

*The House on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Challenge to the
Traditional Mexican Literary Feminine Archetypes of
La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe.*

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FACULTY APPROVAL

The House on Mango Street: Sandra Cisneros's Challenge to the
Traditional Mexican Literary Feminine Archetypes of
La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe.

Approved for the Faculty

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ABSTRACT

In 1984 Sandra Cisneros published her first novel entitled *The House on Mango Street*. It is about a young Chicana, Esperanza Cordero, who lives on Mango Street in a Chicago barrio. Esperanza witnesses the sad lives of the women on Mango Street, and she delivers poignant insight through her narration about the pitfalls of following the gender traditions set forth by her culture. Cisneros uses Esperanza as a Chicana feminist ideal to challenge the traditional Mexican literary feminine archetypes of La Malinche, the whore, and la Virgen de Guadalupe, the pure virgin. This thesis discusses how Cisneros utilizes the Chicana Feminist theory to create characters that show how detrimental it can be to align oneself with either of the traditional archetypes. Chicana feminists have reclaimed the archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe, reworking them to fit into the ideals embraced by the Chicana feminist theory. Cisneros chooses to use these reclaimed and reworked archetypes for her characters as well, emphasizing the strengths and complexities within Chicanas.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

The characterization of women throughout Mexican literature has been profoundly influenced by two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: That of the woman who has kept her virginity and that of the one who has lost it (Leal 227).

La Malinche, or *La Chingada*, the violated one, and la Virgen de Guadalupe, the Holy Mother and Patron Saint of Mexico, are the embodiments of the "sharply define[d] [feminine] roles in Mexican culture based on physical sexuality" (Petty, par. 5).

The driving force behind this thesis was a conversation I had with a colleague of mine from the Sunnyside School District, located in Sunnyside, Washington. We had been discussing how to define *archetype* to my 8th grade students. My colleague, being new to our school district, which has a 94% Latino population, was brushing up on her Mexican and Chicano (a political or preferred term of some Mexican-Americans born within the United States) literature, asked about the archetype of la Virgen in Chicano literature. I explained how she was considered the feminine ideal; the quinceaneras, the 15-year-old girls who go through a rite-of-passage ceremony in their respective churches, pledged to model themselves after la Virgen. My colleague, quite knowledgeable in literature, expressed the view that most cultures have a

traditional good/bad description for women: "If la Virgen is the good," she questioned, "who is the bad?"

I happened to have just read *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldua, and in her writing, she references La Malinche, the *mujer mala*, or bad woman, who helped Cortes when he conquered Moctezuma's Aztec Empire (39). I explained this to my colleague, who noted the unjust and inequitable standards that women are held to when men may do or say as they please. I concurred, and found myself deep in thought about how these inequalities might affect my Chicana students.

I knew that it was necessary for me to find a piece of literature that emphasized both archetypes clearly enough for 8th graders to grasp, yet criticized the rigid cultural roles. This desire to find a strong Mexicana/Chicana character who defies the traditional archetypes present in much of our literature, especially in Chicano literature, drove me to find a novel to which my students could relate. Through my research, I was able to find an article on Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, and its use of traditional Mexican archetypes. An article by Leslis Petty entitled "The Dual-ing images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros's *House on Mango Street*" met and even surpassed my expectations. Although I did not wholly agree with the narrow-focused conclusions made by Petty, the article provided me with an idea on what to base my thesis.

I was familiar with the novel and knew I could use it to accurately explain *archetype* to my 8th graders without any confusion on their part. Too, I recognized my students needed to be introduced to a strong Chicana literary character as a model for feminine independence. My own personal struggle for social action and equality among the traditional Mexican/Chicano patriarchal society propelled me to take up the cause of Chicana feminism, a theory, I discovered, that is quite significant to the novel.

The House on Mango Street, written two decades ago by Sandra Cisneros, challenges the virgin/whore dichotomy by intertwining Chicana feminist ideals into the many thoughts and experiences of the narrator, Esperanza Cordero. Esperanza, a young Chicana growing up on Mango Street in a Chicago barrio, discovers that on her street "the woman's place is one of domestic confinement, not one of liberation and choice" (Olivares, qtd. in Klein, par. 5).

Cisneros divides the novel into vignettes, each able to stand on its own, yet they are woven together to create the world in which the reader looks into the life and mind of Esperanza. The short, but powerful narratives give insight to Esperanza's development and her coming to terms with her socio-economic status, her gender, her heritage, and her dreams.

