositions about them.

Larue references historical or mythical figures to illustrate a point but generally avoids an in-depth analysis on subjectivity. Nonetheless, his work on mythmaking, its posture as either life-affirming or life-denying facilitates an understanding of an individual's attempt to grapple with longstanding societal myths that have alienating consequences. The texts examined in this analysis challenge patriarchal interpretations of women's subjectivity, sexuality, and gender roles; namely, they consider matters affecting individuals for whom the myth has become life denying.

Historian Patrick Geary readily acknowledges that women have been written into history in accordance to a masculine worldview. In *Women at the Beginning*, Geary suggests that the male authors reinvent or misrepresent problematic female figures in an attempt to reconcile personal ambivalences about women to their own reality (4). Geary maintains that in the *Historia Augusta*, the author's motivation for writing about Amazons was his concern about Zenobia, the powerful queen of Palmyra and that Cosmas wrote about Libuse and Bohemian Amazons because he was actually "reflecting about Mathilda of Tuscany, another woman who exercised judgment and settles disputes in his chronicle" (40).<sup>6</sup> By distorting women's participation in meaningful historical significance, male authors were attempting to correct history while reinstating patriarchal order; they were in fact contributing to the mythmaking process (39-40).

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<sup>6</sup> The various authors of *Historia Augusta* are known as the *Scriptores historiae augustae*. This compilation of historical accounts is believed to have been written between 117-284.

Both Geary and Larue argue that myth has had a significant influence in the production of history. Larue writes that when events are “treated not as happenstance or the results of plots, plans, covenants, and agreements between humans, gods then were pictured as involved in human affairs” and recorded history became “mythic in quality” (*Ancient Myth and Modern Man* 16). The combination of myth and history customarily made heroes of men in the retelling of their victories in battle or conquests of peoples. Larue points out that such heroic deeds were often accomplished through divine intervention thus sanctioned by deities. Although, in narratives about women that has not been the case, according to Geary in the origin stories when women are present they are “but names; wombs that made possible the transmission of male virtue from generation to generation” (*Women at the Beginning* 3). History’s portrait of these women converts them into saints or they are distinguished by their wickedness.<sup>7</sup>

### **Methods: Reinvented mythology contests patriarchy**

As Larue reiterates, acceptable societal patterns instituted and promoted by the Judeo-Christian tradition were subtly disseminated to the west. Hence, it is reasonable that along with the passage of such patterns, parodies of women as either passive saints or

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<sup>7</sup> Geary references Eve and Dido as well as the Frankish princess Amalberga as told by Widukind and Rosamund in the story of the Lombard hero Alboin who are sources of sin and conflict. Magical women such as Gambara, mother of the first Lombard dukes. Libuse, Kazi, and Tetka, in Cosmas of Prague’s account of the origins of the Czechs. Lilith mother of monsters and demons. Sainly women like Clothild, wife of Frankish king Clovis or Dobrava, wife of the Polish Duke Mieszko, 2006, p.3.

maniacal evil entities were equally propagated. Moreover, such interpretations continue to impact historical and contemporary representations of women in society.

U.S. Latina scholars educated in the reverberation of the 1960s civil rights movements recognized that the problem with the deprecating or overly passive female characters in literature and theater stemmed from the male-centered perspective taken by their authors. These intellectuals' concerns often reached beyond the literary portrayals of women, and into their real life strife in the social and political arenas of American society. They advocated for women-centered scholarship within academia and set about reinventing the narrative of myths. In *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* Tey Diana Rebolledo makes an erudite justification for two key steps that will underwrite such an endeavor: first, to take up the pen, produce their own narratives, and second, to create the images of women that are more positive. Rebolledo writes, "Women's lives are particularly circumscribed by cultural values and norms that try to dictate how women should behave and who their role models should be" (49). In addition, she asserts that should these models prove lacking in promoting a positive image, then female writers should alter traditional figures with "different aspects or attributes" or create "totally different figures" (49).

When Latinas create new images of mythical literary women or historical ones they are proposing alternative subjectivities to those delineated by patriarchy. In *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* Cherríe Moraga illustrates the aforementioned Rebolledo and Yarbrow-Bejarano imperatives when she reinvents Euripides' Medea, La Llorona, and the Hungry Woman myths; the first two committed infanticide and the third

fed on the decaying bodies of the dead.<sup>8</sup> Moraga questions the traditional narratives and finds them wanting. She surmises that Medea and La Llorona must have murdered their children because of a far more insidious reason than a philandering husband (*Loving* 145). Moraga resists the conventional account where innocent children were sacrificed as an act of vindictive revenge or because their murderous mothers were in a sexual competition with another woman. She speculates that the great betrayal may in fact be patriarchy's misogynous attitudes and infanticide is the retaliation against its "enslavement" of women (145). Additionally, the playwright probes into infanticide and wonders if it may be considered suicide rather than homicide since the mother-child bond is not ever completely severed because the child is an extension of herself (146). Like Medea of Greek mythology and La Llorona, Moraga's Medea kills her son. Her reasoning is to save him from adopting the male dominated ideology of patriarchy, from becoming a man. The same as the traditional Llorona, Medea is grief stricken and eventually takes her own life. In the rewriting of the myth, Moraga resisted sparing the child; for giving in to this temptation would have altered the outcome and would have transformed the basic storyline. Instead, Moraga allows Medea to speak "...to say something other than 'mis hijos' for all eternity" (146). Giving Medea voice presents spectators with the opportunity to know her side of the story; a narrative told through her experiences, constructs an alternative subjectivity for her.

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<sup>8</sup> See Américo Paredes "Mexican Legendry and the Rise of the Mestizo: A Survey" where he proves that La Llorona myth results from the combination of European Medea and pre-Colombian myths. From the combination of these two narrative traditions arises a mestizo legend form; here the term mestizo is used culturally and Paredes signals it central to Mexican identity, 1971, 99-103.

Moraga's theorizing and playwriting exemplifies Yarbrow-Bejarano's imperative for Chicanas to write from the deep core of personal experience of gender, class, and culture. The playwright attributes this aspect of self-awareness to her study of feminisms:

I am ever-grateful to feminism for teaching me this, that *political* oppression is always experienced personally by someone. This feminist tenet, *the personal is political*, has provided me the poet's permission to use my own life as evidence of what I believe to be true about *us* and *them*. Us and them; the binary that binds us in its ever-shifting shapes of body and thought. (iv)

As Moraga states, the binary varies: it could refer to women, women of color, people of color and white men or of Chicanas and Chicanos. Whatever the case, it unmistakably speaks of an oppressor and the oppressed.

When the playwright proposes that Medea's act of infanticide may have been in retaliation for patriarchy, she is indeed making a statement about the multiple ways it has failed women. Moraga is critical of Chicanos who retaliated against Chicanas when they voiced discontent with the movement's leadership with name-calling and ultimately fostering divisiveness.<sup>9</sup> She is equally critical of Chicanos' failure to acknowledge the topic of lesbianism unless it was to use it as an insult. She explicates these cultural shortcomings as a form of heterosexism. Moraga writes:

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<sup>9</sup> Among the disparagingly terms used to dissuade Chicanas from making unwanted demands of the movement's leadership were malinchistas, women's libbers, vendidas, lesbians. See *Loving in the War Years*. (2000, 103).

Chicanos' refusal to look at our weaknesses as a people and a movement is, in the most profound sense, an act of self-betrayal. The Chicana lesbian bears the brunt of this betrayal, for it is she, the most visible manifestation of a woman taking control of her own sexual identity and destiny, who severely challenges the anti-feminist Chicano/a. (103)<sup>10</sup>

*The Hungry Woman* is set in the future after a race war. As a result, the United States has been Balkanized and among the new territories are Gringolandia, Aztlán, and Phoenix. Medea was banished from Aztlán, her birthright, when her husband became aware that she was carrying on a lesbian affair. He relegated her to the slum zone of Phoenix, which functioned as a type of dumping ground for the social misfits from the surrounding territories. The play expresses the alienation that Chicanas must have felt when they attempted to address "women's issues" that should have been viewed by movement leaders as "people's issues" (98). Their concerns were ridiculed and they were labeled traitors to their people; metaphorically, they were ousted from a cause they believed in, much the same way Medea was exiled from Aztlán. Moreover, Moraga rejects the traitor accusation of Chicanas who sought answers in the feminist movement. She observes:

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<sup>10</sup> Heterosexism is the view that heterosexuality is the "norm" for all social/ sexual relationships and as such the heterosexists imposes this model on all individuals through homophobia. See note #6 in *Loving in the War Years*. (2000, 214)

Interestingly, it is perfectly acceptable among Chicano males to use white theoreticians e. g., Marx and Engels to develop a theory of Chicano oppression. It is unacceptable, however, for the Chicana to use white feminist sources to develop a theory of Chicana oppression. (98)

When Chicanas were called traitors, malinchistas, or vendidas the affliction of the wicked woman was located onto their female bodies because they transgressed from the expected and acceptable behavior. Moraga's Medea is an alternative mythical woman because she too transgressed sexual and gender mores; she sacrificed her son to save him from becoming a man molded by patriarchy.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the subject of Odalys Nanín's play, is a historical figure who has had multiple literary incarnations and is a woman written into history as described by Patrick Geary. She confounded learned men who struggled to comprehend choices she made, such as choosing a religious life over marriage or even the secular subject matter of some of her writings. Sor Juana's actions challenged men's notions of acceptable comportment for women, for nuns. Hence, their ambivalence about her resulted in their attempts to define her in such a way that would restore patriarchy's authority over her, over women.

In *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Trampas de la fé*, Octavio Paz writes that the Jesuit priest Diego Calleja became her first biographer (13). Calleja interpreted the final epoch of Sor Juana's life, after she renounced her studies and writing, as a long slow road of ascension into sanctity. From her literary works, he extracts a narrative about her in accordance with his own comprehension of reality. Consequently, Calleja became the first male writer to mythologize the nun in print. He glossed over or simply ignored

details of Sor Juana's life that were incongruent with his representation of her. In the following, Paz describes Calleja's work:

El relato de Calleja no es una verdadera biografía, en el sentido moderno de la palabra, sino una narración edificante en la que los más mínimos incidentes de su vida son signos y señales sobrenaturales de su ascenso hacia la virtud y la santidad. Calleja elude todo lo que pudiese oscurecer su reputación y no dice nada que aclare realmente los que se han acercado a su figura: las razones que la movieron a profesar y las que la llevaron a renunciar a las letras...Es la leyenda que contamina a la historia, lo maravilloso cristiano que disuelve la realidad prosaica. (90-91)

Influenced by the lens of psychoanalysis, German scholar Ludwig Pfandl falls on the other side of the spectrum. Paz writes that Pfandl gleaned from her literary works that Sor Juana was "un conflicto neurótico" (13). Pfandl opined that she suffered from gender confusion. His supposition stemmed from the popular epistemology of the time that asserted immutable biological types. According to Paz, for Pfandl the feminine and the masculine are categories that resist social and historical changes. A woman's interests did not venture out of the private space therefore Sor Juana suffered from masculine tendencies:

El tipo de mujer ideal, la "rubia pícnica, aria" redonda y maternal, no se interesa en la cultura, el saber o en los libros, sino en la familia. La intersexual, como sor Juana, deriva su sexualidad enfermiza hacia

actividades como la literatura o la vida pública. Pfandl identifica al mundo del saber y las letras con el mundo masculino... (93).

Paz's argument was not so much a defense of Sor Juana's gender, although that fact was at the core of Calleja's and Pfandl's theses; they ignored the literary value of her works, but that they made assumptions about her personal life from them (13-14). Paz argues that although biographical readings may be made from her writings it is the reader and not the author who imposes their interpretation on the written work:

No niego que la interpretación biográfica sea un camino para llegar a la obra. Sólo que es un camino que se detiene a sus puertas: para comprenderla realmente, debemos trasponerlas y penetrar en su interior...Las obras no responden a las preguntas del autor sino a las del lector. Entre la obra y el autor se interpone un elemento que los separa: el lector. Una vez escrita, la obra tiene una vida distinta a la del autor la que le otorgan sus lectores sucesivos. (14)

For Paz the two important questions about Sor Juana that should be asked are why she took religious vows and did she completely give up writing. Paz's denunciation of Calleja and Pfandl has merit; however, he inadvertently falls into the very snare that he warns against when he too makes declarations about Sor Juana. He points to her work as evidence of her rejection of marriage, but in an effort to quail any suggestion of same-sex attraction on her part, he deems her incapable of knowing her own desires:

Pensar que ella sentía una clara aversión a los hombres y una igualmente clara afición a las mujeres es descabellado. Por una parte, en caso de que

esa suposición fuese cierta, en esos años de extrema juventud no es fácil que ella tuviese conciencia de sus verdaderas inclinaciones por la otra, salvo atribuyéndole un libertinaje mental más propio de una heroína de Diderot que de una muchacha novohispana de su edad y de su clase, podía ella fríamente escoger como refugio un establecimiento habitado exclusivamente por personas del sexo que, supuestamente, la atraía. No...es vano tratar de saber cuáles eran sus verdaderos sentimientos sexuales. Ella tampoco lo sabía. (158)

Paz's argument against the reader forming suppositions about the author by imposing his or her own views and prejudices loses strength when he appears to do the very thing. Pronouncing Sor Juana, too young and too innocent at nineteen to comprehend her own desires is making assumptions that may be perceived as at best paternalistic on his part. While he is willing to concede Sor Juana's intellectual maturity, he balks at the notion that she might have felt carnal desire, specifically same-sex desire. According to Paul Allatson, such statements are more revealing about Paz than of Sor Juana for they illustrate Paz's inability for "countenancing or tolerating erotic breaches in the androcentric, heteronormative bodily logics he takes for granted" ("Shadowy Sequence 7). Not mincing words, Alicia Gaspar de Alba categorically characterizes Paz's position as "advancing a patent homophobia" (*Sor Juana's Second Dream* 460). Additionally, Gaspar de Alba asserts that Sor Juana's literary works place her within current feminist discourse; such an observation authorizes Latinas to reinvent her narrative from a contemporary perspective (460).

Sor Juana has been mythologized by her male authors. As described by Patrick Geary, she has been saintly, neurotic, and sexually confused; and Paz infantilizes her. These interpretations fortify these authors' own reality. U.S. Latinas who have deconstructed representations of Sor Juana as proposed by Calleja, Phandl, and Paz seek to rewrite aspects of her subjectivity that in the past "deny or justify or pathologize" her sexuality (460).<sup>11</sup> This analysis takes Amy Kaminsky's position for reading the literary works in the absence of an author-defined identity. Playwright Odalys Nanín stages Sor Juana as an intellectual, a feminist, and one who acts on lesbian desire. Nanín's Sor Juana unashamedly accepts her intellect and feminism. Her friendship with María Luisa leads to a deep love that is consummated one night at the Countess's residence. She pronounces her own intelligence natural and celebrates the idea of female scholars of future generations reading her works. At the end of the play, she curses patriarchy for taking her voice. Nanín has returned to Sor Juana her voice that she may construct her own subjectivity before a theater audience.

### **Theories: Traditional family structure of patriarchy**

Previous discussion has illustrated that the organizational structure of placing the father at the head of the family hierarchy was constructed to exercise male-control over women, a privilege sanctioned by God. The symbiotic relationship between the institutions of church and the traditional family authorizes social power to one another.

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<sup>11</sup> Among the U.S. Latinas to reinvent Sor Juana are Martha Arat, Estela Portillo-Trambley, Pat Mora, and Alicia Gaspar de Alba. See *Sor Juana's Second Dream* 460.

The father figure at the head of the family is symbolic of placing God the Father as the ultimate authority. Social power is passed from God on to his male priests, they in turn have passed it on to the family man, and their actions become reciprocal. In *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, Chris Weedon writes about this philosophy as disseminated by the institution of Catholicism in its role in defining women:

Within Catholicism there are subject positions which validate and even celebrate particular modes of femininity, for instance, an approach to traditional family life governed by norms of “selflessness” which imply compliance to and fulfilment of the wishes and the needs of husbands and children, wishes and need which Catholicism also defines. (92)

Catholicism is typical of patriarchal discourses in its insistence on the singularity of meaning, including the meaning of gender. In Catholicism, the ultimate guarantee of the truth of the discourse is God, the transcendent subject who *is*. The individual gains a stable unitary subject position by identifying with the word of God as read by the institution of the church and by becoming subject to the meanings and laws of the church which define both femininity and women’s role. (93)

Chris Weedon refers to the family as a site of emotional seduction where women are complicit in their own oppression (14-15). Gayatri Spivak warns that the family is the place of location utilized to socialize the feminine body (*Outside in the Teaching Machine* 82). Weedon and Spivak have identified the emotional blackmail tactic used to force women into accepting undisputed notions of sacrifice for the sake of the family. A method of accomplishing this cooperation is by glorifying the status of the compliant

woman and her place within the family when she exhibits selflessness. When Latinas like Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano and Alicia Arrizón observe that a notable failing of the Chicano movement was to adopt without interrogation the *familia* ideology as a philosophical stance for *la causa*, they were in fact taking a position against the influence of patriarchy on women.<sup>12</sup>

A competing perspective on the family was expressed by José Armas in his 1972 self-published book *La Familia de la Raza*. Here Armas criticizes the symbols of nationalism that the Chicano movement has adopted and instead proposes that it embrace family ideology, which he expresses to have “been a stabilizing element in the lives of the Chicanos” (13). He warns that the movement will face questions of definition before long and he feels that the family will provide the identity foundation that it needs. Armas’s position demonstrates that the decision not to question the structure of the traditional Chicano family may have been a conscious effort by the movement to utilize the family as an identity-building tenet. Armas writes:

I have suggested that the Chicano cultural concept of “La Familia” provides for us a ready-made base from which to build both our emerging identity and a humanistic system. Idolizing philosophies of Che, Pancho Villa, Zapata are for the moment, and they serve their purpose, but for the lasting and sane foundation for a humanistic way of life, we look to our “Familia.” The goals are for the foundation of brotherhood, a respect for

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<sup>12</sup> See Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano “The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, ‘Race’, and Class”, 390 and Alicia Arrizón *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage*, 7-9.

people, a defense of the family that keeps us spiritually alive and a compatible attitude toward the land that keeps us physically alive. (46)

### **Methods: Displacing the family hierarchy**

Moraga believes that resistance to examine the family is a “weak link and a soft spot” which reveals that the male Chicano “wants to be able to determine how, when, and with whom his women mother, wife, and daughter are sexual” (*Loving in the War Years* 101-102). She writes that the control of women’s reproduction begins with the social institutionalization of heterosexuality, the male dominant over the woman. Consequently, lesbianism and male homosexuality that acknowledge an emotional and sexual bond are viewed as threatening to the foundation of the traditional family hierarchy (102). Shifting the center of authority of women from the Chicano family man to the women themselves is Moraga’s objective in *Shadow of a Man*. In this play, the protagonists are the female character: through their dialogue, they express desires for relationships with each other and sexual partners; they explore alternative subjectivities from those prescribed to them.

In the character of Leticia, the oldest Rodriguez daughter, Moraga challenges the virtue of virginal purity, valued by patriarchy, by having her announce that she has unburdened herself of it because she was “tired of carrying it around” like a prize “for some lucky guy to put his name on it” (*Shadow* 45). Leticia also becomes socially and politically aware outside the home and demonstrates ambitions of effecting changes for her community. A hidden surprise is the Rosario character because she appears docile and at times childlike when she jokes with her niece Lupe. She is the voice of reason

when she counsels her sister Hortensia with her marital problems with Manuel. Rosario observes in silence and understands the inner conflicts that other characters experience. She is the first to recognize that Manuel, the father of the family is suffering from a crisis of sexual identity. She counsels Lupe, the youngest Rodriguez daughter, when she fears that “the devil is inside” her (14). Through Rosario Moraga weakens the authority of the church by making a distinction between God and religion. “God is always right, not the Church” (13). Rosario’s sensitivity and acceptance of her family members are the actions of a self-assured woman not concerned with following the patterns of the traditional female.

Hortensia, the mother of the family is conflicted with the tenets of traditional female behavior, but she makes the most dramatic leap towards self-definition when she rejects patriarchal judgment on her for an act of adultery in which both her lover and husband were complicit. Until that time, she had carried the guilt of that night alone, but when she rebels and demands that Manuel and Conrado take responsibility Moraga is making a statement against unequal patriarchal condemnation against the women in adulterous situations. Moraga’s optimism for a hopeful future is in the character Lupe. As a thirteen-year-old, Lupe is becoming aware of her own lesbian desires and it scares her. Throughout the play, she hints that there is something evil about her. Her talks with Rosario and Leticia help her be less afraid and more accepting of herself. According to Leah Garland in *Contemporary Latina/o performing Arts of Moraga, Tropicana, Fusco, and Bustamante*, “Lupe’s sexual and spiritual exploration tests the tenets of male privilege on a figurative level, and for Moraga, to question male privilege is to confront the cornerstone of subjectivity” (32).

For Moraga, challenging patriarchal definitions of subjectivity go hand in hand with combatting patriarchal ideas of what constitutes good drama. In the following Moraga writes about a critic's negative reaction to *Shadow of a Man* because, it challenged the male-defined idea of theater:

The play is judged as inferior. "I wasn't moved," writes the critic. Chicanas' multigenerational conversation around a kitchen table is referred to "banter" because the critic isn't interested in it. The only significant male figure in an otherwise all-Chicana play (in this case, my own *Shadow of a Man*) is mistakenly viewed as the protagonist because he's the closest the male reviewer can get to caring. "He's a weak character," the reviewer states. "He doesn't hold the play together." He wasn't supposed to. In *Shadow*, the father's (intentional) weakness as a character is fundamental to the plot; it is the women who must hold the family and the story together. But the reviewer wasn't following the plot lines of those whom he was accustomed to viewing as auxiliary to the "real" (the man's) story. (*Loving* 159)

### **Theories: Classic Bildungsroman unsuitable for female fiction**

The editors of *The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development*, state that Jerome Buckley's definition of the *bildungsroman* plot in *Season of Youth* is based on presumed social options that are available exclusively to men. Thus, the principals have defined "human development" strictly in male terms (7). Able, Hirsch, and Langland exemplify this stance by deconstructing Buckley's list of *bildungsroman* elements in in the context

of feminine characters in nineteenth-century literature. First is the supposition that the narration is chronological and the hero realizes in childhood that forces inhibit his imaginative growth. According to Able, Hirsch, and Langland, while this may be true for the heroines of some novels it is more prevalent that, they arrive at this self-awareness later in life, after “expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient” (7). Another point of contrast is education; through formal education, no matter how rudimentary, males are taught to internalize and evaluate social rules and values, whereas female nineteenth-century literary characters rarely have a formal education. Even those educated, such as Jane Eyre, “do not significantly expand their options, but learn instead to consolidate their female nurturing roles rather than to take a more active part in the shaping of society” (7).

Buckley's hero leaves home because he finds it repressive and goes to the city. Left up to his own devices he begins his real education of life. In contrast, the nineteenth-century heroine is not free to leave her home to execute a similar exploration. The best she can do is exchange one domestic space for another, usually in a rural setting where her objective is to seek protection in exchange for nurturing others rather than learning about herself. The hero severs contact with the family, but the heroine finds it more difficult to cut her family ties. The social attitudes and approach towards sexuality are characterized by an austere gender difference. According to Buckley, the hero will have two significant love affairs, one debasing, and one exalting, which are essential to his emotional and moral development. Sexual affairs are not an option for women of the nineteenth-century, and if she does engage in sexual relations outside of marriage, she is punished “Even one such affair, no matter how exalting, would assure a woman's

expulsion from society” (8). Buckley’s hero ends his quest in an accommodation with society, a resolution that he arrives at through thoughtful and painful soul searching and finally reaching maturity. Even if the hero becomes the antihero and his quest culminates differently, “The rebel’s defiance and the artist’s withdrawal are conventional arrangements with society.” (8) The woman’s novel of development, alternatively, generally replaces accommodation, defiance, and withdrawal and turns to “inner concentration” (8). According to Abel, Hirsch, and Langland such a turn is perilous because “confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss of public activity...female protagonists who are barred from public experience must grapple with a pervasive threat of extinction” (8-9).

Taking from the feminist thought of psychoanalytic theorists such as Nancy Chodorow, Jean Baker Miller, and Carol Gilligan, the editors question if the “individuated self” that results from the identity quest of the *bildungsroman* represents the developmental goals of women or the female characters. They propose that a female “I” demands a different “value system and unorthodox developmental goals, defined in terms of community and empathy rather than achievement and autonomy” (10). Moreover, they indicate the ineffectuality of ignoring gender differences in fictions of development and embracing a male-defined genre description for analysis of women's fiction. Finally, the editors challenge literary critics to refrain from attributing failure to female protagonists because they do not conclude the *bildungsroman* according to a supposed universal yet the male-identified characterization.

### **Methods: Feminization of quest for subjectivity**

In *The Feminization of Quest Romance: Radical Departures*, Dana Heller also stresses gender difference in fictions of feminine development. Heller writes that although a female quest may share a number of elements with the male varieties they differ in that they expose distinct problems and themes (9). Heller postulates feminization of the quest to describe feminine fictions of development:

The exploration of these problems and the working through of these themes in women's literature has led to the development of a separate tradition of quest-romance, a distinct history of female heroes and equally distinct, although more recent, feminization of the quest form which has made viable women's unique pattern of human development. (9)

To formulate her thesis Heller also draws from Harold Bloom's reading of the mid-eighteenth-century revival of the romance consciousness and nineteenth-century Romanticism (*Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* 5). According to Bloom poets such as Blake and Wordsworth were responsible for more than the English revival of Romanticism, but that their work also provides patterns to make possible an internalization of the romance-quest, "particularly of the quest variety" (5). The poet turns within himself to gain self-awareness; such internalization has a function beyond therapeutic purposes, "because it is made in the name of a humanizing hope that approaches apocalyptic intensity. The poet takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again in the movement of the poet himself from poem to poem" (5). In this manner, the poet becomes the hero of the internalized quest and the end goal is not the poem itself

“but the poem beyond that is made possible by the apocalypse of imagination” (8). Thus, future poets will reveal poetic expressions made possible through poetic models presented by the internalized quest of the Romantics. Bloom describes the patterns as a “map of the mind” provided by Wordsworth and Blake for their readers, along with “a profound faith that the map can be put to a saving use” (3).

Heller seizes on the concept of the mind map as product of the Romantic poets' internalized quest to further her standpoint. She perceives the poet's turn inward as the redirection of the traditional quest: “The Romantic poets took the dialectic of self and world, and privileged the former-- the internal area-- as that which contained the true drama of the quest” (*The Feminization* 5). She suggests that internalization has generated an alternative type of heroism defined by “intellectual and visionary endeavors” in contrast to physical strength, which it has “anticipated the feminization of the form” (5). Therefore, in the same vein as the Romantic poets, the female psyche should be mapped to provide literary patterns toward the feminization of the quest-romance for feminine fictions (*The Feminization* 13).

To achieve her quest the female protagonists must grapple with and win over an “internalized combat against an enemy that lives within the female psyche,” in order to confront the demands of successful patriarchal socialization (*The Feminization* 12). Dominating over such a conflict requires that the female protagonists become the subject of the quest. She must be willing to “sacrifice” the image of a male-defined femininity; her quest demands that she create an authentic image for her benefit and that of her community (*The Feminization* 12-13). Heller considers that a “woman’s quest must

propose strategies for escaping debilitating structures, for discovering authentic selfhood, and for claiming the right to take her journey out into the world” (*The Feminization* 13).

Heller’s argument can be applied to the protagonists of Carmen Rivera’s play *La Gringa* and Dolores Prida’s play *Coser y Cantar*. Additionally, the schema of textual characteristics identified by Nicolás Kanellos for native U.S. Hispanic literature is used to illustrate these protagonists quest for subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> Salient characteristics identified in these two works are as follows:

1. Struggle for civil and human right and against racism
2. Working-class posture/ minority consciousness
3. Cultural synthesis, hybridization, and new identities and home spaces
4. Cultural conflict and cultural nationalism, new, hybrid literary characters (23)

Rivera and Prida’s protagonists claim and accept their right to make the journey to self-definition. In *La Gringa*, María was born in New York but racial prejudices there have made her feel foreign in her own country. She hopes to reconcile her identity crisis by exploring her ethnic roots in Puerto Rico. She clumsily struggles to establish a connection to the island through a series of superficial gestures: kissing the earth when she arrives, wearing a jacket decorated with the Puerto Rican flag, and taking a sightseeing tour of the island monuments. María’s quest began with a geological trip, which proves unfulfilling until her uncle Manolo and friend Monchi help her make a psychological connection to the island culture. María takes the first step of her journey

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<sup>13</sup> For a complete list of characteristics on schema, refer to Nicolás Kanellos *Hispanic Immigrant Literature*, p. 23.

although “Society neither expects nor wants her to test her powers, prove her autonomy” (Heller 10).

The element of racism identified by Kanellos in native Hispanic literature is very much part of the discussion in the play. The impetus to María’s subjectivity quest was herself recrimination for accepting to pass as Italian with her ex-boyfriend’s family because being Puerto Rican was unacceptable to them. María also expresses that in New York she is viewed upon as an “exotic” foreigner from the island and a threat to American workers (*La Gringa* 51). In Puerto Rico María experiences another element, cultural conflict, in the form of rejection. When María decides to find employment to stay and live with her relatives, she is told by a prospective employer that she cannot have the position because she is not Puerto Rican. This topic is a source of contention with her cousin Iris who contends that María is not Puerto Rican but American. María’s predicament is one shared by many U.S. Latinos grappling with the synchronization of their own culture and the dominant Anglo culture.

As previously mentioned, María must also undergo a psychological journey to maturity. With the help of Manolo, she is able to make a spiritual and cultural connection to mythology of Puerto Rico. At El Yunque the goddess Atabey welcomes embraces her and gives her a blessing. Iris accepts her and calls her “Boriqua” (76). At the play’s end the spirit of her dead uncle, Manolo gifts her a cultural symbol of the Puerto Rico, his güiro (81). María completes her quest and is at peace with her newfound hybridity. The elements of the feminization of the quest are present in *La Gringa*. María claimed her right to make the quest, in doing so she took action to escape dilapidating structures and seek an authentic self (*The Feminization* 13).

In Prida's *Coser y Cantar* Heller's elements are also present. Prida elects to have her two protagonists make an unconventional subjectivity journey in that they never their New York apartment. They question dilapidating social structures for U.S. Latinas/os and present the theater audiences with a map to exit said structures. Distinct from Rivera's play is that the protagonists, She and Ella do not achieve culminating subjectivity. Heller argues that this should not be considered a failure of women's fiction since women's subjectivity is a process and it "defies conclusion" (18).

Prida's use of language illustrates the hybridity and synthesis of the characters. Their conflict is illustrated by the bilingualism yet separateness of their speech. She speaks mostly English and Ella mostly Spanish; each represent half of a Latina living in the United States. Ella struggles to remain authentically Latina through Spanish and through English She is a reminder that the Anglo culture constructs part of their subjectivity. The times that She and Ella alternate language foretells a future acceptance of one another. Cultural conflict is also evident in the foods that they consume; each claims a national identity through food, Ella craves rice, black beans, and plantains while She suggests raw vegetables, granola, and yogurt.

The play setting is a symbol of cultural conflict and an illustration of internalization of the quest. The apartment is the space where the protagonists expose and work through their inner confusion and the reality of the exterior world is represented by the city sounds coming through the window. Prida anticipates Heller's supposition in *Coser y Cantar* that "the true drama" does occur in the internalization of the quest (*The Feminization* 5). Throughout the play, She and Ella reference a map to help guide them through the city. As Bloom suggests the poet creates a minds map of literary patterns

with the hope that future readers and poets will use them appropriately, Prida's play also provides its audiences a minds map by discussing topics that U.S. Latinas/os struggle to reconcile in their daily lives. They may use the map by deliberating and making life-changing subjectivity decisions.

While the themes of male and female dynamics, feminine sexuality, and dieting may be interpreted as women's concerns, others are not so gender specific: bilingualism and hybrid identities. In this work, Prida's protagonists demonstrate another element of feminizing the quest according to Able, Hirsch, and Langland, the goal of the female hero is plurality as opposed to the individuated self (*The Voyage in Fictions* 10). She and Ella's strive for subjectivity benefits their community; their successes are not autonomous. The methods discussed here are used to analyze the plays further in the following chapters.

## Chapter II. Reconstruction of the myth

“If, however, existing mythology (as defined by patriarchy) is unable to fulfill the increasing demand for women as energetic, and positive figures, then women writers may choose myths and archetypes, historical and cultural heroines, that are different from the traditional ones. They may create new role models for themselves or choose existing models but imbue them with different (sometimes radically different) traits and characteristics.”

--Tey Diana Rebolledo in *Women Singing in the Snow*

### Introduction

Re-interpreting and re-writing historical, mythical and literary icons is a tactic that some Latina playwrights have employed to counter traditional, and more common than not, disparaging narratives ascribed to them. A revisionist theatrical project of this sort highlights the fact that it is only until recent times that feminine representations on the U.S. Latina/o stage have been imagined from a woman's perspective. Previously, these images had almost exclusively been the product of the masculine mind's eye. Such versions typically tended to be self-serving and to uphold notions of male superiority, but more importantly, to reinforce the oppressive patriarchal structures in which they were conceived. The re-conceptualization of such images by Latina playwrights has shattered the status quo and brought forth alternatives to traditional interpretations of these figures, recreated their iconography, and in essence, they have rewritten their mythology. This chapter examines the role that the re-imaginings of myths, mythical, literary, and historical figures portray in the plays of Cherríe Moraga in *The Hungry Woman: a Mexican Medea*, and Odalys Nanín in *The Nun and the Countess*. Discussed first is the Moraga play and then in the latter part of the chapter the Nanín text.

According to Irma Mayorga in, *Homecoming: The Politics of Myth and Location in Cherríe Moraga's The Hungry woman: a Mexican Medea and Heart of the Earth: A Popol Vuh Story*, the function of myths in Moraga's dramatic works is "a viable means through which the legacies of patriarchy, homophobia, and xenophobic nationalisms can be counteracted with feminist visions and queer perspectives" (*The Hungry Woman* 155). Moraga has also written that the objective of her work is "... to right a wrong, a distorted picture of our mexicana/americana selves" (*Out of the Fringe* 290). Here the playwright's purpose is twofold; first, by invoking the contemporary mexicana/americana subject and identifying with her, Moraga emphasizes that although hundreds of years old, such distortions continue to negatively impact U.S. Latina lives. Secondly, she confirms her own commitment to the reconstruction of narratives that are deprecating to women.

In a further description of her plays, Moraga says that they always begin with the introduction of a female body, a "Native and Mestiza" which is the "lens" that guides her writing and her creative viewpoint (*Out of the Fringe* 290). In *The Hungry Woman: a Mexican Medea*, the main character, Medea, becomes that feminine body. Through her, Moraga presents an amalgamation of Euripides' *Medea*, the pre-Columbian myth of creation known as "The Hungry Woman," and the literary mythical figure of La Llorona. The setting of the play is also used to problematize the Chicano Movement's male-created vision of Aztlán, the fabled Aztec place of origin. Moraga's personal feminist slant adds depth to Euripides' dramatic interpretation of the Jason and Medea myth, La Llorona, and Aztlán as *The Hungry Woman* unfolds.

## **Traditional myths**

Although, there is an abundance of symbolism from other myths throughout the play, such as the birth of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war, the dismemberment of his sister Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess, and the Cihuatateo, Aztec women who died in child birth, the inter-textual references of three dominant mythical figures come to rest on the protagonist. Moraga makes the connection between the Hungry Woman, a figure that had existed in the mythology of the new world long before the arrival of the Europeans, the legend of La Llorona, and from the western world, the Greek Medea myth. A general description of the three stories exposes the universality of these feminine archetypes, constructed within patriarchal societies.

The Hungry Woman is a myth of creation, about a woman that incessantly cried out in hunger. She had mouths all over her body, her ankles, knees, wrists, and elbows. The woman lived amongst the spirits, but because there was no food there, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca took her to what seemed to be water beneath the spirit world. They thought she might be able to eat there, but because she floated, they transformed into snakes and wrapped themselves around her arms and legs. They pushed and squeezed her so hard that she broke in two at the waist. They took the bottom half back up to the spirit world and asked what should be done. The other spirits used the bottom half to make the sky. Then they all went back to the water to comfort the woman. They proceeded to make grass and flowers from her skin, the forest from her hair and pools and springs of water from her eyes. They made the mountains from her shoulders and the valleys from her nose. But that did not stop her hunger or her cries. It is said that when the rain falls or when blood runs in the battlefields she drinks and that she eats when people and the

vegetation die. She is never satisfied and the mouths of her body are always snapping open and shut. Her cries for more food may be heard at night when the wind blows (*The Hungry Woman: Myths and Legends* 23-25).

The traditional legend of La Llorona may vary in the details, but the basic storyline remains intact. La Llorona, the weeping woman, is sometimes a seamstress, other times a wife and yet in others a mistress; whatever the circumstance, she is betrayed in love with a man. Distraught by his abandonment she decides to take revenge against him by killing his bloodline, her own children. How she carries out this act of infanticide also changes; sometimes the children are drowned in a stream or a river and in others she stabs them. La Llorona immediately regrets her actions and takes her own life, but because she has murdered her children, she cannot rest peacefully and is destined to roam the earth looking for her dead children. At night, her wailing may be heard calling out to them. *¡Ay mis hijos!* Oh, my children! For this reason, little children are warned against La Llorona, she might mistake them for her lost children and make off with them. Dressed in white, she is beautiful, seduces young men, and may lead them to their ruination. Scholars agree that this is a more contemporary Llorona version, one that evolved in Mexico after the conquest.<sup>14</sup>

Luis Leal further argues that this legend actually has its origins in the pre-Hispanic mythology of various goddesses.

The model of La Llorona is to be found, rather, in pre-Conquest mythology, in the form of several old goddesses, among them the woman

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<sup>14</sup> See Américo Paredes, 1971, 97-107. Luis Leal, 2005, 136. For other Llorona versions see John Bierhorst, 1984.

serpent, Cihuacóatl, who dates back to the time of the Toltecs; Xtabay among the Mayas; Quilaztli (a manifestation of Cihuacóatl); and Coatlicue among the Aztecs. These goddesses, in turn, are derived from the Earth Mother, who appears in a cosmogonic myth transcribed in 1550 from oral tradition.<sup>15</sup> (*Feminism, Nation and Myth* 135)

Leal expounds on the motifs shared by Cihuacóatl and Quilaztli: they both gave birth to twins, they both wear a white dress, carry a cradle, and their moaning and crying is heard at night. Xtabay also wore white and like the modern day Llorona, ensnared men. According to Leal, the most significant of these goddesses was Cihuacóatl. Because the Aztecs as well as other indigenous groups appropriated Cihuacóatl from The Toltec culture, her image underwent various phases of evolution. At the time of the reign of Moctezuma II, she was a woman going about through the night wailing, saying goodbye to her people. “ My beloved sons, now I am about to leave you”<sup>16</sup> (136).

In his essay “Mexican Legendry and the Rise of the Mestizo: A Survey”, folklorist Américo Paredes successfully reconciles Leal’s argument by demonstrating how both European and pre-Colombian myths have influenced the formation of the La Llorona legend through the process of “Spanish-Indian synthesis” (103). He draws attention to the European setting, European values, and the “love-them-and-leave-them” theme found in classical as well as modern European literature, “from Euripides *Medea*

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<sup>15</sup> The Earth Mother appears to be one and the same as the Hungry Woman, where she is identified by the name Atlalteutli. See Luis Leal, 2005, 135.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Leal from Fry Bernardino de Sahagún in *Historia de las Cosas de la Nueva España*, Book VIII, ch. 1 and 3.

to Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*" (103), that are also presents in the legend of La Llorona. Furthermore, he presents an additional mythical figure in which La Llorona legend has "struck deep roots" (103), Matlacihua or Woman of the Nets.<sup>17</sup> The same as La Llorona, Matlacihua seduced men when they were alone along the road or in the fields while they worked. Afterwards, Matlacihua was sometimes benevolent to her lovers and gave them good fortune, but other times she destroyed them (103).

La Llorona and Medea were both callously abandoned by their man. In the case of Medea, it was her husband Jason, of Argonaut fame, who took on a new wife. In Euripides' version Medea and Jason escape to Corinth after Medea tried to help her husband reclaim his right the throne of Iolcus, by killing his uncle, Pelias. While there, King Creon wants Jason to marry his daughter. Blinded by the prospect of gaining social status and power in Corinth, Jason leaves his family. Bitter and angry, Medea pretends to have accepted her fate and sends a gift to his new bride, a dress laced with poison. Both Glauca and her father die when he tries to help her out of the poisoned garment. Afraid that King Creon's subjects will retaliate against his sons, Jason goes to Medea's house to rescue them. But he arrives too late because Medea has killed them to further injure her husband. In Euripides' dramatization, Jason is indeed affected, and Medea takes pleasure in his pain. She escapes to Athens with the bodies of her dead sons in a chariot pulled by flying dragons. At the end of the play, the chorus queries as to how Zeus will judge her (*Jason and Medeia*).

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<sup>17</sup>For more on various manifestations of La Llorona see Américo Paredes, 1971, 103.

## Play summary

Moraga writes that *The Hungry Woman* takes place in “the near future of a fictional past one only dreamed in the Chicana imagination” (*Out of the Fringe* 294). In this fictional space the United States has experienced a racial civil war; the end result is the fracturing of the country into three independent territories; Gringolandia, or “white Amerika,” Aztlán or “Chicano country”, in what was once New Mexico, and the third space is Phoenix, Arizona (294). Phoenix is also referred to as Tamoanchán, meaning “We seek our home”<sup>18</sup> (307). Tamoanchán is the border region between Gringolandia and Aztlán and it functions as the dumping site where the other two territories exile their unwanted homosexual citizens. The play begins with Medea interned in the psychiatric ward of a prison. As the title of the play suggests, and audiences will confirm, Medea has committed the crime of infanticide and therefore is incarcerated. The action takes place both in the present space of the prison psychiatric ward and through Medea’s memories of Aztlán and Tamoanchán, also in the past.

In Aztlán, Medea had been a writer and her husband Jasón a poet. They were also revolutionaries during a civil war and they shared equally in the spoils of that conflict, their own plot of land. However, when Jasón discovered that she was carrying on an

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<sup>18</sup> This significance of Tamoanchán is taken directly from the playtext. Domingo Martínez, on the other hand, makes an etymological analysis where he asserts the literal meaning to be, “lugar del gavilán serpiente,” place of the serpent sparrow hawk, 39. Other scholars describe Tamoanchán as an Edenic garden paradise; see Georges Baudot, Enrique Florescano, and Natalicio Gonzalez. Ironically, Moraga’s Tamoanchán is the exact opposite of paradise. David Carrasco adds a dimension to this fabled garden; as a place of sexual sin connected to pre-Colombian goddesses such as Xochiquetzal.

adulterous love affair with Luna, a woman from Phoenix that he had hired to come do some stonemasonry work, he became angry and jealous and had Medea exiled. Uprooted from her home, Medea and her five-year-old son had to go to Tamoanchán and live with Luna. On the other hand, Jasón was able to conserve his social prestige and the property in Aztlán. Seven years later Jasón was about to lose his claim to Aztlán because he did not hold the required indigenous family blood ties. For this reason he sought custody of his son Alfonso, or as his mother had renamed him, Chac-Mool, messenger of the gods (311). Due to Medea's indigenous bloodline, Chac-Mool had inherited his mother's birthright to Aztlán. Therefore, he suddenly became very valuable to Jasón. Medea did not want to part with her son, so she proposed reconciliation to Jasón. He flirted with the idea, but ultimately was not interested because he planned to marry a much younger Apache girl; unfortunately, for Jasón she was infertile. However, he did offer to keep Medea as his mistress if she left Luna. The foretold tragedy was set in motion when Chac-Mool expressed to Medea that he wanted to go to Aztlán that he wanted to go live with his father.

All roles, with the exception of Chac-Mool are played by women. Four women portray multiple parts, the chorus, the Cihuatateo North, East, West, South and other supporting characters such as Savannah (Luna's girlfriend), Nurse, Jasón, and the border guard. The characters Mama Sal, Luna, and Medea are played by actors interpreting a single role.

## Myths in the text

Querying the myth is an appropriate response when the storyline seems implausible, and its conclusion is unsatisfactory. Moraga asked the question that has been problematic to the traditional versions of the Medea and Llorona myths: Why did they really kill their children? The act of infanticide is too frenzied a reaction that does not fit the situation. In Moraga's own words, "The official version was a lie. I knew that from the same bone that first held the memory of the cuento. *Who would kill their kid over some man dumping them?* It wasn't a strong enough reason" (*Loving in the War Years* 145). She further suggests that if treachery is the motive and infanticide is the chosen revenge, then the betrayal must be for something far more insidious and of a larger scale than mere unfaithfulness. "Well, if traición was the reason, could infanticide then be retaliation against misogyny, an act of vengeance not against one man, but man in general for the betrayal much graver than sexual infidelity; the enslavement and deformation of our sex?" (145). For Moraga that betrayal boils down to patriarchy; her rebuke points out the destructive consequences that the feminine body endures as patriarchy normalizes its notions of motherhood and womanhood for the purpose of setting, limiting, and defining "essential" female behavior.

In the play, Moraga has inverted the traditional modes of myth by retelling La Llorona and the Hungry woman. Medea does commit infanticide, but her motive is not trivial, rather, for Medea it is an act of sacrifice. Her motivation is to prevent the patriarchal indoctrination of Chac-Mool. Therefore, his murder, as argued by Moraga, is

justified.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the traditional Llorona, Medea is not a deranged, jealousy-driven woman caught in a mere sexual competition against another woman, but rather a mother saving her son from patriarchy.

The playwright expands her comments on patriarchy in her writings of the legend of the Hungry Woman. The obvious correlation between La Llorona and the Hungry Woman is that they share the motif of the wailings heard in the wind as both women seek to appease an overwhelming yearning. In addition to relating the creation of the earth and illustrating how it rejuvenates itself, the Hungry Woman myth also portrays the earth mother as a woman with an insatiable hunger for man's blood and flesh. Moraga rejects the latter characterization. In her analysis, the woman's hunger is symbolic of her search of self and her desire to auto-define. Furthermore, Moraga makes a correlation between the mythical figure and contemporary Latinas who defy patriarchal ideology, and are therefore labeled by pejorative adjectives:

In my research, I discovered another story, the Aztec creation myth of “the Hungry Woman”; and this story became pivotal for me, an aperture in my search to unlock la fuerza de La Llorona in our mehicana lives... Who else other than La Llorona could this be? It is always La Llorona's cries we mistake for the wind, but maybe she's not crying for her children. Maybe she's crying for food, sustenance. Maybe que tiene hambre la

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<sup>19</sup> Moraga has written elsewhere on matricide, where she defends Coyolxauhqui for conspiring with her siblings to murder their pregnant mother, Coatlicue to prevent the birth of Huitzilopotchli., the war god, in essence patriarchy See *The Last Generation*. (1993, 73).

mujer. And at last, upon encountering this myth—this pre-capitalist, pre-colonial mito—my jornada began to make sense. This is the original Llorona y tiene mucha hambre. I realized that she has been the subject of my work all along, from my earliest writings, my earliest feminism. She is the story that has never been told truly, the story of that hungry Mexican woman who is called puta/ bruja/ jota/ loca because she refuses to forget that her half-life is not a natural-born fact. (*Loving in the War Years* 146-147)

Moraga's Medea is such a rebel, she is a modern-day Hungry Woman and Llorona; like these mythical figures, she too has incurred society's wrath by refusing to accept institutionalized womanhood as her essential truth, and additionally complicates her situation by rejecting its punishment for her disobedience.

From the beginning of the play Medea makes it known to audiences that the heteronormative life she led in Aztlán with Jasón had been unfulfilling for her. The language she uses tells more than superficial facts; it reveals a feeling of "brokenness" the character embodies when she is living a lie. In the following, Medea recalls in a conversation with her nurse / prison guard how she came to know her lover, Luna:

MEDEA. During the day when Jasón was at work. I would lay my head down on the pillow and put the slices (of cucumber) over my eyelids. They were cool, one on each eye. I could hear Chac-Mool outside talking to the stonemason. It was paradise.

NURSE. The stonemason?

MEDEA. Yes. The woman, the migrant worker, my husband, Jasón hired  
to put in the garden patio.

MEDEA. ...And the stonemason's voice entered me like medicine.

Medicine for my brokenness. (*Out of the Fringe* 299)

The “brokenness” that Medea confesses to results from the feeling of being out of sorts with social and sexual expectations of Aztlán society. Here, Moraga is alluding to Medea’s yearning, like that of the Hungry Woman’s need, of self-definition in contrast with the heteronormative role imposed on her by fellow Chicano revolutionaries. In the excerpt above Medea recalls the events of seven years in the past, but in the play’s present the audience is aware that Medea has acted upon her lesbian desire, that she has stepped out of the Chicano male-vision of womanhood to explore her own version of self. The language used here bridges for the public the close relationship between sexual identity and the perception of self. When Medea becomes conscious of an alternative, she interprets it as a healing power to her fractured state. For Medea, listening to Luna and her son, Chac-Mool, talk while she rested was “paradise.” Luna’s voice became the “medicine” that she longed for.