It has been said that this novel is loosely based on the life of its author, Sandra Cisneros. In order to form my own opinion on the matter, I decided to research the life of the author. What I found was that although this is a piece of

fiction and does not qualify as an autobiography, her life history greatly impacted the creation of *The House on Mango Street*.

Sandra Cisneros was born in 1954, in Chicago, Illinois, to a Chicana mother and a Mexican father. As a youth, Cisneros moved around Chicago and back and forth from Mexico. She moved from apartment to apartment, never quite feeling settled. When she was a teenager, Cisneros' parents finally bought a house, but it wasn't the kind of house that Cisneros thought of as beautiful. This made her even more determined to find a better place for herself (Gagnier, par. 6).

Cisneros surrounded herself in the beauty of books, and she sought comfort and solace in writing poetry and stories. Cisneros recalls that she was "reading and reading, nurturing myself with books like vitamins" ("Do You Know Me?" 74). Cisneros also acknowledges her mother's investment in her education by concluding, "[M]y mother let me stay in my room reading and studying, perhaps because she didn't want me to inherit her sadness and her rolling pin" (75).

In 1976, Cisneros earned a B.A. in English from Loyola University, and then enrolled in the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop (Gagnier, par. 8). The University of Iowa was where Cisneros began to be more conscious of gender, class, and racial inequality, and thus, formed the idea behind *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros determined she needed to make room in the female literary tradition for a young working-class Chicana who "like[s] to tell stories,"

since Cisneros observed while sitting in her seminar at the University of Iowa that she needed to write "about something my classmates couldn't write about" (Aranda 64).

[M]y family and relatives...was [sic] nothing like the family on 'Father Knows Best.'...That's precisely what I chose to write about: third-floor flats, and the fear of rats and drunk husbands sending rocks through the window. And this is where I discovered the voice I'd been suppressing all along (Cisneros, qtd. in Wissman 29).

Cisneros taps into her own history and her struggles and experiences as a Latina to create Esperanza--the narrator and protagonist of the novel. Esperanza espouses the characteristics of a young feminist because she recognizes at an early age the discrepancies in power and the sad lives that exist for the women on Mango Street. In fact, Esperanza daringly declares, "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" (Cisneros, *House* 89).

Sandra Cisneros's activity in the Feminist Movement helped her to capture, through many of her characters in *The House on Mango Street*, various ways women are subjected to exploitation and submission. However, Cisneros quickly recognized that focusing on gender inequality was not enough; she needed to reflect on the other kinds of inequality faced by Latinas within their own racial and ethnic communities.

According to Yarbrow-Bejarano, Latina/Chicana feminism can be defined as recognition that a Latina/Chicana's "experience as a woman is inextricable from her experience as a member of an oppressed working-class racial minority and a culture which is not the dominant culture" (139). It is this Chicana feminism that battles against the traditional archetypal views of La Malinche and la Virgen, and it is this feminism that is embodied in Esperanza, who pursues her ambitions despite many obstacles.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Overview

The Feminist Movement began in the United States in the 1850s, under the leadership of well-known women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone. Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Ellen Craft, three women of Color, also played a significant role in the "suffragist" movement. However, these latter women were excluded, theoretically, because the traditional feminist ideals and literature are based on the middle-to upper-class white women's views. The movement, founded and led by middle-class white women, ultimately reflected *their* needs, concerns, and biases. In the process of establishing goals and priorities, the unique needs and concerns of minority women were not taken into account (Mirande and Enriquez 1).

Latina Feminism

In *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism*, Aida Hurtado ascertained that Chicanas, as well as other women of Color, have not, historically, been part of the white feminist analyses "primarily because most white feminists have overemphasized gender oppression as overriding other socioeconomic characteristics as the basis for subordination" (3). As recent as the mid-1980s feminist thought in the United States has been written by white, educated women, since it is possible for white women to stay in college much longer than women of Color, due to socio-economic status. Hurtado developed a

theory explaining the relative ease with which white women are able to have their voices heard: it's their relationship to white men.