A direct reference to the myth of the Hungry Woman is raised twice in the playtext; each time the myth is announced by a chorus member. Moraga strategically places the myth in the instances that the characters are questioning womanhood or motherhood as delineated by patriarchy; this goes along with her proposed belief that the insatiable woman is searching for her own understanding of self. In Act One, Scene Eight Cihuatateo East narrates the complete indigenous myth to the audience, but before she starts to speak, the stage direction has Medea and Luna in an embrace. By

introducing the myth at this point, the playwright leads audiences through a dissection of Medea's sexuality. Moraga draws attention to patriarchy's suspicions about the veracity and longevity of a lesbian identity. Immediately after Cihuatateo East finishes the myth, Luna and Medea are shown "in bed, after sex" (320):

LUNA. Tell me who you were with him...

MEDEA. Why?

LUNA. It gives me something...somehow...

I don't know. That I have you that way, like he did, but knowing he  
wasn't—

MEDEA. ...Enough?

LUNA. Yes. (321)

This passage has Luna seeking reassurance that she alone, not Jasón, knows Medea's true self. Her anxiety is well founded, for Jasón has been working on his wife, urging her to "...Give up the dyke..." (312), and arguing that she is now living a lie: "You're not a lesbian, Medea, for chrissake. This is a masquerade" (327). Jasón's arguments seem to be gaining some ground as Medea contemplates what she must do to keep her son. The following illustrates how Medea views her own sexual identity as she argues with Luna:

MEDEA. ...You were born to be a lover of women, to grow hands that  
could transform a woman like those blocks of faceless stone you turn  
into diosas. I, my kind, is a dying breed of female. I am the last one to

make this crossing, the border has closed behind me. There will be no more room for transgressions. (322)

It is revealing that at this point Medea appears to deny herself and is willing to return to her previous state of “brokenness” rather than losing Chac-Mool. But Luna is relentless; she does not allow Medea to give into a patriarchal argument of denial that absolves her of responsibility for their relationship:

LUNA. ... You know lesbianism is a lot like virginity, you can't recycle it. You don't get to say, oops, sorry, I changed my mind, I didn't mean those seven years in her bed. (322)

LUNA. Well, it's too late, Medea. You can't go back there. I know your secrets. Your secrets have been safe with me. All of them, like sacred relics carefully guarded. I watch them spill out of you in our lovemaking... Let me remind you of the first time. The magic. The disappearing act. My hands vanishing inside you, your grito. “Where are your hands?” you cry. They move inside of you and you thank me with your eyes. For this, I forgive you everything. And we start another day. (*Beat*) You've changed, Medea. You don't know it yet, but you won't ever be able to go back to Aztlán or to any man. You've been ruined by me. My hands have ruined you. (323)

These passages expose three distinct characters communicating three separate interpretations of Medea's sexuality. They serve to illustrate the complexities of attempting to fix a one-size-fits-all sexual identity on individuals. While Moraga does not give definite answers that will satisfy the mythical woman's hunger for sexual self-definition, she does prompt her spectators into a re-evaluation of patriarchal sexual assumptions made and imposed upon members of their communities.

The second instance of the Hungry Woman's overt presence is in the text of Act One, Scene Four. In this occasion it is patriarchal motherhood that comes under scrutiny. Moraga's voracious woman problematizes notions of motherhood in an exploration of the patriarchal mother-child bond. In the passage below it appears that the infidelity referred to is the triangle between Luna, Medea, and Jasón, but it speaks of another, one between Medea, Chac-Mool, and Jasón. Here Medea first describes the bond she had with her infant son when the child suckled her breast. She felt a union with him that she describes as an "animal need" that overtook her. Medea laments that the bond was severed when the outside forces of patriarchy penetrate and impose their influence over it:

*A sudden blast of salsa music from a small radio. The Prison Guard enters, announces:)*

PRISON GUARD. The Hungry Woman

MEDEA. It was true what Jasón claimed, that I was unfaithful to him.

True, I was in the midst of an insatiable love affair. No, it did satiate.

Did it begin when my son first put his spoon-sized mouth to my

breast? Yes, there our union was consummated, there in the circle of

his ruby mouth. A ring of pure animal need taking hold of me. It was a

secret Jasón named, stripped to expose us—mother and child—naked and clinging primordial to each other.

JASÓN. I want a wife, Medea. It's not natural!

MEDEA. Each night I could hear Jasón circling outside our bedroom window, over and over again, pissing out the boundaries of what he knew he could never enter. Only protect. Defend. Mark as his domain... (311)

By declaring that he wants a wife, Jasón is logging a complaint against Medea; she is not behaving as a wife should. He names the relationship between Medea and Chac-Mool unnatural; therefore, it is something that needs to be altered. In the following Jasón voices what that change should be: “If you really loved your son, you'd remove him from you tit” (339). Jasón uses the power of patriarchy to negatively affect Medea's experience of motherhood.

In the next passage Medea describes how at the age of three Chac-Mool was already displaying the effects of patriarchy. He rejected her offer to breastfeed while simultaneously discarding his mother; by doing so he makes the final break of their bond:

MEDEA. I never really weaned my son. One day, he just stopped wanting it. It was peer pressure. He was three years old. I call him over to me. “Mijito,” I say, “¿quieres chichi?” He is on his way out to play I remember his playmate, that little Rudy boy at the doorway. And I show Chac-Mool my breast. His eyes pass over me. Lizard eyes. Cold. “Not now, Mom,” he says. Like a man. I knew then that he already

wanted to be away from me, to grow up to suck on some other woman's milkless tit. (312)

The "milkless tit" becomes the image of patriarchy's dominance over Medea's vision of motherhood. When that bond was no longer meaningful to the three-year-old Chac-Mool, Medea is castoff to the silent background of patriarchal motherhood. She comments that the next breast that her son would suckle would be an object of sexual gratification; such an observation conveys Medea's conviction that Chac-Mool would be further influenced by chauvinistic attitudes in Aztlán. Medea insists that such an alteration of ideology is nothing short of treachery to the mother-child relationship, and her solution is to shield Chac-Mool from such manipulations. She says to Jasón, "Betrayal occurs when a boy grows into a man and sees his mother as a woman for the first time. A woman. A thing. A creature to be controlled" (340). Hints of the lengths that Medea will pursue to keep Chac-Mool from adapting to patriarchy become clear in the following: "...but he will leave me as a daughter does, with all the necessary wrenching, and his eye will never see me 'as woman'. I promise you that" (340).

In this case, the insatiable woman is hungry for the brand of motherhood that does not indoctrinate her son against her, one that allows the mother-child bond to grow into something other than what patriarchy dictates or expects. The last seven years that, mother and child have spent in Tamoanchán became an extension of the relationship they shared when Chac-Mool was an infant, but now Medea sees that bond threatened again, by Jasón: "My son needs no taste of that weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and you will not make him one in your likeness!" (339).

In a conversation with his great grandmother (Mama Sal), Chac-Mool indicates that he has not been completely overtaken by the tenets of patriarchy, but that he preserves some of Medea's influence when he challenges the traditional narrative of La Llorona. In the following exchange, not only does he display compassion for the tragic weeping woman, but also accepts that there must be an alternative narrative that reveals an untold story:

CHAC-MOOL. La Llorona never scared me like she's supposed to.

MAMA SAL. No? Even when you was a little escuincle?

CHAC-MOOL. No, I felt sorry for her, not scared. (*pause*) When I was real little back in Aztlán. I used to wake up in the middle of the night just when the wind would kick up and the whole cañon would start crying. I'd go outside and stand out there under the stars and just listen to her. I felt like she was telling me her side of the story. I felt like I was the only one that heard it.

MAMA SAL. Maybe you were. (316)

This exchange is in direct opposition to another in a later scene that suggests that as Medea feared, given the opportunity; her son would embrace the values of patriarchy. Chac-Mool is being interviewed for approval to enter Aztlán. Here Chac-Mool tells the border guard that at the age of four he "was born of" (346) his father when Jasón asked him to flare up his nostrils like a bull and smell his land. He also tells the border guard that he understands that the land is his mother and that he is "beholding only to it" (346). He tells of how he was "stolen away" (346) by Medea to go live with Luna. The guard approves his entrance into Aztlán and declares that he was "caught just in time" (346).

Act Two, Scene Eight opens with Medea nervously going through Mama Sal's bag of herbs as she prepares to consummate her murderous act. Chac-Mool arrives and they fight because he plans to leave for Aztlán the following day. The excerpts below show that the struggle between the two centers on Chac-Mool's entry into corrupting patriarchy and Medea's battle to hold on to his childhood:

CHAC-MOOL. I don't wanna leave you like this.

MEDEA. Now, that's a line I've heard before. But they leave you anyway, don't they? The line-givers.

CHAC-MOOL. It's not a line.

MEDEA. They're all lines, mijito. Rehearsed generations in advance and transmitted into your little male DNA.

CHAC-MOOL. Why you turning on me, Mom?

MEDEA. I think that's the question I have to ask you. (350)

According to Medea, the following signals Chac-Mool's death :

MEDEA. YOU WIN. Vete. (*He doesn't move.*)

Go, Chac-Mool. (*He still doesn't move*)

(*Turning to him*) What? You want my blessing, too? ¡Qué dios te bendiga!

Lo siento mucho, hijo, pero no soy tu mamacita davidosa. (*Grabbing her breast*) The chichi has run dry.

CHAC-MOOL. (*After a beat*): You're crazy. He's right. He told me you

were crazy. He met me at the border. He told me to come with him.

Right then.

MEDEA. You should have.

CHAC-MOOL. I didn't. I didn't because you taught me loyalty. Because I wasn't going to sneak away from you like a punk. When I leave here tomorrow, I'm walking out that door like a man.

MEDEA. A man. (351)

When Chac-Mool exits Medea once again reaches for the sack of herbs. Mama Sal enters and wants to know what she is doing. Stage direction has Medea running herb through her fingers. Images of La Llorona are conjured up as Medea cryptically answers her grandmother: "All the babies, they're slipping through my fingers now. I can't stop them. They've turned into the liquid of the river and they are drowning in my hands" (352). Medea selects an herb and asks Mama Sal for the deadly measurement. Her grandmother protests but in the end gives in "Half of that. Es suficiente" (352).

In the following scene Medea is now dressed in a long white nightgown; on stage is a statue of Coatlicue. In prayer Medea is holding a cup and she explains that it is her sacrifice:

MEDEA. He refuses my gifts and turns to my enemies to make a man of him. I cannot relinquish my son to them, to walk ese camino triste where they will call him by his manly name and he goes deaf to hear it. But the road I must walk is sadder still. (353 - 354)

When Medea feeds Chac-Mool the herb in a bowl of *atole* he immediately falls unconscious. Medea sings to him as she cradles him in her arms: “My sleeping little angel... Sleep, mi diosito. Sleep the innocent sleep of the childless” (355). With Chac-Mool now dead, Medea has become the childless Llorona. Her white gown flows in the wind and she cries out for her son “¡Ay-y-y-y! ¡Mi hi-i-i-i-jo!” and the chorus of Cihuatateo echos her cries “¡Mis hi-i-i-i-jos!” (357). By having the chorus chime in on Medea’s cries, Moraga is drawing the parallels between La Llorona and the Cihuatateo, the indigenous women who died during childbirth are also crying out for their children. The Cihuatateo sacrificed their own lives so that their children might live. On the other hand, Medea’s sacrifice takes the opposing form; she sacrifices Chac-Mool’s life so he might remain innocent of the effects of patriarchy. Like Moraga, Gabriele Schmitz argues that La Llorona’s act of infanticide is justifiable; she compares it to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, where the main character Seth kills her children to save them from slavery (*Transgressing Motherhood-Contesting Patriarchal Construction of Infanticide* 138-140).

Up to the point of Chac-Mool’s death, the basic myths of the Greek Medea and La Llorona have traversed throughout the play hand in hand. It is in the drama’s epilogue that the two icons separate. The traditional Llorona tale ends with her endless cries and search for her children; in contrast, Euripides’ Medea escapes to Athens and the chorus suggests that she will face judgment for her actions. Like Euripides, Moraga also speaks of judgment, but she departs from the traditional tale when she includes forgiveness.

When Luna comes to visit Medea at the insane asylum one last time she brings her a small bundle in Mama Sal’s satchel. As she leaves Chac-Mool suddenly appears,

and a puzzled Medea tells him, “Daily, I try to join him...and my hands are always emptied of the instruments of death. They steal my fingernail file and panty hose and yerbas” (360). Medea wants to know why he has returned and he says he has come to take her home. Finally, he puts the herb Luna has brought for her in a cup of water and gives it to her to drink. He tells Medea the same as she told him, “It’ll help you sleep” (362), as he cradles her in his arms. By allowing Chac-Mool to return and lovingly help Medea into her death, Moraga implies Chac-Mool’s forgiveness of his mother. This act of redemption was foreshadowed when Chac-Mool as a child in Aztlán recognized that La Llorona must have her own version of events and that he alone could hear it. By accepting that La Llorona / Medea must have struggled with an untold account, Chac-Mool is shown to be a compassionate son / sacrifice and his final show of clemency is convincing.

Hispanoamericanas and U.S. Latinas alike have extended this type of revisionist mythologizing to historical figures such as La Malinche, Rosario Castellanos, and Frida Kahlo, to name a few. Cuban-born, U.S. Latina Odalys Nanín, the second playwright discussed here, has chosen to do just that by reconstructing New Spain’s celebrated nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) in her play, *The Nun and the Countess*. Nanín’s dramatization of Sor Juana depicts her as a woman whose demeanor and actions aim to counter seventeenth-century hegemonic social constructs. Analysis of Nanín’s Sor Juana centers on two dominant traits of the on-stage persona; first, as forerunner of modern day feminism, and second, a sexual woman that acts upon her lesbian desires.

In his article, “A Shadowy Sequence: Chicana Textual/Sexual Reinvention of Sor Juana,” Paul Allatson successfully articulates the kinship that has gravitated U.S. Latinas

to Sor Juana and her texts, and their penchant for rewriting her. Allatson cites Octavio Paz's *El laberinto de soledad* (1950) and *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe* (1982), as major points of contention for Chicana/o intellectuals who seek to counter Paz's "pejorative treatment of el Pachuco...its ambivalent allocation of responsibility to La Malinche, and by extension to all Mexican women, for the mixed-racial and split-psychic legacies of Spanish colonization" (4). As well as for his authoritative pronouncements on intimate details of Sor Juana's life. Allatson writes that "Paz's reading of the nun could be construed as a form of patriarchal domestication" (5).<sup>20</sup>

Allatson believes that operating on two levels U.S. Latina reinventions of Sor Juana are salient to understanding why she has been embraced by them. First, they are an attempt to combat Paz's narratives that continue to influence Chicano discourse. Second, they are a cultural and political expression of U.S. minority and gender politics. He writes:

Chicana reinventions of Sor Juana operate in this polemical climate. They announce a transcultural shift from seventeenth-century colonial New Spain, a baroque literary aesthetic and an ecclesiastical and Creole elite framework, to the contested cultural terrains of Aztlán. They imply a negotiation through the Paz-centered discourse of national invention that has impacted on Chicano cultural debates. And they signal a Chicana cultural-political praxis articulated in a context of U.S. minority and gender politics in the wake of earlier civil-rights activism. These entwined

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Electa Arenal praises Paz as a critic of Sor Juana's texts but says that he fails as her biographer because he "worldview" and writes her as "a 'fragile prodigy', 'pretty, virgin, unprotected,' 1980, 554.

projects provide the key to understanding why Chicana writers have appropriated Sor Juana and, despite certain perils in the revisionist enterprise, reinvented her. (4)

A brief discussion on the perils which Allatson states Chicana writers must navigate through when rewriting a historical figure like Sor Juana is appropriate here. First, are the historical and discursive problems of “epistemological anachronism” which may surface while attempting to attribute “late-modern intellectual desire” to historic figures, such Sor Juana, for the purpose of claiming her “a paradigm of feminist subversiveness” (4). If so then, ideological terms such as “feminism” or “lesbian identity” are more appropriate for referencing late-modern and postmodern works rather than those from the Latin American colonial period. Second, Sorjuanista scholarship is given to “ideological overdetermination” where by the radical messaging of her work has undergone domestication. Lastly, due to Sor Juana’s numerous “rebirths in distinct settings and guises,” a “readerly obsession” concerned with “extracting biographical truths from her texts” has resulted (4).

Of Allatson’s concerns, it is the first that seems to present the most reservations to scholars.<sup>21</sup> However, not so much concerned with applying terminology out of epistemological sequence, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel takes issue with the use of the word “feminist” by scholars such as Electa Arenal, who attribute a “feminist

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<sup>21</sup> Octavio Paz expresses similar misgivings to Dorothy Shuns declaring Sor Juana America’s first feminist, 1982, 628. Also, see Judith C. Brown’s explanation of her use of the term “lesbian,” 171 n. 54, and Margret Reynolds on Sappho being Lesbian, 101.

epistemology” to Sor Juana. In Martínez–San Miguel’s estimation, the nun’s writings are more concerned with inserting women into the discourse set forth by her intellectual contemporaries rather than developing knowledge aimed at furthering a feminist epistemology that would affect the hegemonic structures of her time:

Aunque estos estudios destacan tendencias significativas en la obra de Sor Juana, dejar de lado uno de los asuntos centrales en su desarrollo del tema femenino: la articulación de un sujeto intelectual que aspira a acceder a los espacios intelectuales hegemónicos. Lejos de auto-marginarse en la creación de una “escritura femenina” o en la postulación de un modo de saber específicamente femenino, Sor Juana parece dirigirse más a la ampliación del espacio intelectual de su época mediante la inclusión de la mujer en los debates epistemológicos y teológicos que se estaban ventilando en la Universidad, los centros religiosos y en instituciones educativas e intelectuales de la Nueva España. (*Saberes Americanos...* 51)

On the other hand, in “*Early Modern Women’s Writing and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz*” Stephanie Merrim defends the application of “feminism” to Sor Juana’s “*Respuesta*”:

The years 1621, 1666, and 1691, as we have seen, witness feminists doing battle in the same Pauline stone wall or “stumbling block”. Feminism need not have been organized as such, as it is now, to evince either a feminist consciousness or a discursive commonality. (xxiii)

The contrasting viewpoints of these well-respected scholars illustrate the multiple and varied inroads that Sorjuanista scholarship has experienced, particularly in the latter

part of the twentieth century. Although, for many, the only truths accepted about the historical person that lived are those that may be verified in her texts. For example, Electa Arenal complains, “But critics who focus upon her gender have spun mythologizing webs. The story of her fame, her biography, and her critics, full of unavowed and unrecognized preconception and prejudices...” (“Comments on Paz’s Juana Ramirez” 553). Despite his reservations on referring to her as a feminist, Paz did recognize Sor Juana as a proto-feminist; but he went to great lengths to explain away any specter of same-sex attraction she might have felt towards her friend María Luisa, the countess of Paredes:

La hipótesis que acabo de esbozar no excluye necesariamente la existencia de tendencias sáficas entre las dos amigas. Tampoco las incluye. Sobre esto es imposible decir algo que no sea una suposición: carecemos de datos y documentos. Lo único que se puede afirmar es que su relación aunque apasionada, fue casta. (*Trampas* 287)

Given the controversy among critics, epistemological uncertainties about reinventing Sor Juana persist. Questions abound, such as how can U.S. Latinas write feminisms and homoerotic desire into the narrative about Sor Juana? Amy Kaminsky offers an insightful argument in her analysis of Uruguayan exile Cristina Peri Rossi’s work, *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers*; she argues for a change of approach to reading feminisms and lesbian identity in the works of some writers. Kaminsky points out the error of seeking a “unitary identity” in Latin American texts because this is a U.S. practice that holds individual identity in high esteem: “...a tradition that has by now been redesigned so that the body of the individual

is as highly valued as the mind that has been abstracted from it” (116). This single method of reading presents a problem when it does not take into account Latin American writers such as Peri Rossi, who “...represents the fragmented self in exile, and her political culture posits an ideal identity that is collective” (117). Therefore, Kaminsky reminds us that the writer’s politics, sexuality, or social class may not always be represented in the text: “An all-encompassing theory based on a mathematical model of elegant simplicity may be an unachievable goal” (117). She suggests that in the absence of a defined writer identity, texts may be read as feminist or lesbian when they take on an oppositional position through their language, “...which for Latin American writers, as for North American lesbian writers, is essential” (117). Kaminsky’s observations become pertinent in Paz’s reading of Sor Juana, because as Allatson points out, when he writes about her in *Trampas* Paz seems oblivious to the assumptions he makes about Sor Juana, for example: “La indudable atracción que sintió hacia algunas mujeres pudo haber sido una sublimación de una imposible pasión por un hombre que su estado de monja le prohibía” (186), or “...el mal de sor Juana no era la pobreza sino la riqueza: una libido poderosa sin empleo” (286) and lastly, “es imposible, de nuevo, extraer del examen de esos poemas conclusiones acerca de sus íntimas tendencias eróticas” (299). Paz is unwittingly suggesting the possibility that the author’s intimate desires may be embedded in her texts, and that a reader may come away with an undisclosed meaning from them (“A Shadowy Sequence” 7).

Furthermore, Allatson views this argument as, rather than being effectively convincing, to be more telling of Paz and the prejudices with which he approaches his subject: “The purported impossibility of extracting the truth about Sor Juana’s libidinal

life appears instead as the impossibility on Paz's part of countenancing or tolerating erotic breaches in the androcentric, heteronormative bodily logics he takes for granted" (7). Allatson is in good company in his criticism. Chicana writer Alicia Gaspar de Alba has made similar observations; in the postscript of her novel, *Sor Juana's Second Dream: A Novel*, she rejects Paz's interpretation of Sor Juana: "Needless to say, my views are radically different from those of Octavio Paz and the homophobic "Sorjuanistas" he represents..." (460). In Gaspar de Alba's opinion Paz's and the Sorjuanista scholars' attitudes are complicit in advancing "a patent homophobia, outweighed only by Mexican nationalism, that must deny or justify or pathologize this crucial aspect of Sor Juana's subjectivity" (460).

Discussing her research for the *Second Dream*, Gaspar de Alba echoes Kaminsky's premise that in the absence of complete certainty, literary works may be read as lesbian or feminist texts when the language associated with such political positions are present. She writes, "Paz's work challenged me to delve deeper into the baroque structures of her verse,... proved to me that, in fact, Sor Juana did leave us ample evidence of her desires, cloistered though they may have been, even to herself" (460). She adds that multiple feminist studies and critical readings of Sor Juana's work allowed her to "to place her squarely within the theoretical and epistemological framework of contemporary feminist discourse" (460). Perhaps anticipating accusations of epistemological anachronism, Gaspar de Alba gets ahead of the criticism and reveals a visitation from Sor Juana that grants her authority to retell the nun's story, to reconstruct her myth. "Tell my story, Sor Juana says, you who can tell it in a language less veiled, you who have no Inquisition guarding your eyes and tongue" (460). Latina writers such

as Gaspar de Alba and Pat Mora have taken advantage of the cacophony evident in epistemological debates and create their own roadmap towards the reinvention of the myth of historical figures such as Sor Juana, and imbue them with traits and characteristics that patriarchy denied them through the process of paternal domestication. Through the U.S. Latina enterprise of reimagining historical icons, a space is created in which they articulate the polemics of gender, sexual identity and politics that are relevant to their own experience of minority relations in American society (Allatson 4).

### **Play summary**

Based on *Sor Juana's Second Dream*, Nanín's *The Nun and the Countess* dramatizes salient episodes of Sor Juana's life, such as her great friendship with the countess of Paredes, María Luisa de Gonzaga, the death of her mother, the countess's departure, the events that finally brought her under the scrutiny of the Inquisition, and her renunciation of all intellectual pursuits. The nun's voice comes through in dialogue, sometimes monologue, which in some instances are based on her poetry and *La Respuesta*. Some historical figures, Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas of New Spain, her confessor Antonio Nuñez de Miranda, and the Bishop of Puebla Manuel de Santa Cruz are principle characters. Other characters are Melchora, the mother superior, a slave / gift from Sor Juana's mother, Francisca, and Concepción, an indentured servant to the convent who performs scribe tasks for her. The play begins after the arrival of the new viceroy to New Spain and husband to María Luisa, in 1680. The set oscillates between Sor Juana's private quarters, a library, a bedroom, a kitchen, and a salon where she entertains visitors. Because she is a cloistered nun, an iron grille separates Sor Juana from

outside contact. She is allowed to leave the convent only to tend to her dying mother. On the return trip from her mother's farm, Sor Juana stops at María Luisa's home, where a sexual encounter ensues between the two. Within these spaces, the political intrigues of church hierarchy and sexual power struggles are played out. Institutional patriarchy is represented by Melchora, the Archbishop of New Spain, Bishop of Puebla, and father Núñez de Miranda. Sor Juana's resistance to this oppression is facilitated by her friendship to the Vicereine. The courts protection allows her to advance a feminist and homoerotic discourse. All this changes for her with the installation of the new Archbishop, and she becomes vulnerable to church hierarchal politics.

### **Sexual Juana**

Before a word is uttered, it becomes undeniably obvious to spectators that the Sor Juana they are about to experience is very unlike the historical nun that traditional narratives have mythologized. In her private living quarters Sor Juana sets down a book, goes to her telescope to study the night sky, and then climbs into bed. She moves under the covers and begins to "moan with pleasure" (1). From the shadows enters her indentured servant, Concepción. As she watches the figure moving under the sheets, she also begins to touch herself. She tries to join Sor Juana in bed, and she is promptly rejected by Sor Juana. As a reprimand Sor Juana threatens to send her away from the convent:

SOR JUANA. Please, do not force me to do this. I care for you but this  
can never happen again. Please, leave.

CONCEPCION. I'll never understand this God of yours!

SOR JUANA. My dear girl if I ask you to leave, it is not because of what you have done but because of how weak I have been.

Nanín's portrayal of Sor Juana struggling to reconcile the contradiction between her vow to live a chaste life and her carnal desires is in direct opposition to the traditional narrative that rejects and negates the notion of the nun as a sexual woman. For example, Paz argues that the historical Sor Juana entered the convent because of her love for intellectual pursuits, rather than any abhorrence she may have felt towards men, or due to an affinity she may have felt for women (158):

El estado religioso fue la neutralización de su libido. En su jerarquía de valores el conocimiento estaba antes que el sexo porque sólo por el conocimiento podía neutralizar o trascender su sexo. Cualquiera que hayan sido las causas psicológicas de su actitud, toda su vida estuvo movida por la voluntad de penetrar en el mundo del saber: un mundo masculino.

*(Trampas 159)*

Paz's language makes clear that the symbolic neutralization that he believes the nun's habit performed on Sor Juana's femaleness simultaneously divested her of sexuality. By introducing a sexual Sor Juana, Nanín challenges Paz's authoritative imagination of the historical Sor Juana. The reinvention of Sor Juana as a sexual woman with homoerotic desires opens up an alternative narrative that recounts the historical presence of same-sex relationships.

The sexual tension between Sor Juana and the countess are evident from their first meeting, when Countess María Luisa asks Sor Juana to compose poetry. The nun begins to write at will a poem that she entitles "The Portrait of a Beauty" (6). At this first

meeting formalities are also dropped, the countess calls the nun Juana, and Sor Juana gives María Luisa the pet name, Lysi, which they will keep as a secret between them. Guarding the secret is an instrument of flirtation between them that implies a shared intimacy:

SOR JUANA. The Egyptian goddess Isis like yourself was bestowed with both wisdom and beauty. By adding the letter L it becomes our secret.

MARIA LUISA. Calling me by a name of a Goddess in secret pleases me.

*(They look at each other intensely, beat change)... (8)*

Nanín uses an interesting juxtaposition technique where at one stage point Sor Juana delivers a monologue; when her light blacks out, the Bishop of Puebla and Father Miranda enter at another point carrying on a conversation. Then a pin light illuminates Sor Juana at her desk, and the action alternates between monologue and dialogue. The bishop and Father Miranda are discussing the intrigues of Church politics and the unwanted attention that Sor Juana's writing has brought her. Sor Juana on the other hand directs her monologue to the absent Lysi. The contrast between power and rebellion illustrates the complaints that the church patriarchy had against her, and how Sor Juana allows herself the luxury of expressing love through her poetry while opposing institutionalized oppression. Her indulgence comes with a price, for in the speech Sor Juana is still struggling with her desires and reveals that she whips herself as punishment:

SOR JUANA. I knew the minute I saw that comet three days before your arrival, that its tail of light was blazing temptation into my heart. I have prayed, meditated and scourged myself like never before till stripes of blood soak through my tunic in remonstrance of this

pernicious inclination. Yet, I kneel and gaze out through my window on those volcanoes only to see myself and you in them. I am as Popocatepetl, smoldering silent and covered with snow and I speak to you Ixtaccihuatl, my lady in the language of smoke. What other language can my heart dare speak to you? Let my quill take flight in you Lysi. (8-9)

BISHOP OF PUEBLA. Father Miranda since Fry Payo's replacement by our present Viceroy Count de Paredes, your dear Sor Juana has become more impassioned and free with her quill. Our new Archbishop Aguiar y Seijas has taken it as a personal offense to the church. You know how he detests women in general. (9)

SOR JUANA. Este amoroso tormento que en mi corazón se ve, sé que lo siento, y no sé la causa por que lo siento. (9)

FATHER MIRANDA. Don Manuel as Bishop of Puebla you have also like myself known Sor Juana when she lived at the Palace, back then under the protection of the viceroy de Mancera. Sor Juana's scribbling through the years have become more impassioned but she has never offended the church to the point of involving the Inquisition. She is a lost soul and needs much guidance. (9)

SOR JUANA. Let my love be ever doomed if guilty in its intent, for  
loving you is a crime of which I will never repent. (10).

Though the salon where Sor Juana entertains her guest offers no privacy, María Luisa and Sor Juana do share a moment in an abstract space that begins similar to the monologue/dialogue combination above. Sor Juana sits at her desk writing a letter to the countess after a disagreement. María Luisa reads the letter aloud; they walk toward each other but are separated by the grille; their conversation comes in excerpts from love letters to one another. The dialogue below portrays Sor Juana's relationship to be intense; however, due to the restrictions of a cloistered nun, it remains chaste. Sor Juana's tone is changed; she no longer expresses her desires in terms of sinfulness and is more accepting of her emotions:

SOR JUANA. Enough of suffering my love enough: let jealousy's vile  
tyranny be banned, let no suspicious thought you calm corrupt with  
foolish gloom by futile doubt enhanced, for now this afternoon, you  
saw and touch my heart, dissolved and liquid in your hands. (29)

MARÍA LUISA. ...You see, I can no longer tolerate this grille between  
us. The last few nights, I have been visited by you. In my dreams, I  
can smell the incense that you burn when you write. I feel the pressure  
of your quill on my skin and your verses flow across my body. (30)

SOR JUANA. We are like the sea and the earth both bound and separated  
by our choices. Hear me with your eyes, Lysi. I am a poet trapped in a  
nun's habit. My body is neuter, abstract until that afternoon when I felt

your eyes piercing through my scapular and straight into my heart.

(30)

If Sor Juana and María Luisa had never become lovers, Nanín would have fulfilled patriarchy's narrative of a platonic love between the two. This narrative excludes all possibility of homoerotic love. Paz describes their relationship as a deep love between two friends in the following: "Transposición y sublimación la amistad amorosa entre sor Juana y la condesa fue la transposición; la sublimación se realizó gracias y a través de la concepción neoplatónica del amor-amistad entre personas del mismo sexo" (*Trampas* 286). But Nanín's characters did share one night in María Luisa's house, when Sor Juana was returning to the convent from the family farm after her mother's funeral. By having the characters meet in the carnal sense, Nanín continues the U.S. Latina tradition of de-centering the myth of the historical figure:

MARIA LUISA. This dream is real as real as the touch of my lips on yours. (*kisses her*) Unlace my tunic.

SOR JUANA. My God, I'm not dreaming.

MARIA LUISA. What else can I give you my tenth muse, my patron saint of scholars.

SOR JUANA. If I could forget the devil and the priest who guard my eyes...

SOR JUANA. If I could turn myself into a bee and free this soul, (*climbs on top of her*) nothing can save you from my sting. (51)

Sor Juana's love affair comes to a foreseeable end when the countess returns to Spain. As they say farewell they profess their love for one another. María Luisa demands

that Sor Juana will not love another, and Sor Juana wonders how she may love again without her heart (54). Without María Luisa's protection, Sor Juana faces the Inquisition, which has compiled a list of charges, heresy, disobedience, defiance, notoriety, illicit visits, and physical contact. Not satisfied that the lovers have been permanently separated, Father Miranda demands Sor Juana's total renunciation of her love affair in order to come closer to God. Sor Juana replies that it is in her love of María Luisa that she has been closest to God (61). The Bishop of Puebla, on the other hand, is most eager to learn the extent of Sor Juana's supposed relations with the countess. The Inquisition's persecution of Nanín's Sor Juana suggests that she is being pursued for far more than just her quest of knowledge, or her indulgence in secular writing; it also illustrates patriarchy's punishment for her sexual transgression.

Allatson writes of "lacunae" in Paz's argument about lesbian sexuality (8). Though his observations are directly linked to the historical Sor Juana, they bring a general clarity to patriarchy's motives for ignoring lesbian desire, therefore keeping the lesbian invisible and by extension, non-existent. Furthermore, they justify the necessity of the mythic reinvention, while they explain the appropriation of, and U.S. Latina identification with, such historical figures. The first of these seemingly intentional lacunae is that the lesbian dislocates the terms by which active and passive gender principles are understood in Latin American social economies (8). In Allatson's words, "Lesbian desire is unimaginable both in physical relation to the ideals of male penetrative and female penetrable sexuality, and in terms the gendered conventions governing social relations, conventions that her public appearance would undermine and threaten" (8). The second motive is that the lesbian has a presence only if a historical document verifies her

existence: "...a viewpoint sustained only by glossing over the patriarchal and institutional regulations responsible for the pervasive textual silence with which desire between women has been treated in western historical, literary, ecclesiastical, juridical, and medical venues for centuries" (8). By staging a sexual Juana, Nanín challenges social invisibility and the textual silencing of female homoerotic desire.

### **Sor Juana feminist**

As previously discussed, questions about whether the historical Sor Juana may be defined as feminist center on whether a modern-day understanding of feminisms may be applied to seventeenth-century works. Nanín leaves little doubt that that should be the case; her on-stage portrayal of the seventeenth-century nun is infused with contemporary feminism. At their first meeting Sor Juana recites, "Hombres necios que acusáis la mujer sin razón, sin ver que soís la ocasión de lo mismo que culpáis" (3), which she describes as her "philosophical satire" (4). This implies that Sor Juana views herself as an active participant of knowledge production. María Luisa also speaks in contemporary feminist terms: "They create us in their own image and yet they want us to resemble the Virgin Mary" (4). Together they support rebellion against women's oppression and are aware of the power of knowledge. They see rebellion as the method for attaining knowledge, and Sor Juana is positioned as the patron saint, and inspiration of rebellious women:

SOR JUANA. I'll remove my mourning veil so I may have some wine.

MARIA LUISA. That's better. Now, I can see your eyes. (beat) Let's make a toast! To your sacrifices, to your knowledge and to your rebellion. (drinking)

SOR JUANA. (laughs) If rebellion were a holy thing, Señora, then I should be a saint.

MARIA LUISA. Then you should be canonized. Let's toast to that. Santa Juana Inés de la Cruz, patron saint of women rebles. (47-48)

Furthermore, the women criticize patriarchy's control over and method of dispensing knowledge in New Spain; in this epoch a formal education is reserved for males only. Sor Juana describes how she wants upon her death the ashes of her organs, except her sexual ones, scattered over the university. In this way, Nanín has taken Sor Juana to the institution she had always wanted to enter to prove that women, like men, are worthy of an education. María Luisa anticipates the future generations of women scholars that will study Sor Juana's works at said institution. She makes herself responsible for safeguarding the nun's works for posterity by publishing them:

SOR JUANA. What kind of Saint will I be, Señora?

MARIA LUISA. The patron saint of women scholars and since your saint day is chosen on the day of your death...what should be your saint day?

SOR JUANA. Surely the day of my death will be upon your departure, Señora. When is that famous day of my death?

MARIA LUISA. I depart on April 28<sup>th</sup> if there aren't any delays.

SOR JUANA. Then April 28<sup>th</sup> shall be my day, day of las rebeldes, of women scholars with a brain to use it whenever they see fit. And on my death, may my internal organs except for my sexual ones that should be burned and the ashes cast into the air, be distributed to all

the universities in the realm to prove that women are indeed like men.

That anatomy is not destiny!

MARIA LUISA. (applauding her) Bravo, bravissimo! (she kneels in front of her as she says these words she rises and kisses her on the way up reaching her lips) And I will kneel and kiss your feet and print your words so that all future generations will have access to your ideas, to your verses to your everlasting passion... (48-49).

Belilla, Sor Juana's niece, replaced Concepción as the nun's assistant. At the time that Sor Juana is preparing her defense against the Bishop of Puebla, she asks Concepción to help her gather the sources she will need: *Concerning Famous Women* by Bocaccio, *The book of the City of Ladies* by Pizan, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, Kircher's *Nature's Magnetic Realm*. In awe of her aunt's intellectual skills, Belilla confesses that she wishes to be like her. By suggesting that Sor Juana is the foundation, Nanín has located her in the position of the founding feminist:

BELILLA. Tía, I wish I could be like you. That's why I entered the convent.

SOR JUANA. My dear Belilla, I pray that you won't have a life like mine. It's a harsh and lonely one.

BELILLA. But you are the brick Tía, to the foundation we must all continue to build on.

SOR JUANA. A brick Belilla? Interesting metaphor. (58)

When Sor Juana is being questioned by the Inquisition, the Bishop of Puebla asks if she had disobeyed Father Miranda's warnings against composing poetry and other secular writings. She defends herself by crediting God for her intellectual aptitude; by doing so Sor Juana challenges the authority of the church hierarchy because a power greater than theirs has bestowed her with the gift of reason. Not only is her inclination to write a God-given gift, but she pronounces it "natural." Here Nanín has given Sor Juana the power to define herself outside the parameters delineated by the social constructs of her time. In the following Sor Juana reiterates an earlier observation, that intellectual ability is not exclusive to men:

SOR JUANA. My Holy Father knows that I have prayed for God to dim the light of my reason, for there are those who would say that such knowledge does injury to women. My prayers have not been answered. Only God know why and for what purpose he has placed this natural impulse in me. (63)

After the Audencia has passed its sentence on Sor Juana, and her books, writing instruments, and study have been stripped from her, Sor Juana receives a copy of her published edition from María Luisa. She takes the book from Belilla, kisses it, cradles it, and cries out in a desperate rant:

SOR JUANA. How dare you remove my voice? Why don't you just cut out my tongue, pluck out my eyes and slice off my fingers. Without my quill I am blind, deaf and mute. I'm nothing without my voice. (66)

Proceeding from this point as though Sor Juana is without voice is a bit disingenuous, for by dramatizing the seventeenth-century nun, Nanín has in fact given Sor Juana the voice to articulate a story that had been absent from her myth. Sor Juana's rage then serves another purpose; it is the license authorizing Nanín to place her in full view with an alternative narrative. Nanín is free to use the contemporary tools of language, to go against the epistemological grain concerned with an encompassing theoretical model: to rewrite her as a lesbian and as a feminist. Cherríe Moraga's rewriting of the mythical Llorona, Medea, the Hungry Woman and Odalys Nanín's reconfiguration of Sor Juana are advancing the U.S. Latina project to re-imagine these icons in a non-traditional context constructed by women. Moraga and Nanín are in fact taking Tey Diana Rebolledo's advice, and are reinventing the role models missing from tradition.

### Chapter III. Entre familia: re-imaginings of subjectivity

“...we break the false mirrors in order to discover the unfamiliar shadows, the inner faces...”

--Gloria Anzaldúa in *Making Face, Making Soul*

“You can see yourself in there... in the darkest part. It's like you got other people living inside you”

--Lupe in *Shadow of a Man*

#### Introduction

From the reinventions of mythical icons to the re-imagining of contemporary women, the Latina struggle for self-definition continues to reshape on-stage feminine representations. Playwrights' active opposition to patriarchal notions of womanhood includes the reassessment of the nuclear family, which consequently, has traditionally positioned women as subordinate in their relationships to men. This familial male/female hierarchy locks Latinas into submissive mother, wife, daughter, girlfriend roles. Early on in the *Teatro Chicano* movement, Chicanas were typically cast as such; in these roles, their primary function was to provide a backdrop for the more active male characters. In her essay, “The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, ‘Race’, and Class,” Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano explains the intertwined relationship of the Chicano theater movement with the civil rights Chicano Movement: “The Chicano theatre movement can only be understood in relation to the larger political and cultural movement of which it was a part” (389). The essayist reiterates the initial goals of the *teatro* movement, as raising social awareness and initiating social action. In the process, the *teatros* were making theater accessible to a Chicano working-class audience, validating Chicano

culture, and to presenting authentic representations of Chicano social and historical experience (389).

According to Yarbro-Bejarano, the Chicano movement lacked cohesiveness and *teatro* groups were a microcosm of the “conflicts and contradictions of the larger movement” (390). Furthermore, she describes how in the cultures of the Chicano theater and the Chicano civil rights movement they envisioned themselves “in opposition to Anglo-American culture, which was perceived as materialistic and impersonal” (390). Yarbro-Bejarano acknowledges that the stress on Chicano culture was important to the community because it created a source of pride necessary to counteract “the years of lived experience in a society permeated with degrading stereotypes of Mexicans” (390). However, she highlights the unintended repercussions that cultural nationalism fostered: a fixed notion of culture and “the uncritical affirmation of the family and gender roles” (390). By default, the unchallenged notion of the traditional family led to the “reinscription of the heterosexual hierarchization of male/female relationships” (390). The family became by extension *la causa* of the movement, or as described by Elizabeth Jacobs, the movement adopted the “*familia* ideology” (*Mexican American Literature* 109).<sup>22</sup> To question or challenge the movement’s ideology was equal to being disloyal to the family. Accusations of being *malinchistas* were often used to silence women who raised concerns.<sup>23</sup> They became simultaneously suspect as traitors to the family and to the

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the historical networks between the family, community, and politics. see *compadrazco* in Alicia Arrizón 1999, 8-9, Ruiz 1998,16, Segura and Pierce 1993. Also see *mutualistas* in Ruiz , 1998, 86-87.

<sup>23</sup> For more on *La Malinche* as signifier of treachery. see Yarbro-Bejarano, 1986, 392-394.

Chicano Movement, because they had been corrupted by “foreign or bourgeois influences that threaten to destroy their people” (The Female Subject 393). Within this line of thought, the male became the dominant figure in the Chicano Movement, in the *teatro* culture, and remained so in the private space of the traditional family. Yarbrow-Bejarano argues that playwright Luis Valdez and El *Teatro Campesino* perpetuated “the power relations of sexual difference through the exclusive representation of the male subject and the relegation of women to the status of Other...” (The Female Subject 392).

Latinas in theater understood that this narrative needed a counter strategy. A tactic employed by playwright Cherríe Moraga was to write the feminine subject by redefining the family. In *Loving in the War Years*, she challenges the traditional notion of family:

Family is *not* by definition the man in a dominant position over women and children. Familia is cross-generational bonding, deep emotional ties between opposite sexes and within our sex. It is sexuality that involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm. It springs forth from touch, constant and daily. The ritual del beso en la mejilla and the sign of the cross with every coming and going from the home. It is finding familia among friends where blood ties are formed through suffering and celebration shared.

The strength of our families never came from domination. It has only endured in spite of--it like our women. (102-103)

This chapter explores the ways in which the play *Shadow of a Man* by Cherríe Moraga problematizes patriarchal constructs of women’s identity within the traditional Chicano family and provides a space to explore non-traditional models of Chicana/Latina

subjectivity. Moraga writes that sexism; "...lives and breathes in the flesh and blood of our families, even in the name of love" (*Loving* 100).

According to Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, in *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman*, the family unit has two primary functions: reproduction and socialization of its members. Socialization consists of "the transmission of the culture and values of the group" (97). Mirandé and Enríquez dispute the passive and powerless Chicana stereotype and argue that she has power in her domestic domain. They describe her as the backbone of the family, who is in charge of defusing the cultural beliefs and values to the new generations. Furthermore, Mirandé and Enríquez state that the Chicana is responsible for the "provision of needed warmth, support, and affection for family members..." (116), concluding, "...although the Chicano family is ostensibly patriarchal, it is in fact mother centered" (117). As proof they point to the power women have within their "respective spheres" (117). What Mirandé and Enríquez have failed to recognize is that this so-called power is restricted to and limited to a familial space and, more importantly, that the diffusion of cultural values and beliefs are designed to reinforce patriarchal doctrine. By definition, such structures are limiting and oppressive to women; they reinforce men's place within the hierarchy. What's more, Mirandé and Enríquez's choice of words in their description of a mother's tasks require closer examination; they state that women are responsible for providing "needed warmth, support, and affection" to their children. The conflation of emotional ties and male-dominant tenets uphold the propagation of patriarchal ideology and preserve the status quo.

Moraga warns against this very effective tool when she states that sexism occurs even in the name of love. Chris Weedon echoes this view point in *Feminist practice and*

*Poststructuralist Theory*, when she observes that the warmth and security of a family provides a seductive picture that continues to persuade women's participation in a social contract that is oppressive to them (14-15). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak describes the family as the location of women's patriarchal indoctrination by means of sentiment. In *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Spivak writes that the family is "the machine for the socialization of the female body through affective coding" (82). Therefore, being loyal to the family structure equals securing the transmission of patriarchal constructs.

Commenting on Spivak's observation, literary critic Elizabeth Jacobs adds that the Chicano family "mirrored this kind of socialization, reproducing traditional gender roles and male dominance, and attributing to women moral and spiritual attributes most suited to the private, domestic arena" (*Mexican American Literature* 100).

In *Shadow of a Man*, Moraga de-stabilizes masculine authority and the traditional family by disengaging the male figures from the day-to-day events of the Rodriguez household. Her female characters' voices expose the oppressive socialization of women and interject alternative feminine representations that operate against the grain of patriarchal ideology in the Chicano cultural imagination. In the introduction of *Shattering the Myth: Plays by Hispanic Women*, Linda Feyder observes that the title of the play "suggests the omniscient and weighty presence of men in the lives of the female characters..." as well as from "Father as deity," which is represented by religious symbols, nuns, and priests (6). Although male agency is curtailed in this play, the women's internalization of patriarchal power looms over them. However, as the action progresses the female characters confront the shadow of patriarchy as they explore auto-definition.

In *Contemporary Latina/o Performing Arts of Moraga, Tropicana Fusco, and Bustamante*, Leah Garland argues that Moraga's writing stance derives from multiple marginalized locations, and that a call for social activism exists in both her prose, as well as in her dramatic production. It then becomes critical to look upon her theatrical works as a means to "re-imagine subjectivity within the cultural imaginary" (42). This type of re-imagination is arrived at by contrasting the traditional woman's role within the family to alternative ones envisioned and articulated by the feminine characters. *Shadow's* women illustrate a divide that runs across generational lines with two sets of sisters. The two older women, Rosario and Hortensia, struggle to fit within patriarchy's fixed notion of femaleness. On the other hand, the two younger sisters, Leticia and Lupe, demonstrate an urgency to negotiate the fluidity of identity by questioning tradition and attempting to take control of the construction of their own subjectivity.

### **Play summary**

*Shadow of a Man* is set in the Rodriguez home of 1969 Los Angeles. Hortensia is married to Manuel; their children are Rigo, Leticia, and Lupe. Early in the play Rigo is married off-stage, but he never actually appears in the play. He, his wife, and male child are only referred to in the conversations among Rodriguez family members. Other characters are Rosario, Hortensia's sister, and Manuel's friend, Conrado.

The drama begins with twelve-year-old Lupe in front of a mirror searching her reflection for answers as she struggles to make sense of personal fears and uncertainties. Audiences soon learn that Lupe has secrets, but in this, she is not alone; the entire family grapples with tensions and secrets of their own. Manuel and Rigo have a contentious

relationship; the root of the matter is that Manuel suspects that Rigo questions his father's masculinity. Although Manuel's suspicions are never confirmed, what he is reacting to and coping with is the unrequited love that he feels for Conrado. Manuel's inner struggle negatively affects all relationships with his family.

The marital conflicts between Hortensia and Manuel provide the backdrop for the interaction that takes place between the women. It is through the negotiating of familial situations that Moraga creates for the female characters a space to explore alternative subjectivity options to scripted patriarchal feminine roles. The tone of their conversations pivots from the very serious to the playful. The strength of the play comes from the interaction among the women as they survive despite the toxic familial drama created by Manuel and Conrado. The play ends as it began, Lupe gazing into the mirror. She is no longer questioning or seeking answers; instead she makes personal decisions. The ending implies that Lupe, although the youngest is well on her way to constructing a realistic and tenable subjectivity.