Traditionally, white men hold the power in society. All oppressed groups are "positioned in a particular and distinct relationship to white men, and each form of subordination is shaped by this relational position" (2). Given that white women are the sisters, daughters, or wives of white men, they have an "economic cushion" that escapes most women of Color. This economic edge allows white women to make more money, to attain a higher education, and to study and publish their ideas about feminism. Their brand of feminism tends to not only overlook the socio-economic disparities between white women and women of Color, but their ideas overlook the concept of race and culture (7).

In order to overcome the exclusion of women of Color in feminist thought, there had to be a shift in the focus of the lens of feminism; therefore, it was determined that there was a need for many kinds of feminisms. As a result, each oppressed racial and ethnic group under the umbrella of women of Color, formed their own branch of feminism.

The Chicana feminist movement began after the Civil Rights period of the 1950s and 1960s. Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enrique observed in their book *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* that this time period had "dramatize[d] the subordination and exploitation of black Americans but also increase[d] awareness of the exploitations of other groups" (1). The Chicanos' experience in the United States has been very different than that of the African-

Americans, who were forcibly brought here as slaves. Because of the annexation of the Southwest United States in the 1840s, Chicanos became a "colonized or conquered people, rendered politically and economically powerless and having a foreign culture and language imposed by force" (p. 8). Through the recognition of being a colonized people, the Chicano movement thus came to the forefront, and its main goal was to end the colonial oppression of Chicanos.

Although the movement professed to focus on the issues of all Chicanos, the common concerns were based on male issues, such as racial and ethnic discrimination in the workplace and in education. As much as the Chicanas were unhappy with the omission of important female concerns like forced sterilization, welfare, abortion, and sexual discrimination, they were torn because they did not want to split the movement. Therefore, they "subordinated their needs to the good of the entire group" (2).

The oppression of Chicanas is tied to not only the experiences of subordination they have in the dominant society, but also by the subordination created in the societal structures within their own culture (12). "The construction of Chicanas' sexuality is at the core of the gender dynamics that results in sexism in Chicano families and communities" (Zavella 76). The use of two archetypes, La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe, traps Chicanas physically, sexually, and psychologically in rigid gender roles.

La Malinche

"If there is one villainess in Mexican history, she is Malintzin. She was to become the ethnic traitress supreme" (Candelaria 1). This villainess of Mexico has many names: Malinal, Malintzin, Dona Marina, and Malinche. La Malinche persists in Mexican and Chicano culture as an infamous emblem of female transgression and treachery (Mirande and Enriquez 24). Much of the story of La Malinche is shrouded in mystery, but some have made an exhaustive effort to research and separate the facts from the myth. In "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," Cordelia Candelaria presents historical information about La Malinche in an effort to provide a clearer understanding of who she really was:

Born in 1502 in Coatzacoalos, a pre-Columbian province, La Malinche is believed to have originally been named Malinal after Malinalli, the day of her birth, as was the custom at that time. As the daughter of an Aztec *cacique*, or chief, she was a member of a privileged, educated class....After her father's death and her mother's remarriage, Malinal was given away by her mother who sought to gain control of her daughter's inheritance for a son by her second husband" (3).

Malinal was sold as a slave, and she moved to the province of Tabasco, on the Yucatan coast. In 1519, the Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortes conquered Tabasco, and he was given "twenty maidens to serve as domestic labor for the warrior-adventurers" (4-5). Malinal was part of the group of maidens.

Malinal's name changed when she was converted to Christianity by the Spanish and was christened "Marina." She soon earned the title of "doña," a salutation of respect, when she had distinguished herself as a polyglot, a speaker of many languages. Doña Marina not only spoke Nahuatl, her native language, and Mayan, the language of the people of Tabasco, but she learned Castilian Spanish with remarkable speed. Her language skills proved to be invaluable to the Spanish, and she soon became the personal interpreter for Cortes (Petty, par. 8-9).

Doña Marina was more than an interpreter; she eventually had a child with Cortes. Doña Marina's involvement with the Spanish eventually condemned her in the eyes of many when Moctezuma's Aztec Empire was conquered. Dona Marina's participation with the Spanish and Cortes "label[ed] her a whore, the mother of a bastard race of mestizos, and a traitress to her country" (Mirande and Enriquez 24). She became known as Malinche, a linguistic twist on her Aztec name, Malinal. There was no significance of the word Malinche at the time, but it has now come to mean a "deviance, and a symbol of damned femininity," and "[La Malinche] has become a cultural burden to subsequent generations of [M]exicanas and Chicanas" (Candelaria 10).