The play was first developed by Moraga at an INTAR workshop in 1983-1984. In 1990, it was directed by María Irene Fornés for Women in the Arts (BRAVA) and the Eureka Theatre Company of San Francisco (*Contemporary Latina/o Performing* 42).

### **The women of *Shadow***

Since the female characters of *Shadow* are imbued with both traditional and non-traditional aspects, a clear-cut division between the two generations of women cannot be pinpointed. Nonetheless, Leticia and Lupe, the younger characters are more open to exploration of alternative definitions of womanhood, while Rosario and Hortensia

grapple with the cultural past of their gender. Of the two Rodriguez sisters, seventeen-year-old Leticia is the character that is the most vocal against hierarchal social paradigms. Her revolt is directed at the racial and class inequalities rooted in U.S. culture and the sexism in Chicano culture. She challenges the expectations and the prescribed gender role that her family has shaped for her. Much to the disdain of her mother, when Leticia makes her entrance she is wearing an outfit described as “late sixties radical Chicana attire: tight jeans, large looped earrings, an army jacket with a UFW [United farm Workers] insignia on it” (*Shattering the Myth* 16). Hortensia remarks, “Allí viene la política,” and then to Leticia she says, “I told you I don’t want you to wear esa chaqueta” (16). Leticia’s clothing communicates opposition to the conventional. Hortensia, who represents tradition, is threatened by her daughter’s politicization. Leticia sees her affiliation with the Chicano Movement as both an avenue to express her dissatisfaction and a move towards destabilizing the status quo of her private and public spheres.

With the exception of an instance where her father, Manuel, chastises her for defending her mother during one of the parents’ numerous altercations, he has minimal interaction with Leticia. Manuel is self-absorbed with his own sexual identity crisis. However, this one occasion is loaded with the specter of cultural sexism. When Leticia wants to hear from her mother’s own voice that Manuel has not struck her, he angrily accuses her of overstepping her place as a woman by challenging him like a man would. “You wanna defend your mother? You think ’cause your brother’s gone, que you’re the macho around this house now?” (20). More than just reprimanding Leticia for her supposed gender transgression, Manuel’s words betray his own feelings of male inadequacy as defined by the Chicano heteronormative culture, and that he is

experiencing a process of emasculation. Manuel no longer views himself as the man of the house; with Rigo now moved out, there are no men left in the Rodriguez household. Unaware of Manuel's inner demons, Leticia does not grasp the deeper meaning of his utterance; yet, his ranting does not deter her. When Manuel complains further about being "sick of this house full of viejas," or plainly, sick of women, Leticia invites him to leave (20). The political consciousness she has gained outside the home has empowered her to confront him; unlike her mother who also chastises her for the outburst.

Through Manuel's self-absorption Moraga has weakened and displaced male authority consequently, Hortensia comes to represent tradition in the family dynamics. Therefore, it is not surprising that the tenets of patriarchy placed upon Leticia come largely from her mother. Through the mother-daughter relationship, Moraga addresses the double standard that arises from raising sons and daughters in a patriarchal Chicano family; the sons enjoy male privilege, while the daughters are held to a separate set of behavioral rules. When Leticia tells Hortensia that she is going to her friend Irma's house, her mother accuses her of being "callejera" (18), a girl that roams the streets instead of being home. Leticia protests and reminds her mother that she will soon graduate from school. To which her mother retorts, "You think graduating makes you una mujer. Eres mujer cuando te cases..." (18). For Hortensia, a girl becomes a woman only through the passage from her paternal home to the one she will share with her new husband. Moraga highlights patriarchy's control of defining womanhood by placing the authority of naming a girl a woman solely in the hands of the husband. As the dialogue continues, Leticia points out that her brother Rigo could come and go whether he was married or not. Hortensia proclaims that he, after all, is a man. To this, Leticia

emotionally airs out her grievance: “Es hombre, Es hombre. I’m sick of hearing that. It’s not fair” (18). Hortensia then advises that she had better get used to an unfair world; as a traditional woman Hortensia has accepted that she will have to accommodate her desires to the whims of her husband and family. Leticia rebuffs Hortensia’s observation and answers, “Well my world’s going to be fair!” (18). When Leticia walks out Hortensia tells Rosario, “Te digo, the girl scares me sometimes” (18). The blank stare moment shared by the two women upon Leticia’s hurried exit may strike a comical note, or one may even empathize with Hortensia’s motherly fears, but Moraga’s message resonates in Leticia’s vision of a world, where she may generate her own “fair” rules. In her world, equality is not to be obstructed by gender.

As part of her alternate world, Leticia envisions Chicanos participating actively and equally within American society; such a change would take place through higher education. With the passage of time in the play, Leticia begins college courses and increasingly articulates her stance to her younger sister. By example, she inspires Lupe to desire a college education as well. Leticia immediately suggests that she should apply for a scholarship to Harvard; puzzled, Lupe wants to know what Harvard is. “The best” she answers (39). In Leticia’s estimation, a prestigious Ivy League education signals an equal footing for a Chicano future: “’Bout the time you’re in college, lots of Chicanos will be going to Harvard, you’ll see” (40).

The theme of keeping daughters at home arises again in a later exchange between Hortensia and her daughters when she is babysitting Rigo’s son. Leticia has purchased a fixer upper, a “jalopy” (27). Hortensia’s reaction is to remind her that owning a car does not mean that she is “free to go wherever you please now” (28); it is to be used only to go

work and apparently to run household errands since she is later told to “go pick up the panza” for the next morning’s menudo (29). In the same scene, Hortensia is diapering her new grandson and she admiringly points out to Leticia and Lupe his “pajarito” (29), his infant’s penis, “...like a little jewel. Mi machito” (29). She gushes that he is just like his father, and confesses to her daughters that the birth of a son is something that men cannot take away from women. “Somos las creadoras. Without us women, they be not’ing but a dream” (29). Hortensia’s words are double edged. Even though she admits that men could not exist as they do without their creators, without women, she fails to recognize that within her adulation of the male child she is transmitting to Leticia and Lupe an encoded cultural message that diminishes a daughter’s worth, while favoring the son:

In only minutes, los muchachitos are already standing at the toilet...I remember sometimes being in the kitchen and hearing little Riguito...he must have been only three or so, going to the toilet by himself. The toilet seat flipped back. Bang! it would go. Then the sound from his baby’s body. But the sound was like a man’s, full.. y fuerte. It gives you a kind of comfort, the sound. (29)

Leticia resists her mother’s indoctrination; to Hortensia’s discourse on the penis she retorts, “Please, spare me” (29). Furthermore, Leticia reminds Hortensia that she does not get any recognition for the creation of her male child. Unable to share Leticia’s perspective, Hortensia assures her that when she has her own son, she will understand. Leticia replies that she might not choose to have children. By rejecting Hortensia’s

predestined characterization of motherhood, Leticia is experimenting with creating her own subjectivity.

In *Shattering the Myth*, Linda Feyder recognizes that it is the women in the family who are carriers of “myths and scripts” (6) to the younger female generations. Moreover, she explains that “it is in the company and safety of women that they experience a sense of freedom...to talk about their sex lives, their desires, their dreams” (6). Leticia has clearly spoken to some of these hopes and desires already, but Moraga has an added benefit to this safe space. The time spent with the younger females also provides Hortensia and Rosario the opportunity to reflect upon their own lives, to articulate disappointments, and to contemplate other outcomes.

Hortensia temporarily divests herself of the cultural mother role she shares with Rosario when she complains about being ignored sexually by Manuel. She says that his heart is closed and that she cannot get him to open up to her. In bed, he freezes to her touch. “No soy tan vieja” (31), she pleads. She is in disbelief that social constructs expect her to abandon her sexual self while still in her mid-forties. She resorts to reminiscing on Conrado’s touch, which made the hair on her arms stand straight up by merely grabbing her hand (31). Alas, all those years ago, he was not the marrying kind; he never even asked. Now, Hortensia explains that she does not want to give up on her marriage to Manuel: “If I give up, might as well put on the black dress and say I’m a dead man’s wife” (32). Rosario advises her to make him see her: “It is not that men don’t love us. They just don’t stop to see us” (32).

Rosario’s words are pertinent because she appears to be explaining to herself the behavior of some male in her own life, a man with no interest in her as a person. Of

Rosario, we know that she is in her early fifties, she has her own house, and her children are grown. At one time, she had been married, but now lives alone. This, to a certain degree, makes her self-conscious; we become aware of Rosario's feelings when she laments to Hortensia, "Tencha, I know sometimes you look at me and think there's something wrong with me becuz I coont stay with a husband" (31). However, we may also glimpse that not keeping a husband may be due more to that particular man, rather than Rosario: "But after you see the other side of a man, your heart changes. It's harder to love, I've seen that side too many times, m'ija. Ahora, tengo mi casita, mi jardín, my kids are grown. What more do I need?" (31). Hortensia and Rosario are criticizing the traditional suffering wife in an unhappy marriage. Rosario finds solace in her simple needs; a house and a garden. She views them as her rewards. She becomes an unusual model of woman, because she has elected to live through the stigma of losing a man rather than to stay in a bad marriage. Hortensia is also contemplating another outcome for herself. When Rosario surmises her reasons as to why men do not see women, Hortensia expresses her personal discontent, and hints at a decision she has made for herself:

ROSARIO. Us women do all the loving for them. If a man sighs for no reason, we already know the reason. We watch their faces y sabemos cuando se vuelven máscaras. What they hide from us, we smell on their clothes and touch in our sleep. We know better than them what they feel...and that's enough to make us believe it's love. That's a marriage.

HORENSIA. Pues para mí, ya no. It's not a marriage for me. (32)

In Hortensia's case, this moment also reveals a desire to bring new meaning to her life. Yet it is increasingly difficult to escape the effects of patriarchy's internal colonization. Chris Weedon describes the family, according to radical, and socialist feminisms, "as the instrument *par excellence* of the oppression of women"; she views it as the most significant "social instrument" in binding women to heterosexuality and masochistically constructs women's sexuality from a male's perspective (*Feminist Practice* 39). She further explains that the subjugation of women is accomplished through a combination of legal, economic, ideological structures of family, and finally "the internalization of a masochistic form of femininity which helps make women psychologically accepting of the material structures of their oppression" (39). Moraga aptly illustrates Weedon's point when right after the exchange between Rosario and Hortensia, Manuel enters and Rosario exits. Again, Hortensia attempts to get her husband to respond to her. "Yo existo. Manuel, yo existo. Mírame, cabrón! Why don't you look at me? ¡Mírame!" (32-33), and angrily he rejects her once again: "Me das asco, ¿sabes? I can't stand the touch of you" (33). Overwhelmed by his rejection Hortensia, falls into an emotional scene of self-deprecation in which she attempts to wash herself in the tub with a douche bag and vinegar to cleanse away the stench that she is sure repulses Manuel. In this scene, there are several clues that Hortensia had a sexual affair with Conrado. First, she calls Manuel a cabrón, a man who has been cuckolded. Next, in her crazed state she tells Lupe that she has Conrado's eyes. Finally, is her frenzied ascertainment that she is dirty, "¡Estoy cochina! ¡Filthy!" (34), the vinegar and douche bag imply a sexual transgression.

We later learn that she did indeed spend one night with Manuel's compadre, but she was not alone in this indiscretion. Both men were complicit. Conrado had lusted for her, and knowing this, Manuel offered her to him as a bribe to keep him close-by. Alas, Conrado left anyway. Through the character's memories, the audience learns the details of that night. As Conrado slips into Hortensia's bed she tried to send him away, but he assured her that it was all right, that Manuel wanted them to be together (47). By attempting to cleanse herself, Hortensia has assumed all blame for the incident and she manifests that guilt through self-mutilation. According to Weedon's theories, we can understand the Hortensia has internalized the masochistic mechanisms of patriarchal oppression. In the tub scene, she holds herself solely responsible for deviating from the good wife role. To this point of the play, Hortensia interprets the situation as her flaw, but fails to recognize that the men have used her body as a commodity in an unspoken contract between them.

The safe space created by Moraga for her female characters, and appropriately noted by Feyder, provides Hortensia with the opportunity to reassess her relationship with her daughters. At the end of the washing incident, Lupe and Leticia are caring for their mother. Hortensia acknowledges that they are the only ones standing by her side: "You girls are all I got in the world, you know" (35). The nurturing aspect of motherhood comes full circle when it is the daughters that come to the aide of the mother. This leads Hortensia to claim that they are full-grown (35). However, Hortensia is not prepared to abdicate her position of authority in the mother-daughter dynamics. In any case, the mother-daughter relationship between Leticia and Hortensia is noticeably altered. When they get into another quarrel about Leticia arriving home late, Hortensia is less

authoritative and more accepting of an undetermined subjectivity for her daughters, if not for herself:

HORTENSIA: Pues, no naciste varón. If God had wanted you to be a man, he would of given you somet'ing between your legs.

LETICIA: I have something between my legs.

HORTENSIA: But you're not a woman yet. In this house you're my daughter...a daughter I can't control. I know what you're feeling and I can't stop you. You walk in that door and I can smell the woman coming out of you.

LETICIA: What's wrong with that?

HORTENSIA: I don't know what to tell you no more. Maybe there's nothing wrong with that. (44)

Hortensia's openness leads Leticia to confess that she has unburdened herself of her virginity to one of the "Raza gods" (44). Moraga mockingly refers to the male members of the Chicano Movement as gods; however, in *Shadow*, she does not do an in-depth criticism of the male-dominated tone of the movement. Instead, she chooses the topic of conserving a girl's virginity as an affront to cultural tradition and opens up a candid conversation between Leticia and her mother. At first Hortensia says she does not want to know, but then struggles to understand Leticia:

HORTENSIA: "Why, m'ija? Why you give your virginidad away for not'ing"

LETICIA: I was tired of carrying it around...that weight of being a woman with a prize. Walking around with that special secret, that

valuable commodity, waiting for some lucky guy to put his name on it. I wanted to be worthless, Mamá. Don't you see? Not for me to be worthless, but to know that my worth had nothing to do with it. (45)

This exchange ends with Hortensia telling Leticia to protect herself and Leticia reassuring her that she will be all right; mother and daughter embrace and the stage direction indicates an expression of loss on Hortensia's face. The sense of loss is indicative of Hortensia's acceptance that she no longer dictates to her daughter. Leticia is now a woman making her own sexual choices, although these choices are contrary to Hortensia's liking and an affront to cultural taboos. The closeness that Hortensia shares with the women in her family ultimately strengthens her fortitude. At the denouement of the play Conrado returns; in a drunken rant Manuel complains about Hortensia to him: "And all these years she looks at me like she knows something I don't know, like she's got something I don't got" (47). This is the crux of Manuel's anger towards Hortensia; she had been with Conrado in a way he had only fantasized about when he imagined himself in their pleasure (38). At this point Hortensia defends herself: "Manuel, you can't blame me. You were there that night. I heard you coming in. You were laughing and crying. Conrado was leaving. The whole house suddenly goes quiet y veo esta sombra in our room" (47). Making Manuel responsible for his part in the event that splintered their lives is Hortensia resisting his male authority. Her rebellion is complete when after Manuel's suicide she sends for Conrado to come pick up his belongings. When Conrado asks what he is to do with the clothes, she tells him to wear them or to burn them (49). In essence, Hortensia is telling him to take possession of Manuel's remnants, in death they may symbolically live out their relationship. However, the implication is that Hortensia

no longer cares. With this final act, Hortensia has freed herself from the hold that Manuel and Conrado had over her. The title of the play, *Shadow of a Man*, thus, has various implications. For Hortensia, it is the shadow present in her bedroom that night thirteen years ago. At first, she thought it was Manuel, but later sees it was Conrado. Since then she had lived in the shadow of cultural shame and rejection. By liberating herself from that guilt, Hortensia has finally rejected patriarchal judgment. The lasting effects or extent of Hortensia's personal growth towards subjectivity formation remains uncertain, nonetheless her acceptances of the strides Leticia has made towards self-definition are an indication that she will not revert wholeheartedly into patriarchal ideology.

Rosario could be perceived as a traditional conformist female character, content with her lot and unquestionably accepting the status quo. But like Hortensia, at various times she too departs from the patriarchal mold to reveal an alternate self. The only personal concern that she voices is that her sister may interpret her marital status as a personal deficiency. It is noteworthy that it is Hortensia's opinion that worries Rosario, now that she is a woman minus a man. Her grown children are not involved in her day-to-day existence; yet she does not dwell on this aspect of her life. Rosario displays no traces of martyrdom that may be associated with the suffering wife / mother stereotype. She claims that her house and garden are all she needs. Although audiences never see her house, it is understood to be nearby. Rosario's home is a symbol of her autonomy. She does not directly involve herself with the emotionally charged incidents that take place in the Rodriguez household, although she does see it all, and on occasion offers comfort to various members of her extended family. Rosario is always either in the garden or entering from the garden, a space that flourishes from her tending to it. She talks lovingly

to the roses as though they are her children, “¡Qué mala madre soy, mis pobres rositas! Tomen, tomen el agua. Ya, mis hijitas...mis rositas” (13).

The garden is also the space from where she makes most of her observations. At times her commentary stems from patriarchal ideology, such as male-identified notions of nationalism, as when she makes a nostalgic comparison between Mexico and the United States. Rosario comments on the tasteless peppers that grow in Los Angeles. She attributes the *chiles*' lack of authenticity to the smog and the soil of Los Angeles, “Bueno, pero la tierra no me da ni un chile verdadero” (13). The obviously phallic symbolism of the chile implies that men in the United States are not authentic like men in Mexico. This criticism extends to others, as if to say no one can be authentic in the United States either: “Aquí en Los Angeles the sun has to fight its way down to the plantas...and to the peepo, too.” She bites into the chile she is holding and proclaims, “No sabe a nada” (12). By proclaiming the chile flavorless Rosario is alluding to the weakness of the Chicano men. In the following dialogue with her niece Lupe, Rosario seems to embrace the stereotypical silent woman's role when she finds out that Hortensia has been singing to keep from arguing with Manuel as he prepares to go meet Conrado:

LUPE. I heard Papi telling Mami. She's getting his clothes ready. She's

been singing all day, so she won't say nothing mean to him.

ROSARIO. She's singing?

LUPE. She's mad inside, so she sings. That way only nice things come out of her mouth.

ROSARIO. Tu mamá es una buena mujer.

LUPE. I know. (41)

Considering Rosario's influence over her young niece, her expressed viewpoint on the virtues the silent wife stereotype and Lupe's seeming agreement, it would be troubling if she didn't also model alternative standpoints challenging accepted notions of cultural and religious truths. In Act One Scene Two Lupe is conflicted by the teaching at parochial school and her aunt's assertion that plants have souls. Rosario asks her, "You think the nuns are always right" (13). Tentatively, Lupe replies, "I guess so," and Rosario voices her unorthodox beliefs on Church authority: "God is always right, not the Church. The Church is made by men. Men make mistakes" (13).

Rosario's willingness to question Church doctrine leads Lupe to confess one of her secrets, that she sometimes feels a chill run through her body which she interprets to be the devil. Lupe compares this sense of evil to a shadow that lurks in the periphery, just beyond her scope. Yet she is aware of its presence. In this instance, the shadow has two possible interpretations; it could represent Manuel and the never confirmed but implied incest between Lupe and her father. The second interpretation references God the Father and the teachings of the church as Lupe becomes sexually aware. Rosario tries to comfort her and tells her that it is only a saying, but Lupe continues to unburden her fears:

LUPE. ¿Pero sabe qué, tía? A veces I do feel him. El diablo me entra a mí.

He's like a shadow. I can barely tell he's there, jus' kinda get a glimpse of him outta the corner of my eye, like he's following me or somet'ing, but when I turn my head, he's gone. I jus' feel the brush of his tail as he goes by me.

LUPE. ...At night, I try to stay awake cuz when I fall asleep that's when he sneaks inside me. I wake up con tanto miedo. It's like my whole

body's on fire and I can hardly breathe. I try to call Lettie pero la voz no me sale. Nothing comes out of my mouth. (14)

Rosario warns Lupe against such thoughts by relating the story of a cousin that went mad from thinking too much about “el diablo y la religión” (14). Lupe questions Rosario; she wants to know if her aunt thinks that she too will become insane, and if such thoughts are. Rosario reassures her:

ROSARIO. No sé, m'ja. I don't think so. Not if you can't help it.

LUPE. Sometimes I jus' feel like my eyes are too open. It's like the more I see, the more I got to be afraid of.

ROSARIO. ¿Quieres saber la verdad, Lupita?

LUPE. What.

ROSARIO. Only los estúpidos don't know enough to be afraid. The rest of us, we learn to live con nuestros diablitos. Tanto que if those little devils weren't around, we wouldn' even know who we were. (LUPE *smiles*. ROSARIO *gives her a hug*.) Vente. Today we think about las rosas. Sunde, cuando we go to church, there's plenty a time to think about el diablo. (14-15)

The wisdom that Rosario shares with Lupe is multi-leveled. First, by voicing her own doubts that thoughts could have caused her young niece to sin, Rosario forgives Lupe of willful wrongdoing against the Church. In doing so, Rosario has assumed authority from a traditional patriarchal institution to grant Lupe, as a priest would, God's absolution. Second, by acknowledging that others live with their own demons, Rosario validates Lupe's worries and helps her to see them as a pathway to self-discovery.

Finally, when Rosario relegates “el diablo” to a topic of discussion for Sunday services, she undercuts the long reach of Church influence that interjects its self through controlling beliefs of good and evil behavior into Lupe's day-to-day life. By making a distinction between God and religion, Rosario demonstrates that she recognizes the use of Church dogma to reinforce and secure man's authority.

In a similarly didactic moment, Rosario jokingly demonstrates to Lupe her openness to discuss women's sexuality. When Hortensia complains about the “gringuita” that is about to marry her son she remarks, “They might fool you with their pecas y ojos azules, but the women are cold” (16). Rosario observes about Rigo's future wife, “I bet her thing down there is frozen up” (16), and Hortensia quickly chastises her:

HORTENSIA. (*Laughingly*) ¡Ay, Rosario! No digas eso.

ROSARIO. I may be old...but my thing is still good 'n hot. ¿Verdad, m'ija?

Us mexicanas keep our things muy calientes...as hot as that comal allí,  
no?

LUPE. I dunno, tía.

ROSARIO. ¿No sabes? ¿Tú no sabes, eh? (*Playfully, snatching at LUPE between the legs.*) Is your fuchi fachi hot down there, too?

LUPE. (*Jumping away.*) Stop, tía!

HORTENSIA. ¡Chayo!

ROSARIO. ¡Ay! ¡Tú eres pura gallina! (16).

Although Lupe's reaction is visibly uncomfortable, by including her in the adult-themed conversation Rosario is taking female sexuality and normalizes it the safe space of Hortensia's kitchen for her niece.

From her vantage point as the family observer Rosario is the character that demonstrates awareness of Manuel's true feelings for Conrado. In dialogues with Manuel, Lupe, and Hortensia, Rosario expresses great insight as she attempts to understand and explain his predicament to them. On the morning of Rigo's wedding, Manuel tells Hortensia that he will not be attending; he sits on the porch, drinking beer, and listening to sad songs on the radio. As Rosario walks by, she comments on his choice of music: "If you listen too much to that music, you start to believe there's something good about suffering" (23). Manuel asks what she means and Rosario explains that she does not believe in suffering for anyone. Welcoming an audience for his memories, Manuel invites her to sit down and share a beer with him; she quietly listens as he voices his dreams about driving to Phoenix to find his compadre. When Rosario points out the approaching rain, Manuel reminisces about being a boy in Arizona:

MANUEL. I remember when I was a little escuincle, riding in the back of my tío's troque. We was coming back from digging ditches or something, me and a buncha primos all piled up in the back...Then, crack! The thunder came and it started raining cats and dogs. In minutes, the water soaked up all the dust of the road and it smelled so clean...Then right there in the open back of the troque, we tore off our clothes and took our showers in the rain. (*Another swig.*) Sometimes you know you want to be a boy like that again. The rain was better then, it cleaned something. (24)

By having Manuel long for a more innocent time when he and a group of male cousins bathed naked in the rain, free from social reprimand, immediately after his

expressed nostalgia for Conrado, Moraga has made Rosario a witness to his grappling with unfulfilled fantasies. It is she who comes closest to knowing his truth. For Moraga, Rosario becomes the vehicle by which she solicits understanding and compassion for Manuel from the audience. Rosario is the constant presence when family members, and Manuel himself, attempt to decipher the source of his torment.

Suffering is a theme conveyed again in a conversation between Rosario and Lupe. Largely due to her parochial school education, Lupe often expresses herself through religious imagery. She struggles to understand her father, and she speculates that he might be a saint because he “...suffers inside like the saints” (35). Rosario makes it clear to Lupe that Manuel is not a saint that his troubles are in fact products of his own devise. More importantly, she gets Lupe to dig deeper for a more worldly cause for his demeanor.