La Virgen de Guadalupe

La Virgen de Guadalupe, as a symbol of purity and virtue, is considered the antithesis of La Malinche. The Patron Saint of Mexico, la Virgen de Guadalupe is viewed, according to RoseAnna Mueller in "Virgin of Guadalupe," as

a "native, loving and forgiving mother, the intercessor to God the Father and his son, Jesus Christ" (par. 1). La Virgen is the Mexican manifestation of the Virgin Mary, and she is the center of Mexican Catholicism.

In 1649, the Vicar of Guadalupe, Luis Laso de la Vega, first published the story of the appearance of la Virgen. Vega wrote that la Virgen "first appeared to a converted Indian, Juan Diego, in 1531, on the hill of Tepeyac, identifying herself as 'mother of the great true deity God'" (par. 4). According to Petty, Juan Diego was told by la Virgen to build a temple for her on the hill. If he does this, la Virgen will give "all my love, my compassion, my aid and my protection" to all those in Mexico" (par. 5). However, when Juan Diego makes his way to see the bishop in Mexico City to tell of the appearance of the Holy Mother, he is met with skepticism. On his second visit to Mexico City, Juan Diego is challenged by the bishop to go back to the hill and bring evidence of la Virgen's existence.

La Virgen again appears to Juan Diego, and she instructs him to go to the very top of the hill of Tepeyac and gather all kinds of Spanish flowers. Of course, the flowers didn't grow on that hill, nor were they in season, but Juan Diego was able to find several, and, to protect the flowers, he puts them in his cloak. Juan Diego returns for a third time to Mexico City with his proof for the bishop. When a few of the bishop's servants stop Juan Diego and try to view some of the blossoms, the blossoms in his cloak turn into painted flowers. Once Juan Diego meets with the bishop, he opens his cloak, live flowers fall to the ground, and inside his cloak lining is an imprint of la Virgen. The bishop finally

believes, begs for forgiveness, and erects the shrine to la Virgen de Guadalupe on the hill of Tepeyac (par. 5).

Although the story of la Virgen cannot be officially substantiated, the important factor is what she has come to mean for Chicanos. Octavio Paz observed "Guadalupe [la Virgen] is pure receptivity, and the benefits she bestows are of the same order: she consoles, quiets, dries tears, calms passion" (qtd. in Petty, par. 6). As such, she represents the holy, chaste woman, the embodiment of feminine purity as well as the virtues of nurturing and self-sacrifice. Thus, she is "venerated in Mexican [and Chicano] culture as the proper symbol for motherhood" (para. 7).

La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe are the two cultural archetypes in which Chicano femininity is defined and confined- the whore or the virgin. These archetypes have been used to denigrate and control female sexuality in Mexican and Chicano society for hundreds of years. It has since become the goal, the mission, of Chicana feminists to reclaim these symbols of femininity and redefine them to express the strength and independence of the authentic Chicana.

CHAPTER 3

Traditional Archetypes Applied as Warnings

"[My great-grandmother] looked out the window all her life," says Esperanza: "I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (Cisneros, *House* 11).

Cisneros portrays Esperanza as the Chicana feminist ideal, creating a sharp contrast to minor characters in the novel. Esperanza, as the first-person narrator, is the mouthpiece through which Cisneros delivers her interpretation of the characters and their faults, successes, struggles, and victimization. Through the characters of Marin and Sally, and Aunt Lupe and Mama, Cisneros is able to show how an alliance with either one of the traditional archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen is "artificial and confining" and leaves a woman feeling unfulfilled and inadequate (Petty, para. 14, 15).

Esperanza's friend, Marin, who "wears dark nylons all the time and lots of makeup" (Cisneros, *House* 23), shares the name of the archetype she represents: La Malinche, or Doña Marina. The description of Marin immediately aligns her with the darker, sexual La Malinche. She smokes cigarettes, wears short skirts, and tells Esperanza that "what matters....is for the boys to see us and for us to see them" (27). Marin does not live with her immediate family in Puerto Rico, but on Mango Street with her cousin Louie. She is not free to do as

she pleases; she is only allowed to go out to the front of the house. She tells Esperanza that she can't go out because she has "gotta baby-sit with Louie's sisters" (23). In essence, Cisneros portrays Marin as being enslaved, much like La Malinche (Petty, par. 34).

Marin also parallels La Malinche by how she wants to live her life. Marin shares with Esperanza that

She's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might want to marry you and take you to live in a big house far away (Cisneros, *House* 26).

This statement can be perceived as Marin's erroneous belief that happiness depends on what a man can provide. Also, it highlights a traitorous desire. Downtown is the center of economic power, where a white majority exists, and a place where few Chicanos work. Marin's yearning to be downtown and end up being taken far away can be viewed as a betrayal of her own culture and family--the same indictments made against La Malinche.

Ultimately, Marin is sent away "with a letter saying she's too much trouble" (27). Esperanza expresses her sadness at Marin being sent away, yet she makes an insightful comment about Marin. Esperanza recognizes the limitedness of Marin's vision of her future by stating, "[Marin] is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (27). There is an underlying

sense of pity in Esperanza's words, a subtle reminder from Cisneros of the dangers of being like La Malinche.

Similarly, the character of Sally symbolizes aspects of La Malinche. She is beautiful, and aware of the power of her own sexuality; these are seen as threatening. Sally becomes the target of name-calling by her own friend, Cheryl, as well as the object of rumors spread by the boys in the coatroom (82). Even her father believes that "to be this beautiful is trouble" (81). In the Chicano culture, women are possessions of men, and a woman's virginity determines her property value (Behar 83). Therefore, Sally's father beats her and refuses to allow her out of the house, all in an attempt to keep her from falling into the trap of promiscuity. Sally, like Marin, is enslaved. Sally is passive, though, and refrains from retaliating.

It is this passivity that, according to traditional views, mirrors La Malinche. Octavio Paz suggests, "[t]his passivity....causes [La Malinche] to lose her identity: she is the Chingada. She loses her name; she is nothing..."(77). Cisneros utilizes that idea of passivity to show how unfulfilled a woman can be if she aligns herself with one of the extreme archetypes. Again, Cisneros reveals this belief through the words of Esperanza. Although Esperanza admires Sally for her beauty, style, and maturity, she perceives a sadness that surrounds Sally:

Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn't have to go home? Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you far away from Mango Street, far away....[a]nd no one could yell at you if

they saw you out in the dark leaning against a car, leaning against somebody without someone thinking you are bad, without someone saying it is wrong, without the whole world waiting for you to make a mistake... (Cisneros, *House* 82-83).

Esperanza understands the desire to leave in search of a better life because, as implied through Esperanza's commentary, on Mango Street, any appearance of impurity defines a Chicana as a whore. As such, Sally, even though she is not quite in the 8th grade, has been labeled as a "Malinche." Sally decides the only way to make things better in her life is to escape. The escape Sally seeks is not only from Mango Street, but also from the perception that she is a whore. To do this, according to cultural codes, Sally must marry.

To break away from the clutches of her father and her La Malinche label, Sally quickly marries a marshmallow salesman. Unfortunately for Sally, her husband "gets angry and once he broke the door where his foot went through" (101). According to Esperanza, Sally's husband does not let her talk on the phone, have friends, visit anyone, or even look out the window (102). Cisneros successfully demonstrates how Sally, because of her dependence on a man for happiness, went from being enslaved by one man- her father- to being enslaved by another: her husband. This reflects the enslavement of La Malinche, who went from being a slave to the Maya in Tabasco to being a slave of Cortes.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, la Virgen de Guadalupe is represented on Mango Street as well. Cisneros reveals the archetype of la Virgen by providing a namesake; she appears as Esperanza's Aunt Lupe.

Passivity in a character who symbolizes la Virgen is, unlike that of La Malinche, a favorable characteristic. Aunt Lupe is passive, helpless. She suffers from a debilitating disease that makes "her legs [bunch] under the yellow sheets, the bones gone limp as worms" (Cisneros, *House* 58). She is nearly blind and cannot see, but is aware of the filth in which she lives.

Esperanza makes it clear that her Aunt Lupe is "maybe....ashamed....[because she has] kids who wanted to be kids instead of washing dishes and ironing their papa's shirts, and [a] husband who wanted a wife again" (61). Aunt Lupe is extremely unhappy, but she quietly suffers. Because of this suffering and her inability to complete her duties as a wife, Aunt Lupe epitomizes the long-suffering and chaste la Virgen.