ROSARIO. ...Some peepo suffer because they want to

LUPE. I don't wanna.

ROSARIO. So don't. But your papi wan's to suffer.

LUPE. He doesn't. He has something inside...that hurts him.

ROSARIO. What?

LUPE. I dunno. (36)

Leticia distracts Lupe temporally as Manuel enters the scene. Stage direction has an orange light color the evening sky, and Rosario points out the sunset to Lupe and Manuel. “This is the best time of all the day,” she declares, then asks, “¿Ves las sombras?” (36). Lupe says, “It’s so clear” (36). While the clarity of shadows revealed in the evening sky may be literal for Lupe, given the title of the play, spectators are on high

alert anticipating the revelation of their metaphorical significance. The wait is not long for Rosario continues straight away, “En esta hora, just before the sun sets, you see the shadows more clear than anytime of the day” (36). The clearness of the shadows represents the unresolved matter between Manuel and Conrado. They signal Conrado's impending arrival, as well as Manuel's tragic suicide.

When Rosario exits, Manuel sits, and proceeds to tell Lupe what he imagines has become of Conrado. “...You don't know him, Lupita, but my compadre is an American success story. He used to live here... near us. But then, he went back to Arizona to make it big” (36). For Manuel, the shadow may refer directly to himself, a man that is ultimately judged lacking, a failure. His attraction for Conrado does not allow him to live up to the Chicano cultural imagination of manliness. The shadow in Manuel's life is Conrado. Manuel's life is stagnant, empty; he lives in the shadow of Conrado. The juxtaposition of clarity and shadows is significant because while the darkness of shadows generally obscures, in this case, Manuel is revealed, or is at least confirms what spectators already suspect. Once again, it is Rosario who brings this detail to light.

Literary critics note Moraga's use of the body to convey the intimacies and distances of human interaction.<sup>24</sup> In *Shadow of a Man*, she uses the imagery of inhabiting

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<sup>24</sup> In his discussion of Moraga's “La Güera” in *This Bridge Called My Back*, Lionel Cantú elaborates on her supposition that lesbianism allows her to connect with women or to “jump [inside] their skins” and feel their oppression as a means or forming alliances with them, 113. On the other hand, Christina Sharpe harshly criticizes Moraga because “she sometimes works out questions of inside and outside on the bodies of black and ‘mulatto’ people,” 242. In this essay, Sharpe argues that by stepping outside of the position of victim of such oppression as sexism and racism, Moraga sets herself apart from the effects of those prejudices and in fact perpetuates the process of erasure of the black body.

another's body to express sexual desire. In Act Two Scene Two, Manuel reminisces back to the night he attempted to hold on to Conrado by offering up his wife to him. He begins by saying, "I am a lonely man," but is soon joined by the memory of his compadre sitting across the table from him, "y me siento bien. All I gotta do is sit in my own skin in the chair"(38).

Moraga grants Manuel the ability of transcending his body by having him refer to his own skin as something separate from himself, a vessel of sorts, which contains him in the chair. Manuel imagines himself first in Conrado's body, then Hortensia's: "I floated into the room with him. In my mind, I was him...And then, I was her, too. In my mind, I imagined their pleasure...and I turned to nothing" (38-39). When he was Conrado, he was the object of his desire: when he was Hortensia, he was the recipient of Conrado's lovemaking. The pleasure is fleeting and unfulfilling, and Manuel wonders how he allowed himself to "disappear," to become "a ghost" (38). In this scene, Manuel feels that he has fallen into nothingness, he acknowledges the sense that he has lost himself. He is now a shadow of the man he was before that night. The entire family is witness to Manuel's downward spiral, but Rosario appreciates it best. In the following, she attempts to explain it to Hortensia:

ROSARIO. Sometimes a man thinks of another man before he thinks of anybody else. He don' think about his woman ni su madre ni los children, jus' what he gots in his head about that man. He closes his eyes and dreams, "If I could get inside that man's skin, then I'd really be somebody!" But when he opens his eyes and sees that he's as empty as he was before, he curls his fingers into fists and knocks down whatever stands in his way. (42)

According to Lionel Cantú, Rosario “personifies the separatist vision” because she claims to have seen the worst side of men and now all she needs is her home and garden (Reflejo y Sombra 120). Cantú contrasts Rosario's seeming rejection of a sexual relationship with a man with Hortensia's striving for something more meaningful in her own marriage. He concludes that Rosario represents a withdrawal from men and patriarchy altogether. Nonetheless, Rosario is a proactive player in *Shadow*. She is the voice that helps Lupe distinguish between institutionalized patriarchy, namely the Catholic Church, and spirituality. With Lupe, Rosario demystifies the concept of sin and takes the subject of feminine sexuality out of the realm of taboo, placed there by patriarchy by means of church and family, into a space of reflection and examination. In Manuel's case, Rosario is the source that challenges the cultural bias against homosexuality and brings empathy for the character to audiences. She makes an effort to get Hortensia to explore deeper into Manuel's pain. Simultaneously, she articulates to her that his personal flaws are not a reflection of her as a wife and sexual mate. Far from recoiling, Rosario carves out her own subjectivity within her space, her house, and garden, her extended family, and she practices agency within the patriarchy.

Twelve-year-old Lupe opens the play; she stands in front of the bathroom mirror surrounded by symbols of the Catholic Church. She is wearing a catholic school uniform; the lit candle she holds with one hand under her chin illuminates her face, and in the other hand, she holds the crucifix part of a rosary. On the wall behind her emerges the shadow of the held crucifix. From the onset, Moraga makes it clear that the metaphor of shadow of a man extends to the Church and God the Father. Lupe has secrets, which she equates with sinfulness, but they are offenses that she cannot confess to the priest; yet Lupe feels

the need to voice her concerns: “Sometimes I think I should tell somebody about myself” (12). Her necessity is the impetus that places her onto a path of fostering her own burgeoning subjectivity.

One of Lupe's secrets is the probability of incest. At various times throughout the play the topic is implied, yet not elaborated upon nor confirmed. The most overt of these occurrences is in Act One Scene Four, when Manuel stands at the door of the daughters' bedroom and drunkenly says, “I know la chiquita is waiting for me...She makes sure her papacito comes home safe” (21). Stage direction has Lupe in bed clutching the covers and her rosary. Her earlier assertion that the devil enters her body at night is not lost on spectators. Just before Leticia comes to her rescue, the scene has “a muted tension” fall over it (21). Incest is most likely one of the untold secrets, hidden from sight within the silent uneasiness of the play.

In addition to the sexual abuse implication, Lupe is becoming increasingly aware of her own same-sex desire. She struggles to understand this sexual attraction in the context of her experience with church teachings, which lead her to conclude that her feelings are sinful and that she is out of step with the norm.<sup>25</sup> When Lupe voices self-

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<sup>25</sup>In *Sexing the Church: Gender, Power, and Ethics in Contemporary Catholicism*, religion scholar, Aline Kalbian interprets official Church documents through the category of order to explain its official position on matters of sex, gender, morality and patriarchy. Order is both an organized structure and a command. She writes that as a structured pattern, order explains the purpose of God's creation and “informs the human understanding of moral action” and as a command, it “reflects the emphasis on governance and regulation”. Moreover, that “Put more succinctly, God has created an order, humans strive to respect and fulfill it, and the Church assists humans by enforcing the appropriate moral norms”, 6. On homosexuality, Kalbian writes

reflection, she always does it in front of a mirror. In Act One Scene Eight Lupe worries that she is different from her classmates:

LUPE. I have X-ray eyes. Sister Genevieve is naked. I can see through her habit, her thick black belt with the rosary hanging from it, her scapular, and her square cotton slip. She has a naked body under there. I try not to see Sister Genevieve this way...I think there's something wrong with me. I look at other kids' faces. Their eyes are smart like Frances Pacheco or sleepy like Chela La Bembona, but they seem to be seeing things purty much like they are. (*Pause.*) I mean, not X-ray or nut'ing.  
(30)

Lupe begins to recognize her budding same-sex attraction as a difference that has the power to situate her apart from church, family, and friends. In addition to the interpretation of incest as the devil that comes to Lupe at night, she may feel her induction into forbidden sexual awareness is evil. The same as Lupe, Moraga describes her own journey with sexuality in terms of a devil. "In my 'craziness' I wrote poems describing myself as a centaur: half-animal/half-human, hairy-rumped and cloven-hoofed, como el diablo, the symbols emerging from a deeply Mexican and Catholic place...A foreshadowing of the marginal place, within my culture and in society at large, my sexuality was to eventually take me" (*Loving* 115). Expressing similar sentiments of cultural alienation, Gloria Anzaldúa describes homosexuality as a "Shadow-Beast" that

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that it represents disorder and disobedience because it is an affront to the Church's sense of order governing human sexual relationships, 137.

has the potential to estrange Chicana lesbians from their family and culture. However, Anzaldúa embraces that perceived monstrous being as a source of empowerment:

Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear--that we will be found out and the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage. Some of us take another route. We try to make ourselves conscious of the Shadow-Beast, stare at the sexual lust and lust for power and destruction we see on its face, discern among its features the undershadow that the reigning order of heterosexual males project on our Beast. Yet still others of us take it another step: we try to waken the Shadow-Beast inside us.

*(Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza 42)*

Early on Lupe demonstrates a maturity of self-awareness that positions her in a space where self-defined subjectivity is possible. She recognizes an inner voice that is not in agreement with her prescribed definition of self. In contrast, her older sister does not understand the depth of her philosophical musings.

LUPE. You can see yourself in there ... in the darkest part. Two little faces, one in each eye. It's like you got other people living inside you. Maybe you're not really you. Maybe they're the real you and the big you is just a dream you.

LETICIA. I swear you give me the creeps when you talk about this stuff.

You're gonna make yourself nuts. (22)

Lupe's dream-self is the subject defined by patriarchy and imposed on her. The faces Lupe sees reflected on her eyes represent the subjectivity she suspects to be her real self and the one that she will strive to construct. According to Leah Garland, Moraga envisions a future brought forth by both political activism, as exemplified by Leticia, and by intellectual and spiritual means, illustrated through Lupe. Cherríe Moraga has written on her reasoning for use of the spiritual as an approach to construct the subject: “Why else would the female body be so associated in Christianity with sin and disobedience? Simply put, if the spirit and sex have been linked in our oppression, then they must also be linked in the strategy toward our liberation” (*Loving* 123).

In Act Two Scene One Moraga uses the New Testament story of Mary Magdalene washing Jesus' feet in a conversation between Lupe and Leticia that highlights homoeroticism. In this situation, Lupe is applying nail polish to her sister's toenails and she begins a conversation about selecting confirmation names; she says that she is considering the name Mary Magdalene for herself. Lupe proceeds to narrate the story as she envisions the sinner/prostitute making her way through “all those phony baloney Pharisees” to meet Jesus (37). Leticia instructs her polishing technique “all the way down to the cuticle” as Lupe continues her account (37). When Lupe play-acts Mary Magdalene sobbing over Jesus' feet Leticia asks, “Are you finished” (37). Lupe is not, she continues the feet-washing scene:

LUPE. In a minute. But suddenly the tears become like bathwater, real soft an' warm an' soothing-like. She's got this hair, y'see, this long beautiful dark hair, an' it's so thick she can make a towel out of it. It's so soft, it's almost like velvet as she spreads it all over Jesus' feet. (*She*

*pours her hair over Jesus' imaginary feet, then returns to LETICIA's toes.) (36-37)*

LETICIA. Blow on 'em a little so they can dry faster, will you? (*She does, then goes over to LETICIA.*)

LUPE. Can you imagine what it musta felt like to have this woman with such beautiful hair wiping it on you? (*Plays with the strands of LETICIA's hair.*) It's jus' too much to think about. And then Jesus says ... (*Pulling up LETICIA as "Magdalene."*) "Rise woman and go and sin no more." (After a beat.) Now tht's what I call forgiveness. That's ... relief. (38)

Lupe imagines herself first as the fallen woman in need of forgiveness from God the Father, represented by Jesus. As Mary Magdalene, Lupe fantasizes about the relief granted through sobbing away her sins. This is a clear indication that the concept of sinfulness continues to trouble her. With Mary Magdalene, Moraga illustrates her point on the methods used to oppress women through spirit and sex. When Mary Magdalene's tears become the bathwater that cleanses Jesus' feet, Lupe fantasizes herself as Jesus. As Jesus, Lupe admires Mary Magdalene's beautiful hair and imagines the feel of it on her/his feet when used as a towel to dry them. The feelings this situation conjures become too much for Lupe to think about. Moraga verifies Lupe's same-sex attraction in this treatment of sin, evil, forgiveness, and sexual desire all taking place over Leticia's feet while she is seemingly unaware. To punctuate the affront to religious teaching this scene ends with the playing of the song *Evil Ways*.

At the end of the play, Moraga returns to the motif of occupying the human body to express sexual desire, Manuel as Conrado and Hortensia, and Lupe as Jesus and Mary Magdalene. For the fourth time in front of a mirror Lupe reveals that she has an adolescent crush on her classmate Frances Pacheco, and that she wants to crawl into Frances' body:

LUPE. I've decided my confirmation name will be Frances 'cuz that's what Frances Pacheco's name is and I wanna be in her body. When she sits, she doesn't hold her knees together like my mom and nuns are always telling me to. She jus' lets them fly an' fall wherever they want ... real natural-like ... like they was wings instead of knees. (*Pause.*) An' she's got a laugh ... a laugh that seems to come from way deep inside herself, from the bottom of her heart or someth'ing. (*Fingering the hat*) If I could...I'd like to jus' unzip her chest and climb right inside there, next to her heart, to feel everyt'ing she's feeling an' I could forget about me. (*Pause.*) It's okay if she doesn't feel the same way ... it's my secret.

(49)

Lupe enumerates the reasons she wants to take Frances as her confirmation name and wants inhabit her body. Ultimately, what Lupe admires about Frances is her uninhibited behavior, which appears to remain untouched by patriarchal attitudes and prohibitions. As Leah Garland has pointed out, Moraga has placed the future in Lupe's hands by questioning the spiritual and the production of knowledge. Furthermore, Moraga suggests that effective change requires more than circumventing religious and patriarchal attitudes. Change must include an intellectual shift. Through Lupe, the playwright advocates subjectivity construction defined by the subject: "Moraga explores

how spirituality and organized religion may be re-imagined to create new relationships between Chicana selfhood and power...and to question male privilege is to confront the cornerstone of subjectivity” (*Contemporary Latina/o Performing Arts* 32).

The phrases used to describe what Lupe admires about Frances are, “natural-like” and that her knees are “like wings.” These terms valorize the subject without attempting to modify it into a patriarchal definition. Lupe expresses her desire to be in Frances' body, which mimics Manuel's sexual fantasies about Conrado. Moraga continues a cycle perhaps initiated by the implied incest of Manuel and Lupe, where as Conrado's biological daughter, she became his surrogate. In Act Two Scene Four Hortensia lends support to this viewpoint when she says that she does not want Lupe in the house when Manuel returns from his reunion with Conrado (43). Lupe concludes her final monologue by acknowledging that she has another secret. The implication is that the same as Manuel's unrequited love for Conrado, Frances might not reciprocate Lupe's feelings. However, the word secret has changed in signification from the dark representation of her anxiety and preoccupation with sin to a welcomed nugget of self-recognition that she is not prepared to share. Lupe appears comfortable not only with the realization of her burgeoning lesbianism, but with her emerging subjectivity as well.

In summation, Moraga has created in *Shadow of a Man* a group of female characters who share a blood kinship to de-center the culturally sexist Chicana/o family. Moraga has exposed duplicities that sometimes lurk within the family unit. Lupe's secrets, Hortensia's wish for something more in her marriage, Rosario's subtle agency, Leticia's social activism are exposed, and worked out on their own terms to shape feminine identity throughout the play. Cherríe Moraga has provided this family of

women the space to represent alternative subjectivities by suspending the patriarchal imaginary of the Chicano traditional family.

## Chapter IV. Woman on a quest

“Tengo que saber quién soy”

--María in *La Gringa*

“Somehow I always knew where I was going. Sometimes the place I got to was the wrong place, to be sure. But that's different. All I had to do was choose another place...and go to it. I have gotten to a lot of right places too.”

--She in *Coser y Cantar*

“Da gusto llegar al lugar que se va sin perder el camino.”

--Ella in *Coser y Cantar*

### Introduction

This study has examined modes by which U.S. Latina playwrights confront patriarchy through the reinvention of mythical, literary, and historical figures. Additionally, an inquiry has been made into the culture of sexism imbedded in the lore of the traditional Chicano family. The focus of this chapter shifts explicitly onto the protagonists of two plays as they advance toward subjectivity construction. The plays studied here are *La gringa*, by Carmen Rivera and *Coser y Cantar* by Dolores Prida. The journey in search of identity embarked upon by their main characters may be both geographical and psychological, as exemplified by the Rivera text. On the other hand, Prida's play is specifically psychological; her protagonists never leave the apartment.

The feminine journey or quest of self-definition is the subject matter of Dana Heller's book, *The Feminization of Quest-Romance*. Her thesis is that in the latter part of the twentieth century, American women writers demonstrate the development of “fundamental formal expressions of women's awakening to selfhood, mobility, and

influence in the world” (15). Heller rebuffs the term “heroine” for women because it implies passivity and proposes using “hero” instead. “Emerging from her entrapment in subservient roles, the woman who rejects the passive term [...] and adopts the active term [...] for her own identity appropriates power from the masculine sphere and accepts the active disobedience of patriarchal law and language” (1).

To clarify the distinction between the male quest tradition and the feminized quest, Heller summarizes the most significant aspects that characterize the traditional Western male quest-romance as such: the male hero speaks for community or nation, the quest affirms the hero's service to the collective and its salvation depends on him. To accomplish restoration for the community he must first leave it: “The adventures of the male quester must eventually bring together the individual and the all; traditionally, heroic action teaches the coherence of worldly and spiritual being” (3). A shift occurs in the literary works of the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets that reflect the changing world's economic and scientific conditions. Heller accepts Harold Bloom's characterization of this literary move as “the internalization of the quest”, where the poet looks inward to investigate the ego:<sup>26</sup>

The Romantic poets took the dialectic of self and the world, and privileged the former --the internal arena-- as that which contained the true drama of the quest. In other words, it was demonstrated that a hero need not slay dragons, fight wars, or traverse oceans in order to attain heroic status. (5)

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<sup>26</sup> See “The Internalization of Quest-Romance” in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* where Harold Bloom writes that the poet-hero becomes a “seeker” of “his own mature powers, to what was more integral than nature, within himself” 15.

Heller views the change from traditional Western quest to a quest-romance as the anticipation of the literary form's feminization. She argues that if "the internalization of the quest emblazoned the creative process itself, there would seem to be nothing to prevent women from becoming heroes themselves by virtue of possessing their own minds and their own imaginative faculties" (6).

Heller reiterates that the American literary canon can be summarized in terms of what it means to be male and American in the national imaginary. The factors that have established the American literary canon include conflicts between the "Old" and "New" World, the individual isolation promoted by Puritan doctrine, conflicts of utopian visions—"City on a Hill"—, and fear of and opposition to racial integration with European whites (7).<sup>27</sup> In comparison to the Western quest, American literature may privilege the self-development of the male over social integration. "The hero's vision of personal achievement may be unholy in the eyes of his community, but through the rituals of heroic initiation, the toils of conflict, the shaking of demons bent on obstructing his path, he may still succeed in attaining heroic status" (7-8). Heller notes that the hero gains social power and autonomy as reward for successful completion of the quest and survival of the masculine initiation. Additionally, if he has not integrated successfully into society, he gains anti-hero status. "Even if he remains outcast, he remains also in

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<sup>27</sup> See "La literatura hispana en los Estados Unidos y el género autobiográfico" in *Hispanos en los Estados Unidos* by Nicolás Kanellos for further discussion on the national myths and ideology that have shaped the American literary canon 221-230.

possession of an active, articulated will: he determines a subject position in the world, and he searches of his own volition” (8).

According to Heller, the feminized quest begins through women's awareness of limitation, “a recognition that society neither expects nor wants her to test her powers, prove her autonomy, or step outside the line of ‘proper’ feminine behavior” (10). Feminization of the quest is complete when the female protagonist becomes the subject. This process requires that she relinquish “femininity” as constructed by patriarchy to perpetuate male power. The female-hero's search must lead her to an authentic self-image that will benefit “the individual woman and a society where men and women hold equal power” (13). Completion of the quest grants the male hero power and glory. In contrast, the female hero does not gain power over community; instead, she becomes an active agent through her relationships with family and community in the formerly limiting public sphere. In the following Heller outlines her precepts for the feminized quest: “Woman’s quest must propose strategies for escaping debilitating structures, for discovering authentic selfhood, and or claiming the right to take her journey out into the world” (13). Heller’s gender based observations note that individualism characterizes the male quest-romance while the feminized quest-romance is inclusive of and benefits the community.<sup>28</sup>

Heller concludes that in the feminization of the quest-romance, women emerge from the category of “otherness,” which she interprets as a “crosscultural project to reach

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<sup>28</sup>See “La literatura hispana en los Estados Unidos y el género autobiográfico” in *Hispanos en los Estados Unidos* where Nicolás Kanellos discusses North American individualism in the autobiography canon 227-228. Also, see American individualism versus community and family in *Hispanic Immigrant Literature* 33.

for inclusiveness in American myth and vision” (121). Furthermore, she envisions this inclusiveness as “a frame for drawing a diversity of cultural experience into the currency of signification” (122). Although she is ultimately concerned with altering the landscape of American novel writing and the American canon, in this study I argue that Heller's analysis can be useful in the literary examination of U.S. Latina playwriting for bringing their representations into visibility and signification.

To expand the concept of the female setting out on a subjectivity-constructing quest, I will use the theoretical framework of the schema proposed in *Hispanic Immigrant Literature*, by Nicolás Kanellos. The schema is comprised of characteristics he has identified to be present in the texts of U.S. Latinos (23). Kanellos writes, “The schema relies on my observation of three general trajectories of Latino expression in the United States since the 1800s” (19). Each trajectory --native, immigrant, and exile-- refers to the text's literary standpoint and not to the citizenship status of the authors. “The schema more accurately relates to the texts writers generate and the narrative stances they assume with regard to the United States and the land of origin” (21). Of the three trajectories, the native category is pertinent to our discussion of the plays to be studied. The relevant textual characteristics guide the literary analysis, focusing on subjectivity formation aspects.<sup>29</sup> It is important to clarify that not all of said characteristics need be present in text for analysis. Kanellos describes the elasticity of his schema as such:

Far from overemphasizing, the rigidity of these three constant currents-- immigrant, native, and exile-- the schema will indicate that they are

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<sup>29</sup>See Kanellos in *Hispanic Immigrant Literature* for a comprehensive list of textual characteristics in each of the trajectories 23.

permeable, flexible categories that allow for writers to assume different, even contradictory stances as they create works for specific publics or because of diverse economic and political circumstances. (14)

Kanellos has written extensively about the historical and social conditions that have determined the native stance in U.S. Latino literature (*En otra voz* xvi-xxxii). Moreover, he states that the fundamental reason for the native literary perspective is living conditions of Latinos in the United States “Pero la razón fundamental para la existencia de la literatura nativa hispana y su punto de referencia han sido y continúan siendo las condiciones de vida de los latinos en los Estados Unidos” (xvii). Although, having a long tradition of political protest that dates back to the 1800s, U.S. Hispanic native literature experiences resurgences in the 1960s in part as the result of the Afro-American civil rights movement and political outcry protesting the war in Southeast Asia (xxvii). The Hispanic literary expression of that era articulated the political awareness to which they had awoken, and they demanded their civil rights as U.S. citizens. They publically embraced their hybridity; hence, the proliferation of Chicano and Nuyorican literary works (xxvii-xxix).<sup>30</sup> This literature exemplifies native literature because it is unambiguous about its demand for acceptance into the American literary body of works.

The effects social movements had on literature extended into theater. In *Feminist Theatre Groups*, Dinah Luise Leavitt writes that feminist theatre appears in the United

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<sup>30</sup> Many Mexican-Americans chose the term “Chicano” as an affirmation of their political consciousness. Nuyorican is a combination of “New York Rican”. See Nicolás Kanellos in *En otra voz*, xxix

States as a direct result of the radical theatre tradition of the 1960s and the resurgence of the women's movement. "Theatre responded quickly to the social consciousness of the times, and although centered in New York, theatre groups sprang up throughout the country to form what Arthur Sainer calls the radical theatre movement" (1). According to Elizabeth Ramírez U.S. Latina Theater makes its appearance in the late 1970s and continues as a "distinctive voice" in the 1980s (*Chicanas/Latinas* xix).