Aunt Lupe also extols the virtue of self-sacrifice. Although she is exceedingly ill and exhausted most of the time, Aunt Lupe is the one who listens to Esperanza's poetry. She encourages Esperanza to "keep writing [because] writing will keep you free" (61). Cisneros develops Aunt Lupe's character into one who recognizes how unfulfilling her life is, no matter how virtuous being self-sacrificing may be. The price Aunt Lupe pays for being passive, long-suffering and self-sacrificing is high; after living a short and unsatisfactory life, she dies.

Esperanza's mother, Mama, is another loving and self-sacrificing, yet frustrated symbol of la Virgen. Mama expresses her dissatisfaction with her life in the chapter "A Smart Cookie." She tells Esperanza, "she could have been somebody, you know?" (90). Although Esperanza admires her mother's abilities to speak two languages and sing opera, she recognizes her mother's frustration; she comments on how her mother would like to go to the ballet or to see a play instead of being confined to the house washing dishes or cooking.

Cisneros cleverly uses the dialogue of the self-sacrificing Mama as a warning to women. Mama, who has given up on herself and her ability to be independent and more educated, admonishes Esperanza to go to school and to study hard. She even uses the examples of her friends, her *comadres*, as more proof of why it is important to get an education and be independent. Mama's two friends are alone, either by being deserted, or by the death of a husband. It can be inferred that Mama's *comadres* are helpless because they never learned to live without being dependent on a man. Once the man is gone, the women have nothing, and they feel they are nothing.

Mama advises Esperanza to "take care all your own" (91). Mama, like la Virgen, is the nurturing protector. She may have accepted her life, her fate. However, as the protector, Mama desires to steer Esperanza far from the typical life of a Chicana on Mango Street, and in the direction of educated independence and self-reliance.

CHAPTER 4

Reclamation and Redefinition of Archetypes

I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. In the movies there is always one with red red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away (Cisneros, *House* 88-89).

Like the ideal Chicana feminist she represents, Esperanza recognizes the oppression of the women dependent on marriage as a source of self-identity, and determines she will avoid their mistakes by accepting and retaining her own power as a woman. Cisneros champions the ideas of Chicana feminists through her application of the archetypal figures of La Malinche and la Virgen in not only the traditional Chicano form, but also in the manner Chicana feminists have redefined them.

Chicana feminists have reworked and re-imagined the feminine archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe by "rejecting a woman's worth in terms of [only] their [sic] honor, virtue, and passivity" (Villenas 665). Rather, Chicana feminists have transformed both archetypes to appear more human, complex, and sexual to express power instead of the helplessness of these feminine symbols. Chicana feminists view La Malinche as an intelligent, adaptive interpreter and leader instead of a traitress. La Virgen is perceived as "a role

model of strength, enduring presence, and possibilities" (Rodriguez, par. 32), rather than a passive, long-suffering mother figure.

The purpose of the Chicana feminist revision of "the[se] cultural symbols [is] so that they become a part of a female interpretation interrupting and disrupting traditional patriarchal modes of thinking" (Aldama 218). This revision is the basis for my objection to Leslis Petty's conclusions that Cisneros solely uses the traditional archetypes to "show...dependence on men for one's importance and security is what leads to violation and abandonment" (Petty 24). Cisneros does much more than what Petty suggests. Cisneros's feminist interpretation fuses the key positive characteristics of the two archetypes together. La Virgen becomes strong and sexual, much like La Malinche is usually portrayed. Also, La Malinche is seen as possessing independence, yet is perceived as caring and nurturing.

Cisneros's use of the characters Marin, Aunt Lupe, and Mama to represent the traditional view of the archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe serves as a warning to Chicanas. However, Cisneros also gives these characters redeeming qualities of the re-defined Chicana feminist archetypes.

Marin, the character who represents La Malinche, cares only about herself and how she looks to boys. She embodies the selfishness the traditional view gives La Malinche. Only someone selfish like La Malinche could turn her back on her culture and be a traitress to her people. Or is she? According to Cordelia Candelaria, La Malinche thought of herself as being in charge of spreading the

Christian faith, of helping to save the souls of her people (9). If La Malinche were truly selfish, she would never have considered the souls of anyone other than herself. Therefore, Cisneros deems it necessary to portray Marin as caring about the soul of someone she does not know in the chapter entitled "Geraldo No Last Name."

Esperanza recalls the story Marin tells her about the hit-and-run accident she witnesses after a dance one night. Marin dances with the victim, Geraldo, but she does not know his last name. Inexplicably, Marin ends up at the hospital, and is upset about the indifferent treatment of Geraldo. Marin "can't explain why it mattered, the hours and hours, for somebody she didn't even know. The hospital emergency room. Nobody but an intern working all alone. Maybe if the surgeon would've come..." (66). Marin displays compassion, a characteristic the traditional archetypal La Malinche would never possess.

The long-suffering, self-sacrificing wives and mothers, Aunt Lupe and Mama, personify the archetype la Virgen de Guadalupe. Many believe la Virgen protects the family, brings people together, and mediates between "Chicanas/os and Anglo society, as well as between the divine and humanity" (Anzaldua 30). Therefore, Cisneros reveals Aunt Lupe and Mama to be mediators and protectors; however, they are mediators between Esperanza and the oppressive Chicano patriarchal society. It is in the messages they leave with Esperanza that position Aunt Lupe and Mama as symbols for the reworked Chicana feminist la Virgens.

Aunt Lupe encourages Esperanza to keep writing, and Mama cautions her to stay in school. Both women are providing Esperanza with insight as to what can happen if she does not heed their warnings. Aunt Lupe and Mama desire for Esperanza to have all the experiences they never received, or of which they didn't take advantage when given the opportunity. Whereas la Virgen knows her son, Jesus, must suffer and die in order to achieve freedom from the binds of sin for all, Aunt Lupe and Mama know Esperanza can avoid suffering and achieve freedom for herself by "retain[ing] her independence, pursuing her ambitions, and cultivating [her] sources of creativity"(Wissman 30). The wisdom of Aunt Lupe and Mama demonstrates Cisneros's belief in Chicana feminist theory: Chicanas must advocate for one another in climbing the ladder of success, help one another foresee the possibilities outside their traditional gender, cultural and socio-economic sphere, and celebrate womanhood through social-consciousness (Revilla 3-4).

Cisneros supports her view of the Chicana feminist theory by providing Esperanza with women on Mango Street who embody the characteristics of the re-defined archetypes. "These women provide concrete advice and [serve as] concrete models of women who work against limiting conditions" (Wissman 30). One of Cisneros's characters who effectively plays this role is her friend, Alicia.

Alicia, who inherited her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university. Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her

whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin. Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night..." (Cisneros 32).

Alicia refuses to acquiesce to the limitations her father puts on her. Despite the challenges she has in her life, as well as the fear she has of her father, Alicia endures the long commute to and from college. Still, she does not shirk her duty as a daughter and as the mother figure in the family. Alicia possess strength, and she withstands her father's criticism that she shouldn't be studying, but sleeping so she is rested enough to wake up early to make tortillas for him in the morning (31).

Cisneros provides Alicia with the independence and leadership of La Malinche, and the strength and compassion of la Virgen. Alicia is a mother figure, but has the determination to make a better life for herself outside the confines of the home. As such, Alicia supplies Esperanza with a model of a young Chicana feminist who is pursuing her aspirations despite the hardships she faces.

In the chapter, "The Three Sisters," Cisneros introduces the last of the important Chicana feminist influences. These influences are three elderly sisters who come to Mango Street when the baby sister of Esperanza's friend, Rachel, dies. It is important to note that these sisters become "narrative mediators that enter the story, at the crucial juncture, to assist [Esperanza] in the trial[s] that [lie] ahead" (de Valdes 63). The Three Sisters epitomize the reworked Chicana feminist la Virgen because they act as mediators, as seers and guides, to help

Esperanza navigate through the oppressive environment in which she lives. The Three Sisters also invoke the redefined La Malinche because they are independent from men, but dependent on one another, working together to compassionately lead other women on their journeys through life.

The Three Sisters challenge Esperanza to never forget from where she came. Esperanza, like Chicana feminists past and present, "must find the balance between defending women's rights, and a sense of responsibility towards all of her people and towards herself" (Fernandez-Olmos 105).

Esperanza is advised by The Three Sisters that when she leaves,

[she] must remember to come back for the others. A circle, you understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are (Cisneros 98).

The Three Sisters serve as Chicana feminist examples in providing guidance to Esperanza by encouraging her to embrace her whole self. Esperanza is a writer and a Chicana: she must develop her talent in writing, transform, but not refute her heritage, and eventually, return to Mango Street and provide guidance for an impressionable female, just as The Three Sisters have done for her.