### **Play summary**

Carmen Rivera's play, *La gringa*, follows the journey of a young Nuyoricana woman from New York to Las Piedras, Puerto Rico. María is a recent college graduate with a degree in Business Administration and she forgoes a trip to Europe over the Christmas holidays to visit her extended family on the island.<sup>31</sup> The family refers to María as *la gringa* because she was born in the United States. Her cousin Iris and her aunt Norma are highly suspicious of her and are not very welcoming. On the other hand, her two uncles Manolo and Victor along with Monchi, a family friend, become more accepting by the day. Her mother Olga is never on stage, but she is spoken to via one-sided telephone conversations. Manolo and Norma are Olga's siblings and Victor is

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<sup>31</sup> Rivera's play shares titles with the 1904 classic by Florencio Sánchez that highlights tensions between prosperous landowner immigrants from northern Italy and the former *criollo* landowners of rural Argentina. The *criollos* are resentful because they have been dispossessed of their homes, land, and power. Victoria the daughter of the new Italian landowner is *la gringa* who falls in love with the son of a *criollo*. The young couple and their unborn child represent conciliation and a hopeful future for the region's inhabitants. See *La Gringa and Barranca Abajo* by Florencio Sánchez.

Norma's husband. María's exaggerated patriotic behavior humiliates her cousin: the wearing of jacket with the Puerto Rican flag on it, kissing the sacred island soil, taking numerous pictures of Puerto Rican monuments and local color. Iris does not allow her to wear the jacket and tells her that all are Puerto Rican on the island and that there is no need to publicize that fact. Through humor, spectators become aware of María's identity crisis and the specifics of her predicament as the play develops. In addition to family friend, Monchi is María's possible love interest. Originally written in English, *La gringa* was later translated into Spanish by Carmen Rivera and René Buch. It has been presented at the Repertorio Español since February of 1996 to the present; in 2002 it was presented in Bolivia and Colombia, and produced at El Ateneo Puertorriqueño in San Juan in 2009 (*La Voz Latina* 258).

### **Myth and magic as strategies to subjectivity**

Carmen Rivera's approach to subjectivity construction confronts fixed assumptions about nationalism and citizenship, which are points of constant struggle and figure daily in the lives of U.S. Latinos. In *Beautiful Señoritas and Other Plays*, Judith Weiss explains that their fellow “non-Hispanic” citizens have the “assumption that they are foreigners” (10). That has been the experience of María Elena García, the protagonist of *La gringa*. She decides to go to Puerto Rico because she feels foreign in her birthplace, New York. María is in search of her own identity. At the Repertorio Español website, a downloadable study guide to the play features a quote from actress Marilyn Seri on her reaction to the play: “Me intrigo con Iris porque soy puramente puertorriqueña y allá no tenemos prejuicios. Lo único que sí, cuando viene alguien de afuera, como lo decimos

allá--aunque sean puertorriqueños de Nueva York, son considerados americanos gringos".<sup>32</sup> Seri's contradictory statement captures the attitude that awaits María on the island. She is accustomed to the North American attitude from non-Hispanics, but María is astonished to learn that she is an outsider in Puerto Rico as well. To begin her journey toward subjectivity María must first reject these two viewpoints imposed upon her from the external sphere in an attempt to define her, and second she must accept the challenge of creating "authentic self-hood" (Heller 13).

The experience of Puerto Ricans in the United States is unique in that through the passing of the Jones Act of 1917 this Hispanic population was granted citizenship. This historical fact shaped a dual perspective of many stateside Puerto Ricans: they feel entitled to the rights of U.S. natives yet look to the island as a place of origin. "Desde 1917, los puertorriqueños, en el continente han mostrado caracteres clásicos tanto de inmigrantes como de nativos. Han tenido la confianza y el derecho a la expresión libre de nativos, sin perder, sin embargo, la doble visión, la doble perspectiva del allá y el acá de los inmigrantes" (*En Otra Voz* xxv - xxvi). Although this is her first visit to the island, by all accounts, María shares this perspective:

IRIS. Mami sabes que esta loca sacrificó un viaje a Europa para venir a esta islita.

MARÍA. Mami y papi querían que yo me fuera a Europa. Ellos sentían que un viaje a Europa me iba a hacer un um... ¿cómo se dice well rounded person?

IRIS. Una persona más completa.

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<sup>32</sup> Study guide found at <http://www.repertorio.org/> on *La gringa* link by selecting the education tab.

MARÍA. Sí, exacto, pero yo sentí que era más importante visitar mi país.

Conectar con mis uh...ancestors...mis...mi abuela...y la mamá de ella...mi familia...

IRIS. Antepasados.

MARÍA. Eso... Mami siempre está hablando de Puerto Rico y yo quería verlo...Cuando yo caminaba por El Morro, sentí que llegué a mi lugar...Me di cuenta que llegué a casa. I came home...los coquíes, el olor a campo, el sol que quema la piel en un solo día.<sup>33</sup>

IRIS. Los mosquitos

MARÍA Hasta los mosquitos...todo eso me ha dado la bienvenida...yo no puedo volver a Nueva York, ESTA ES MI CASA...me voy a quedar en Puerto Rico. (*La gringa* 26-27)

According to the Kanellos schema, the key characteristic of the native works is firm ties to the United States. There is no question of returning to a land of origin because the United States is the land of origin. “This attitude is as true of the Californio narratives and Tejano autobiographies of the nineteenth century as it is of Nuyorican and Chicano literature today” (*Hispanic Immigrant* 22). As explained above, stateside Puerto Ricans have the dual vision of being American citizens and a sense of belonging to the island of

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<sup>33</sup> The coquí is a small frog endemic to Puerto Rico. The male coquí sings throughout the night a call that sounds like its name, *ko-kee*. It has been embraced as a symbol of nationalism. A popular saying that expresses nationality is “*Soy de aquí como el coquí*” (I’m as Puerto Rican as a coquí). See <http://www.topuertorico.org/coqui>.

Puerto Rico. María's wearing of the Puerto Rican flag jacket, her interest in Puerto Rican studies and her commitment to becoming more proficient in Spanish expresses that she identifies with Puerto Rico although she has always lived in New York. Her trip was to be for two weeks, but the romance of her first sightseeing trip around the island has made María reconsider her plans.

María and her uncle Manolo form a strong bond that becomes very important to the dénouement. Consequently, she reveals to Manolo that she and her boyfriend have recently broken up. The termination of this relationship has sparked old identity anxieties in María; to further complicate her dilemma is the fact that her parents do not encourage her identity seeking explorations. Audiences may empathize with María's struggle with identity, which is a salient textual element of native literature. The following selection illustrates the social pressure imposed on Latinos and other marginalized minority groups to assimilate by the dominant Anglo-American culture in the United States. María's boyfriend who is of Sicilian decent has changed her ethnicity to make her suitable for his family. The message here is that being Puerto Rican is not desirable and therefore she must be altered to become socially acceptable. According to Edna Acosta-Belén such attitudes reflect, "...the detrimental effects of the socioeconomic and racial marginalization that Puerto Ricans have experienced in the metropolis" ("Beyond Island Boundaries 980).

MARÍA. Yo me enamoré de un siciliano. Y él le dijo a su familia que yo era siciliana también, porque su familia era muy cerrada de mente. Y yo como una pendeja cualquiera se lo acepté.

MANOLO. "El amor es ciego, m'ija."

MARÍA. Y yo, más ciega, sorda y muda. Y después él rompió conmigo.  
(38)

MARÍA. El tipo...parecía puertorriqueño, hasta bailaba salsa.

MANOLO. Así que te gustaba porque parecía puertorriqueño, y tú le gustaste porque tú no parecías puertorriqueña. Qué reguero. Perdona m'ija. Pero en la cara se te ven el arroz y habichuelas.<sup>34</sup> No sé cómo pudo equivocarse.

MARÍA. A veces me siento puertorriqueña, y a veces no. Estos últimos días me he sentido más puertorriqueña...que nunca. En Nueva York todo es muy confuso. Mami y papi nunca me enseñaron español. Tuve que aprenderlo en la universidad. Me mandaron a escuelas privadas, querían que yo fuera totalmente americana, para que triunfara. Me alegra haber ido a esas escuelas, pero un árbol sin raíces no puede vivir.

MANOLO. Nadie te puede robar tus raíces. Hasta la yerba tiene raíces...

MARÍA. ...no sé de donde vengo. Tengo que saber quién soy. (39)

In time, María comes to the realization that the goal of her quest requires a deeper sense of self-knowledge. Until this point, she had journeyed geographically; but now María recognizes that her identity is not in the monuments of Puerto Rico. The next phase of her quest is psychological. Mary Anne Ferguson recounts in “The Female Novel of

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<sup>34</sup> Jorge Duany writes in *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* that while race in the United States is generally categorized into a two-tier division, white and nonwhite, Puerto Ricans like other Latin Americans classify by physical types such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture, 237-242.

Development and the Myth of Psyche” Apuleius’ version of Psyche’s and Eros’ myth. When Aphrodite, Eros' mother, learns of Psyche and Eros' love, she keeps him in captivity. Psyche must then perform four labors as a condition to set him free and reunite with him. In Ferguson’s words Psyche’s “journey outward is also a psychic journey inward,” which “tests her to grow into maturity” (230). Through her newfound insight and Manolo's guidance, María gains maturity of self-hood.

The gloss of her initial arrival wears off when María goes to a job interview as part of her plan to stay and live there. The insurance agency where she has applied for work is a branch of the company she worked for in New York, and she is optimistic. All hope is lost when the man conducting the interview tells her that she cannot work there because she is not Puerto Rican. Iris who has been looking for work for the last two weeks is somewhat resentful that María got an interview so quickly and that she might get the position. She initiates the conflict when she refers to María as Miss Puerto Rico or la gringa. The situation culminates in a big family disagreement in the second act. The excerpt below exemplifies cultural conflict, another schema characteristic, where Iris voices assumptions and contradictions shared by some islanders:

MANOLO. No dejes que nadie te diga quien tú eres.

MARÍA. Me dijo que yo no era puertorriqueña.

IRIS. Pero es que tú eres americana.

MARÍA. (A MANOLO.) ¿Tú ves?

MANOLO. Ella es puertorriqueña.

MARÍA. ¡Aquí está la bandera de tu país. (MARÍA *le tira la chaqueta a*  
IRIS.)

IRIS. Tío Manolo ella es americana. (51)

IRIS. Tú naciste y te criaste en los Estados Unidos, así que eres americana.

MARÍA. Tú naciste y te criaste en una colonia americana, ¿eso te hace una gringa?

IRIS. Yo nací aquí en Puerto Rico. Pero tu primer idioma es el inglés, ¡así que tú eres AMERICAN.

MANOLO. Hablar español no te hace puertorriqueña.

MARÍA. I'm not accepted as an American. There's no place for me. I'm a foreigner in my place of birth. Allá yo soy exótica, de la isla, una inmigrante que viene a robarle trabajo a los americanos, una carga del welfare, ¡A SPIC!

IRIS. Y si tu madre se hubiera ido a Francia, y te hubieras educado allá hablando solo francés, serías francesa.

MANOLO. ¿Si una gata pare dentro de un horno, lo que nace, qué es? ¿Gatos o pan? (51-52)

IRIS. Entonces tenemos que aceptar como puertorriqueños a todos los gringos.

MARÍA. ¡No me llames más GRINGA! ¿Cuándo me vas entender jíbara?

IRIS. ¡¿Jíbara yo?!... (52)

MANOLO. Ella tiene derecho a estar aquí

IRIS. En mi isla no.

MARÍA. Yo vine porque quería unirme con mi gente, con ustedes mi familia. Nunca me imaginé que me iban a rechazar. (52)

Rivera's approach for confronting "dilapidating structures" as part of the quest is to form a connection with Puerto Rico's cultural past through myth and magic. This technique is reminiscent of the Chicano Movement invoking their indigenous roots through the mythical homeland of Aztlán to construct cultural nationalism, also a characteristic of native literary works.<sup>35</sup> In preparation for receiving Puerto Rico's gift of myth and magic, María must make an additional short journey. Due to the explosive exchange with Iris, María's feelings are hurt and she decides to fly out the next day. Manolo convinces her to take a four-hour trip with him and Monchi to Rincón to visit her abuela's grave before she leaves. Norma is opposed to this decision because Manolo had been very ill and bedridden for the last five years, but he now appears miraculously invigorated by María's visit. Manolo identifies with his niece and is impressed by her interest of island culture. The visit to the gravesite is Manolo's method of leading María through a spiritual connection to her ancestors. Awareness of her cultural past is María's passage to maturity and Rivera's strategy to provide authentic self-knowledge for her protagonist. After a brief stop at the grandmother's grave marker, Manolo steps over to the next gravesite:

MANOLO. (MANOLO *se va a la próxima tumba.*) Ven acá María. Lee.

MARÍA. EMILIA SANTOS TORRES.

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<sup>35</sup> See Rudolfo Anaya and Francisco Lomelí in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, and Kanellos in *Hispanic Immigrant Literature* 168 n. 33.

MANOLO. Mi abuela

MARÍA. Abuela está enterrada al lado de su madre. Por eso abuela quería estar en Rincón.

MANOLO. Y por eso Norma quiere tenerla cerca.

MARÍA. Sí.

MANOLO. Toda su familia está aquí...hermanos, hermanas, su padre, tías y tíos. Somos como las cuentas en este rosario. (*Él saca el rosario*)  
Estamos conectados siempre. No importa donde estemos.

MARÍA. (*MARÍA pone el rosario en la tumba y le da un beso.*)

Bendición abuela. (66-67)

Manolo's pronouncement that they are family regardless of where they live indicates that if María decides to return to New York, she still will be like her ancestors, Puerto Rican. The trip to the family plot is one part of Manolo's plan; next, they travel to the tropical rainforest El Yunque. He takes María there because that is where the Goddess Atabey resides. Manolo is well acquainted with the goddess and interprets for María Atabey's gift of recognition and blessings. The implication is that both Manolo and Monchi have already secured their identity because they have been accepted by the Goddess:

MANOLO. Atabey perdona que no haya venido antes. Estaba enfermo, una jodienda. Pero me siento mejor.

MARÍA. No puedo creer que estoy en el Yunque. (*Se escuchan truenos y relámpagos.*) Ah no, ¿va llover?

MANOLO. Es Atabey. La Diosa no está saludando. (*El sonido de truenos*)

*y relámpagos aumenta. También se escucha la lluvia.)*

MARÍA. Vámonos antes de que empiece la tormenta.

MANOLO. No. Atabey te está dando la bienvenida. Ella nunca lo hace con quien viene por primera vez. Yo fui una excepción.

MARÍA. ¿Una bienvenida, a mí? (*Truenos y relámpagos.*)

MANOLO. Sí. (*El sonido de la lluvia aumenta y se moja MARÍA con lluvia SECA. Ella siente como si se estuviera mojando pero Monchi y Manolo no lo sienten.*)

MARÍA. El agua está tibia. (*MARÍA disfruta la lluvia SECA en su cara.*)

MANOLO. La Diosa abrió las puertas del cielo para ti

(*MARÍA se baña en esta agua seca. Cae en todo su cuerpo. PAUSA.*

*Después de algunos segundos los truenos y los relámpagos se aquietan.*) (69)

As María comes out of the trancelike state, Manolo has gone into a nearby waterfall. It surprises her that she is not wet, but Monchi assures her that that is normal:

MONCHI. La Diosa te aceptó. Vienes por primera vez, y Atabey te recibe

La Diosa sabe que eres especial. Yo sentí lo mismo. Aunque cuando vine la primera vez de pequeño, ESTO no sucedió, hasta que volví con Manolo la segunda vez. Y desde entonces no he sido el mismo. (70)

Although Monchi demonstrates some romantic interest in María, it is not a central theme of Rivera's play. It is alluded to at the family cemetery when Manolo asks Monchi where he would like to be buried, and he answers that he wants to be at María's side.

They share a brief kiss after the dry rain but Manolo's return interrupts them. When Manolo sees them kissing he is happy and says, “¡Qué lindo! Atabey los bendice” (71). The subject is not broached for the remainder of the play. A romantic future for María and Monchi is ambiguous because he has made a commitment to the land. Although he has an engineering degree, he chooses to work the farmland and grow vegetables to sell. He complains that people would rather buy produce from a supermarket than him. María finds all this very admirable, but Iris ridicules him and calls him a jíbarito.<sup>36</sup>

María has not mentioned staying on the island again since the quarrel with Iris. However, she does vow to bring her children to the family cemetery someday, but that does not mean that she plans to stay in Puerto Rico to live. The vagueness of Monchi and María's relationship is significant. According to Heller, the female hero can be obstructed from her quest by patriarchy in marriage plots. “Women’s quests that seek resolution through marriage often signal the female protagonist's recognition that individual aspirations and desires are impossible to achieve outside the institutions which she had once hoped to transcend” (*The Feminization* 11). It is impossible to know what type of a relationship María and Monchi would have had. It is very plausible, given what we know of them that it would not be one based on gender oppression. Although by leaving that

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<sup>36</sup> *Jíbaro* refers to a peasant who makes his living from working the land. This figure has been mythologized and glorified in literature and has become for some, a symbol of Puerto Rican nationalism. Nonetheless, as elaborated upon by Esmeralda Santiago in *Cuando era puertorriquena*, the term also carries disparaging significance and calling someone, *jíbaro*, may be hurled as an insult, 15-16. For more on the dual meaning of the term see Torres-Robles “La mitificación y desmitificación del jíbaro como símbolo de la identidad nacional puertorriqueña.”

question open, Rivera has provided María's quest the possibility of taking an alternate path to self-knowledge.

Heller suggests that the feminized quest begins by saying no: "The female subject assumes the task of continuing to say no to domination, of continuing to speak in her own voice even when she fears that no one will comprehend her" (14). A comparison of María and Norma proves Heller's point. Although challenged by personal barriers and outside influences attempting to define and stop her quest, María has not been deterred. Her parents discouraged her from exploring her Puerto Rican roots. Her ex-boyfriend could not get past her ethnicity and attempted to change it for her. Iris' rejection personified the rejection of many islanders, the people she considers her own. When she does give in to dejection temporarily, María is able to take advice from the one family member that can help her, Manolo. She was tempted to quit her journey, but instead continued saying no to all who would prescribe her identity. Contrary to María, her Aunt Norma allowed others to define her. She is a talented bomba singer and as a young girl had the opportunity to have a professional music career, but her mother did not allow her to pursue it.<sup>37</sup> Back then, Norma lacked the courage to confront her mother, and that failure has soured her

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<sup>37</sup> Bomba is a musical expression originating in the African slave communities rooted in Puerto Rico's historical past. Etymological studies show that the term bomba, or similar sounding words, may be linked to words meaning drum in some West African languages. This art form has had substantial influence on Puerto Rican music. It has numerous variants, but mainly consists of three basic elements: drumming, dancing, and singing and is characterized by the improvisation of the three. The music is momentarily interrupted and a bomba is recited in verses of modified couplet patterns. The recitation of verses may have multiple singers in which case they follow a call and response format. For more and other types of bomba, see Rosa-Nieves 16-18, Quintero Rivera, and McCoy.

outlook in life and has hindered her family relationships. Her husband Victor makes her see the effect her decision had on her:

VICTOR. Quien te oiga, va pensar que tu vida es horrible. Siempre te quejas de que la familia te abandonó y que todo el mundo consigue lo que le da la gana Qué pena que no seguiste cantando y no nos fuimos a Nueva York. Pero ¿qué importa si nos quedamos aquí? Tenemos salud, una buena hija y una casa propia. Pero tú siempre te quejas de lo que no tienes y no te das cuenta de todo lo que si tienes. Mira a tu alrededor, tienes amor Norma, cariño, todo el mundo en tu casa te quiere mucho. Y tú no aceptas ese amor porque sientes que el mundo te ha fallado. Y si tú no lo aceptas, la gente se va a cansar. (74)

In Scene Seven Act Two it is the eve of the Magi, María, and Manolo are sitting outside listening to the *coquíes* and still basking in the magic of their trip to El Yunque. She gives him a shoebox full of grass intended for the Magi's' camels. They are joined by Iris, and the cousins apologize to one another for the disagreement of the previous night. Their apologies do not resolve their differences but they have decided to put them aside. Iris concedes her point of view to a degree, “Aunque tú eres gringa, tú eres boricua” (76). Iris' words synthesize the hybridity that María is willing to accept. The atmosphere develops into a make-do celebration, a *parranda*, and they begin singing *bombas*. The party is soon joined by Monchi and followed by Norma. She enters singing; all are surprised but recover quickly:

NORMA. “Ni por bonita dichosa...”

IRIS. Mami

MARÍA. Tía

(PAUSA.)

NORMA. “Ni por fea desgraciada...”

NORMA Y MANOLO. “...que la suerte de cada cual Dios se la tiene guardada.

TODOS. “¡BOMBA! La bomba hay qué rica es, le sube el ritmo por los pies, por los pies, mulato traiga su trigueña, pá que baile bomba, bomba puertorriqueña.

BOMBA” (78).

The study guide found in the Repertorio Español website describes the scene above, in a synopsis of the play, as the celebration after the baptism at El Yunque. The magic continues and María will receive two more gifts that night. The *parranda* continues and Manolo hands his *güiro* to María so she can play it.<sup>38</sup> She had attempted it

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<sup>38</sup> An Amerindian percussive instrument, the *güiro* is traditionally made out of an oblong gourd that has been ribbed along its side see McCoy, 17. The rhythm is produced by an up and down raking wrist motion against the ribs. Solis writes in *Jibaro Image and the Ecology of Hawaii Puerto Rican Musical Instruments* that the *güiro* has been elevated to cultural icon status. Additionally, that many Caribbean as well as Hawaiian Puerto Ricans believe that the playing of the instrument originates in “the lithe up and down motion used in grating plantains” against the scraper to make dough for pasteles, (a popular Puerto Rican dish similar to tamales, whose dough is made from the green banana) 127-128. Quintero Rivera states that in *jibaro* music, a talented *güiro* player may improvise rhythms much like a bomba drummer in which case a bomba drum is camouflaged by the “humilde e inofensivo guiro”, 103.

once before but could not find the rhythm in it, but now she can. While she is playing Manolo slips out, María soon hears the *coquí* song. She excitedly goes to look for her uncle in his room to tell him about the song, but finds that he has passed away. Manolo's spirit appears in a light to her in the final scene. María says a tender good-bye, “Buenas noches, tío” and the light shines onto the shoebox containing the grass for Magi's camels that she had given to him earlier that evening (81). Inside she finds her uncle's *güiro*; she thanks him and the *coquí* song is heard as the stage lights go out.

Ferguson's analysis of the Psyche and Eros myth suggests that Psyche's quest is complete when she gives birth. Her child is the symbol of the maturity that she gained through the labors; she is now ready to achieve “full development” (“The Female Novel” 231). Since María became the recipient of the *güiro* and heard the song of the *coquí*, we can deduce that she has inherited the Boriquen birthright with the blessing of Atabey and Manolo. The same as Psyche, María has also reached the maturity to complete her quest.<sup>39</sup> She is now on a viable pathway to naming herself. Yet, Heller reminds us that the purpose of the feminized quest is to challenge notions of fixed identities and encompassing patterns, especially those imposed on women by patriarchy. She cautions against falling into the same patterns. Instead, she suggests that we should consider the quest to selfhood a lifelong process (*The Feminization* 18). Rivera's play text exposes existing “dilapidating” social structures, the hazards of cultural identity assumptions, and the consequences of attempting to impose them on others. Instead, she presents a return

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<sup>39</sup> Betty Friedan writes “This is a crisis of women growing up--a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity” in *The Feminine Mystique*,79.

to nature, mythology, music, and magic as a unifying strategy. Overall, María's quest benefits her as the female hero and her community because it promotes self-reflection.

### *Coser y Cantar*

Harold Bloom writes that the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth provide their readers “the scaffolding for a more imaginative vision” because poems are not “ends in themselves” (“The Internalization” 3). Bloom describes the poem as “forepleasure” to the experience the reader conjures up after reading it (3). Ultimately, Blake and Wordsworth supply their readers “both a map of the mind and a profound faith that the map can be put to a saving use” (3). Their reaction to the text determines how or if the map is used. For Dana Heller the American anti-hero, like Blake and Wordsworth, forges such a map. When he is not successful in the quest, he offers his own “subject position in the world,” and Heller questions what that might suggest “about a woman’s attempt to map the female psyche” (8). She concludes that it is “time to map the...frontier of an individual female psyche” (13). What Heller is suggesting is that, like Blake and Wordsworth, the feminized quest-romance can also provide its readers such a map to “a more imaginative vision.”

Two important points should be taken away here. One is Bloom's supposition that the literary product is not the goal of esthetic expression, but rather the response it inspires in readers using the map provided for them by the poet. Second is Heller's extension of the map to the novel. If the readers of these genres may benefit from such a map, so may spectators of drama. Moreover, as argued by Heller in the case of the anti-

hero, the feminized quest does not have to be complete to produce alternative subjectivity positions. Prida's *Coser y Cantar* is such a text.

This play has two protagonists who are still laboring toward maturity. At the end of the play, they fall short of reaching full human identity as described by Friedan and Ferguson. We should however bear in mind Heller's declaration that it is preferable to think of the journey to self-hood as a life-long evolving endeavor. Perhaps Prida's text is more realistic in this sense: the same as the American anti-hero, her protagonists can provide alternative subject positions. Even when they do not complete the quest, they do convey valuable degrees of self-awareness. As aforementioned, the characters do not leave their living space; although, throughout the play they are searching for a misplaced map. The last line asks one more time, "Where's the map?" (*Coser y Cantar* 67) In the same manner that the Romantics' poetry can provide a "map of the mind" to future readers and poets according to Bloom and Heller's extension of that notion to the novel, Prida's non-existent map is a technique that emphasizes to audiences that they must forge their own future. My reading of the play text suggests that the protagonists are in the process of forming their own subjectivity while opening up for discussion traditional cross-cultural attitudes that have constructed women. They are now on course to undoing those constructions, undoing femininity, and laboring toward maturity.

### **Play summary**

*Coser y Cantar* is a bilingual one-act play with two protagonists, ELLA and SHE. They represent two halves of the psyche of a Cuban-American woman living in New York. They are the only characters ever on stage; a male-friend telephones, but he is

never heard. The one-sided conversation confirms that he has called to break off the relationship. Contact between the outside world and the apartment comes in through an opened window in the form of street chaos. The implication is that the outside world is collapsing onto their private space and they fear the uncertainty of it. Thus, they need a map to find their way. The author describes *Coser y Cantar* as “one long monologue” where the protagonists pretend “the other one does not really exist, although each continuously trespasses on each other's thoughts, feelings, and behavior” (49). ELLA generally speaks Spanish and SHE speaks English; occasionally, they alternate a few lines and sometimes they indulge in code switching. Their conversations cover culture conflict themes such as sexuality, identity, hybridity; they make American, as well as Euro-American and Latin American pop culture references to emphasize the wealth of their scope. ELLA's space is stage right and SHE's is stage left. Each protagonist has her own set of furnishings: a bed, a dressing table, and a chair. The play debuted at Duo Theater in New York in 1981 and since then has enjoyed countless performances throughout the United States.

### **Mapping SHE, ELLA and community**

The protagonists' preoccupation with a missing map is Prida communicating to audiences that a map is necessary to move forward in the quest. SHE and ELLA's function is to direct spectators toward an alternate “map of the mind,” hopefully one that is accepting of their proposed techniques to use it for the benefit of the protagonists and the community. SHE and ELLA confront themes that have fixed Latina subjectivity in an

effort to undo femininity. Woman's sexuality and gender construction are fronts that Prida explores through diverse approaches in *Coser y Cantar*.

Kanellos writes that, "...today's Mexican-American literature, like much of Nuyorican and Cuban-American literature, embraces hybridism, synchronicity, and synthesis" (*Hispanic Immigrant* 29). Prida embraces hybridity by splitting the protagonists into halves of one whole, to query patriarchal definitions of feminine sexuality and constructions of womanhood that operate in both Latino and American cultures. Although SHE is somewhat more sexually liberated than ELLA, she also demonstrates instances when she too holds back sexually because she is a woman:

SHE. Do you know what regret means?

ELLA. (*Absentmindedly*.) Es una canción de Edith Piaff.

SHE. Regret means that time in Athens, many years ago...at a café where they played bouzuki music. The men got up and danced and broke glasses and small dishes against the tiled floor. The women did not get up to dance. They just watched and tapped their feet under the table... now and then shaking their shoulders to the music. One Greek man danced more than the others. He broke more glasses and dishes than the others. His name was Nikos. It was his birthday. He cut his hand with one of the broken glasses. But he didn't stop, he didn't pay any attention to his wound. He kept on dancing. He danced by my table. I took a gardenia from the vase on the table and gave it to him. He took it, rubbed it on the blood dripping from his hand and gave it back to me with a smile. He danced away to other tables... I wanted to

get up and break some dishes and dance with him. Dance away, out the door, into the street, all the way to some cheap hotel by the harbor, where the next morning I would hang the bedsheet stained with my blood out the window. But I didn't get up. Like the Greek women, I stayed on my seat, tapping my feet under the table, now and then shaking my shoulders to the music...a bloodied gardenia wilting in my glass of restina...

ELLA. No haber roto ni un plato. That's regret for sure. (*Coser y cantar* 55).

SHE regrets that when traveling in Greece all those years ago that she did not give in to the sexual impulse to act beyond her limited role. She was attracted to the Greek man, but lacked the sexual maturity, as exemplified by the imagined bloodied sheet, to act on that desire and define her own image. SHE only brought attention to herself when handing him a gardenia and the same as the other women, SHE repressed the desire to dance in public and smash plates like the men. ELLA comically plays on the Greek celebratory dance ritual of smashing plates and the Spanish expression “no rompe un plato”, someone who would not break a plate is someone who does not misbehave. ELLA is saying that to have never transgressed, smashed plates, is truly regretful.

Transgressing against the tenets of patriarchy is a recurrent theme of their conversations and fantasies. When SHE wants to “exercise our intellects” and discuss something important such as “the meaning of life” ELLA replies that her mother told her that a woman’s life is primarily, as the title of the play underscores, “coser y cantar” (57).

Prida condemns patriarchy's reduction of a woman's life to sewing and singing by referencing the children's song "Arroz con leche":

Arroz con leche me quiero casar  
con una señorita de este lugar  
Que sepa coser, que sepa bordar  
que sepa abrir la puerta para ir a jugar  
Con ésta, sí  
Con ésta, no  
Con esta señorita me caso yo (*Género y canción infantil* 11)

A popular children's song throughout Spanish speaking countries the words however, vary from region to region, yet the assignation of gender roles is their common meme; it is stressed to little boys that they have the agency to select their future wives, while little girls are taught they must become proficient in household tasks to be chosen by a suitor.<sup>40</sup> Prida's criticism of limitations placed on women by tradition is evident in her treatment of feminine sexuality. ELLA represents the more conservative of the halves; she struggles to reconcile women's prescribed behavior and her sexual desire.

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<sup>40</sup>Included among the different versions of the song are the various tasks a girl should master: coser, planchar, cocinar, barrer, trapear, asear la cocina, bordar y escombrar, jugar y cantar. For further discussion on childhood gender assignation see Anna M. Fernández Poncela in "Género y canción infantil" 1-28. The prerogative to choose her own mate is extended to the girl in one popular version where she is both widowed and the daughter of the king. Privilege is granted to her through social class and marital status, but she must still be able to perform some tasks, "que sepa coser, que sepa bordar, que ponga la aguja en su campanal ". See <http://www.elboricua.com/BoricuaKids.html>.

SHE sometimes challenges her values by provoking shock. ELLA retaliates by calling SHE promiscuous and vulgar. Yet, ELLA has regrets about never breaking plates and she craves agency like a man:

ELLA. ¿Nunca has querido ser hombre?

SHE. Not really. Men are such jerks.

ELLA. Pero se divierten más. ¿De veras que nunca te has sentido como ese poema?: “...Hoy, quiero ser hombre. Subir por las tapias, burlar los conventos, ser todo un Don Juan; rapar a Sor Carmen y a Sor Josefina, rendirlas, y a Julia de Burgos violar...?”<sup>41</sup>

SHE. You are too romantic, that's your problem.

ELLA. ¡Y tú ere muy promiscua! Te acuestas con demasiada gente que ni siquiera te cae bien, que no tiene nada que ver contigo.

SHE. (*Flexing her muscles.*) It keeps me in shape. (*Bitchy.*) And besides, it isn't as corny as masturbating, listening to boleros.

ELLA. (*Covering her ears.*) ¡Cállate! ¡Cállate! ¡Cállate! (59)

SHE presses the subject of sexuality and ELLA flees from it. The stark difference in their sexual attitudes is belied near the end of the play when each protagonist gets in their respective beds and they alternately describe a sensual encounter between two bodies. The monologs become increasingly excited and when done they get out of bed and walk over to their dressing tables. ELLA sensually lights a cigarette and SHE puts cold cream on her face. Together they sing a song in a sexy manner. This masturbation

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted from Julia de Burgos' poem "Pentacromía" *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*, 1556.

sequence reveals that sexually they are closer in agreement than ELLA would like to admit.

Earlier SHE had attempted to shock ELLA by suggestively answering the question, “¿Tienes fantasías a menudo” (57)? ELLA chastises her and tells her that she meant fantasies that invoke heroism, like Joan of Arc. As Heller has written, to initiate the internalized romance-quest, women must first claim their right to be the female hero. By doing so, ELLA appropriates the male privilege to identify herself. Additionally, in the passage below, ELLA asks audiences to join her in her acts of courage, to right the wrongs of the world; in other words, she is attempting to deliver the map:

ELLA. (*Picking up the chair and lifting it above her head.*) Mi fantasía es ser una superwoman: ¡Maravilla, la mujer maravilla! (*Puts chair down and lies across it, arms and legs kicking in the air, as if swimming.*) ... Y salvar a una niña que se ahoga en el Canal de la Mancha, y nadar, como Esther Williams, hasta los blancos farallones de Dover... (*Gets up, then rides astride the chair.*) ¡Ser una heroína que cabalgando siempre adelante, hacia el sol, inspirada por una fe ciega, una pasión visionaria, arrastre a las multitudes para juntos salvar al mundo de sus errores! (58)

Regardless of SHE's sexual bravado or ELLA's acts of imaginary bravery, they are still struggling to undo femininity. They had been trying to distract themselves all morning from willing the phone to ring. When it finally does ring, it is a man calling to break off their intimate relationship. SHE answers the phone and makes an effort to get him to reconsider. Exasperated by her, ELLA grabs the phone out of SHE's hand and

defiantly starts to attack the caller. Alas, her boldness is short lived; the same as SHE, ELLA humiliates herself as she desperately attempts to hold on to their lover. According to Betty Friedan, the process of “infantilizing” American women is accomplished when parents and spouses discourage them from gaining self-confidence and stunting the growth into human identities. (*The Feminine Mystique* 133-134). Friedan's criticism can be extended beyond the family into the society and culture that women live in. It is significant that the protagonists did not dwell much on the phone call after that sequence was over; however, during the conversation their reaction was subordinate to the ex-boyfriend. In this instance, Prida's characters are not deconstructing male defined femininity; they are reinforcing it. SHE and ELLA are living up to the stereotype of emotionally immature women, lacking the self-confidence to reject destructive relationships. They lack the maturity that Psyche gained through labors:

SHE. Hello?...I am glad you called... Yes, I remember you warned me you didn't want to get involved...but, all I said was that I love you...Oh, please, let's try again! Sunday morning we'll make love...have brunch...read the Times in bed and ...please, don't...how can you?

ELLA. ¿Pero quién carajo tú te crees que eres para venir a tirarme así, como si yo fuera una chancleta vieja? ¡Qué huevos fritos ni ocho cuartos, viejo!...Mi amor...ay, mi amor, no me dejes. Haré lo que tú quieras. ¡Miénteme, pégame, traicióname, patéame, arrástrame por el fango, pero no me dejes! (65)

Other themes used to illustrate hybridity, synchronicity, and synthesis are bilingualism, nostalgia, comparison of foods, and the internal struggle of SHE and ELLA for acceptance of one another. Luis Leal's article "Truth-Telling Tongues: Early Chicano Poetry" dispels the myth that bilingual texts are a twentieth century phenomenon, an outcome of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. He traces the use of bilingualism in literary texts back to colonial times; those texts were written with different social purposes. Contrary to early Hispanic texts, the purpose of bilingualism in Chicano poetry is aesthetic (102). Bilingualism is the structure of *Coser y Cantar*; this is evident in the names of the protagonists. The aesthetic function of language in the play is to highlight the psychological duality of being Latina in the United States. The two halves are in constant conflict, as shown by the separation of languages; yet it is impossible to differentiate one from the other. Their thoughts intermingle and their arguments sometimes end in agreement. For example in the following, they are remembering a recent trip back to Cuba. The exchange ends when they agree to treat themselves with some nostalgic memories and SHE plays the Olga Guillot song "*Nostalgia habanera*":

SHE. I miss all that green. Sometimes I wish I could do like Dorothy in "The Wizard of OZ" close my eyes, click my heels and repeat three times. "there's no place like home"...and, puff! be there...

SHE. I remember that trip back home...I'd never seen such a blue sea. It was an alive, happy blue. You know what I mean?

ELLA. A mí no se me había olvidado. Es el mar más azul, el más verde...el más chévere del mundo. No hay comparación con estos mares de por aquí.

SHE. It sort of slapped you in the eyes, got into them and massaged your eyeballs...

ELLA. Es un mar tan sexy, tan tibio. Como que te abraza. Dan ganas de quitarse el traje de baño y nadar desnuda...lo cual, por supuesto, hiciste a la primera oportunidad...

SHE. I wanted to see everything, do everything in a week...

ELLA. (*Laughing.*)...No sé si lo viste todo, pero en cuanto a hacer...¡el trópico te alborotó, chiquitica! ¡Hasta en el Malecón! ¡Qué escándalo!

SHE. (*Laughing.*) I sure let my hair down! It must have been all that rum. Everywhere we went, there was rum and “La Guantanamera”... And that feeling of belonging, of being home despite...

ELLA. (Nostalgic.) ¡Aaay!

SHE. ¿Qué pasa?

ELLA. ¡Ay, siento que me viene un ataque de nostalgia!

SHE. Lets wallow!

ELLA. ¡Ay, sí, un disquito! (62)

In addition to music, the synthesis of the two characters is comically played out in a verbal food fight of sorts. Food is an influential representation of cultural authenticity and poses as a source of contention when living in one culture and wanting to remain authentic in another. Thus, the naming and contrasting of foods becomes an effective tool for Prida to address the mixed messages that Latinas internalize about food consumption in the United States. While the multitude of ethnic foods and dishes can project a sense of

cultural inclusiveness, too often the message is that they are somehow inferior. They are maligned as being unhealthy; they lack nutritional value and they are too fatty. As a result, the healthiest, most nutritious, and slimming foods exist exclusively in American cuisine. Such attitudes set standards of beauty and distort Latina body images. Consequently, Latinas struggle to attain the ideal body image as defined by American culture. SHE criticizes ELLA's food choices and eating habits so she offers alternatives:

ELLA. ¡Aaay, esta nostalgia me ha dado un hambre!

SHE. That's the problem with nostalgia it is usually loaded with calories!

How about some steamed broccoli...

ELLA. Arroz...

SHE. Yogurt...

ELLA. Frijoles negros...

SHE. Bean sprouts...

ELLA. Plátanos fritos...

SHE. Wheat germ...

ELLA. Ensalada de aguacate

SHE. Raw carrots

ELLA. ¡Flan!

SHE. Granola

ELLA. ¿Qué tal un arroz con pollo, o un ajiaco?

SHE. Let's go! (63)

ELLA feels that SHE is an intruder in her life, who has robbed her parts of herself. At one point ELLA describes SHE as a nuisance, a frozen penguin around her neck. SHE corrects her, “An albatross...you mean like an albatross around your neck” (55). Another time SHE criticizes ELLA for being too transparent with her emotions; she accuses her of being “emotionally primitive.” SHE suggests that ELLA needs to acquire “emotional sophistication” (54). After ELLA mulls that over awhile, she accuses SHE of being inauthentic, of not knowing who she is, to have forgotten the smell of her own sweat and the sound of her own voice. The inner struggle that the protagonists act out illustrates the synchronicity that exists in the lives of the two halves. Never fully able to separate one from the other, their criticisms are quickly reversed and exposed as criticisms of themselves. They exist simultaneously, and together they make the whole, as shown when they resolve the albatross analogy jointly. Their conflict comes to a head in the exchange below where ELLA seriously considers if she can eradicate SHE from her life. SHE defends herself by pointing out that they are fused and that SHE is as important as ELLA. The reference SHE makes to the fish tank alludes to an earlier memory where ELLA described the glass partitions separating the passengers and those left behind at the Cuban airport as fish tanks:

ELLA. Tu problema es que ves demasiadas películas de Woody Allen, y ya te crees una neoyorquina neurótica. Yo no. Yo sé como tener una fiesta conmigo misma...Yo tengo mis recuerdos...Yo tengo una solidez. Tengo unas raíces, salgo de que agarrarme. Pero tú...¿tú de qué te agarras?

SHE. I hold on to you. I couldn't exist without you.

ELLA. But I wonder if I need you. Me pregunto si te

necesito...robándome la mitad de mis pensamientos, de mi tiempo, de mi sentir, de mis palabras...como una sanguijuela!

SHE. I was unavoidable. You spawned me while you swam in that fish tank. I would take a long time to make me go away!

ELLA. Tú no eres tan importante. Ni tan fuerte. Unos meses, tal vez uso años, bajo el sol, y, ¡presto!... desaparecerías. No quedaría ni rastro de ti. Yo soy la que existo. Yo soy la que soy. Tú... no sé lo que eres.

SHE. But, if it weren't for me you would not be the one you are now. No serías la que eres. I gave yourself back to you. If I had not opened some doors and some windows for you, you would still be sitting in the dark, with your recuerdos, the idealized beaches of your childhood, and your rice and beans and the rest of you goddam obsolete memories! (*For the first time they face each other, furiously*). (66)

The recollections that the protagonists have of Cuba are nostalgic, but neither one expresses a desire to return to the island to stay. Prida's native literary stance is clear by the end of SHE's rant when she takes credit for saving ELLA from becoming hostage to her memories. She argues her contributions as part of the Latina psyche and demands to be valued. Here Prida is speaking directly to conservative members of the Cuban community; she is handing over a piece of the map. The play ends where SHE and ELLA's fight is interrupted by outside noise and their problems fade into the background. The final lines are about the community and its fears and distrust of the United States. Prida provides the last piece so audiences may construct the map:

*Loud sound of siren, shots, screams are heard outside. They run towards the window, then walk backwards in fear, speaking simultaneously.*

SHE. They are shooting again!

ELLA. ¡Y están cortando los árboles!

SHE. They're poisoning the children in the schoolyard!

ELLA. ¡Y echando la basura y los muertos al río!

SHE. Let's get out of here! (Another shot is heard. They look at each other.)

ELLA. El mapa...

SHE. Where's the map? (67)

In conclusion, Prida has exposed much in *Coser y Cantar*; she uses language and food to demonstrate the hybridity of her protagonists. She utilizes music, literary, and pop culture references to illustrate the richness of taking from two or more cultures to form subjectivity. The play examines traditional attitudes about and the reality of Latina sexuality. In contrast to Rivera, Prida does not resolve SHE and ELLA's identity crisis; they do not complete the feminized quest. Nonetheless, according to Heller, Ferguson, and Friedan, woman's subjectivity is a process that requires maturity, or labor. In that sense, Prida's characters are evolving; they are on a search for identity en route to completing the quest. The playwright has used Bloom's notion of a "map of the mind" to explain through her characters the necessity to construct together a new plan for living in the United States that values Latina/o hybridity. Both plays studied in this chapter take the native trajectory described by Kanellos' thesis on Hispanic Literature of the United

States. Textual elements found in the schema are present in the play texts, such as identity crisis, cultural conflicts, bilingualism. The texts do not promote a return to a land of origin, but rather propose strategies to open space for Latina subjectivity in the U.S.

## Conclusion

“My subject is the one who replaces  
whispers with shouts and obedience with  
determination”

--Alicia Arrizón in *Latina Performance*

This dissertation has focused on the construction of feminine subjectivity in five plays written by four U.S. Latinas. It probes the strategies they have used to reimagine women's role in locales that have been traditionally fixed by men, to construct authentic feminine subjects. The playwrights have secured for themselves the authority to rethink, reinvent, and rewrite the sites of myth, traditional family, and the quest for subjectivity. Their works provide the space to present female characters who possess realistic life experiences essential to constructing the subject.

When Latinas rewrite mythology rooted in patriarchy they expose the frailty of narratives once accepted as indisputable truths. By reinventing monstrous or evil women, Latinas diminish the power of male their authors; they reiterate that the tale merely conveys the perspective of the author. The feminist project to take control of the pen to rewrite the myth and allow the mythical figure to speak for herself makes her less monstrous and more realistic. Moraga's Medea is less evil than Euripides's Medea or the traditional Llorona; she does not murder her son to take revenge on a philandering lover or to keep him away from his father. Medea sacrifices Chac-Mool to save him from the effects of patriarchy, an ideology that would inculcate him with the hatred of women. Infanticide is Medea's tragic response to her experiences with patriarchy. As the speaking subject, she is able to present her own narrative.

The writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz leave little doubt that she was able to articulate her own vision of subjectivity. Nonetheless, her biographers have used her writings to speculate on the details of her private life and mold her according to their own viewpoint. This study adopts the position proposed by Amy Kaminsky that when textual evidence about the author's private life is not available, their fictional texts may be interpreted as feminist or lesbian when the language they use takes an oppositional position. The language of *La Respuesta* certainly takes a feminist position where Sor Juana vigorously defends her gender, her studies, her writing, and her God-given intellect to carry them out. Sor Juana's poetry to her friend, the countess María Luisa de Gonzaga, may also be read as lesbian as it speaks of a deep love between them; plus there is an absence of textual evidence defining their love. Using Sor Juana's writings, dramatist Odalys Nanín has deconstructed the patriarchal mythology of the nun. The reimagined Sor Juana speaks in her own words while she constructs a feminist and lesbian subject for audiences.

The traditional Chicano family normalizes heterosexuality and it undeniably places males at the head of the family hierarchy. In this family model, women and children are defined solely by their relationship to the father. Latina feminists signal the Chicano traditional family structure as a site that must be interrogated in order to construct a space for women to create their own subjectivity according to their own authentic experiences. In *Shadow of a Man* Cherríe Moraga has provided that space for her female characters. The play is innovative because there is no male lead; the main characters are the women of the Rodriguez household. They are not reacting to the problems of the father or another male lead, but instead exploring issues that matter to or

are relevant to them. They reject social and religious patterns delineated for them by patriarchy resulting in women who are confident about how they will proceed to define their subjectivity.

Literary critiques hypothesize that fiction centered on the construction of the feminist subject commences when the female character rejects patriarchal notions of femininity and embarks on a journey of self-definition. Such a journey implies the feminization of the quest to subjectivity; therefore, it is reasonable that such fiction should be studied through the spectrum of the classic *bildungsroman*. Nonetheless, close examination of Jerome Buckley's *bildungsroman* elements reveals that analysis of women's fiction demands its own characterization, one that identifies authentic feminist development. Thus, the objective of the female hero is to identify social structures that limit or discourage her from taking the journey of self-discovery. Subsequently this feminist fiction proposes strategies to combat said structures embedded in patriarchal societies.

*La Gringa* and *Coser y Cantar* illustrate the feminization of the quest in that the protagonists rebuff external definition and seek an authentic self. In Rivera's play, María struggles to reconcile the sense of alienation she experiences in both New York and Puerto Rico. She follows Heller's precepts towards the feminization of the quest; María grants herself permission to make the journey and explores alternative strategies that challenge American and Puerto Rican society's demarcations of ethnicity. Her journey of discovery results in the construct of a new hybrid identity that is consistent to with her understanding herself.

Bloom's minds map hypothesis for poetry may be applied to drama. Prida's use of a metaphorical map in *Coser y Cantar* becomes another tactic towards self-identification. The play queries themes of identity relevant to the daily lives of U.S. Latinos. Therefore, the drama itself becomes the map designed to stimulate conversation and effect change to traditional subjectivity construction after audiences have consumed the play. A notable characteristic of the feminization of the quest literature is plurality and that it concerns itself for the benefit of the female hero's community. *La Gringa* and *Coser y Cantar* exhibit this element in that they offer strategies, which Latinas and Latinos may employ to negotiate cultural synthesis and hybridization.

The plays studied here represent Latinas in the process of defining themselves by demonstrating that their experiences have the depth and authenticity necessary to construct subjectivity. They challenge social paradigms that define their femininity according to patriarchal imagination. They reject compulsory heterosexuality and they choose when and with whom they will be sexual. They are unrestricted to explore intellectual pursuits, redefine family, and contemplate ethnicity, gender and identity. These Latina representations offer theater audiences female subjectivity as imagined and written by women to reveal an authentic feminine subject.

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