Cisneros characterizes her protagonist, Esperanza, as a Chicana feminist ideal through a balanced blend of characteristics like those possessed by the reimagined archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe. Esperanza discovers the importance of internal strength and motivation through her

observation of the four skinny trees that grew despite the concrete on Mango Street. Esperanza expresses a connection with the trees that are skinny like her, and "that don't belong here but are here" (74). She admires the strength of the trees, and looks to them as a sign of hope. Esperanza observes:

Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach.

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when
I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at
trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street.

Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do
not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be (75).

Esperanza is drawn to the trees because she understands the restricting nature of Mango Street. Yet, she has found it within herself and through the examples of others to avoid the trappings of her environment. In fact, Esperanza does not reject Mango Street; she "is Mango Street, and holds within her both the restrictive and potentially transformative power of Mango Street" (Wissman 33). If Mango Street can produce Chicana feminists from within its boundaries, then hope for Esperanza still exists.

As Maria de Valdes states, "Esperanza's quest for a house is crucial in understanding how her character transcends the [traditional] La Malinche/la Virgen de Guadalupe duality"(58) that dictates the lives of the other females on Mango Street. Esperanza searches for a house that is "not a man's house. Not a daddy's house. A house all my own" (Cisneros 108). The house she seeks is, in

reality, her own person, one that is labeled neither "bad" nor "good" by her society (Petty, par 27). This self-knowledge, self-empowerment, and self-identity are gifts Esperanza receives through her alignment with the fused reworked archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Further Research

The novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros is not only based loosely on the life of its author, but is the definitive Chicana feminist coming-of-age story. Esperanza Cordero, as the protagonist and narrator, espouses the characteristics of a young feminist through the recognition of the discrepancies in power and in the sad lives that exist for the women on Mango Street. The novel effectively challenges the traditional Mexican and Chicano literary feminine archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe through the reclamation and redefinition of these archetypes.

Cisneros shows how an alliance with either one of the traditional archetypes of La Malinche and la Virgen leaves a woman feeling unfulfilled and inadequate. Cisneros accomplishes this through the characterization of Marin and Sally, and Mama and Lupe, with each character representing the traditional view of La Malinche and la Virgen, respectively. The extreme natures of the archetypes are unrealistic; therefore, being Cisneros's feminist ideal, Esperanza looks to others for guidance.

Cisneros provides feminist examples who Esperanza can emulate. Alicia, in the absence of a mother, takes care of her family, yet makes the time to attend college so she does not end up with a dead-end job. The Three Sisters advise Esperanza to develop her talents as a writer, so she can be a voice for

those who cannot leave Mango Street. She must embrace herself and in doing so, she embraces all Chicanas.

Sandra Cisneros's background enabled her to recognize and adequately portray the struggles of Chicanas. Not only are Chicanas treated as subordinates in regular society because of their race, but they are also subordinates in their own culture because of their gender. Cisneros realized a way to work through these issues: she wrote about them. "Writing will keep you free," is not simply a statement made by Aunt Lupe to Esperanza (Cisneros 61). It is Cisneros's plea to herself and to other Chicanas to discover and develop their talents, and never forget where they came from; however, she admonishes Chicanas to challenge the internal sexism and submission they face within their own community.

In essence, through this novel Cisneros declares that Chicanas are more than simply virgins or whores. This is why I believe Leslis Petty's conclusions about Sandra Cisneros's use of the archetypal feminine figures are misguided. Cisneros uses the traditional archetypes to demonstrate that Chicanas are complex individuals who cannot be categorized merely by their sexuality, gender, race, or socio-economic status. Through her novel *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros reveals that authentic Chicanas embody both the positive and negative characteristics of La Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe.

The House on Mango Street is an important novel in today's society, considering Latinos are quickly becoming the most populous racial minority in the United States of America. Since literature mirrors society, I would like to see

more research and literary theories applied to the novel *The House on Mango Street*. The vignettes seem simple; yet, they are focused on the complexities and struggles of human nature. I also believe, much like Kelly Wissman, that this novel should be used to “inform feminist analyses” and “inspire the development of heroines from a wide range of cultural backgrounds” (33).

This novel is much more than a story about a young Chicana; it is about living as an ethnic minority, as a female, and as economically underprivileged. Cisneros portrays all of these elements through her beautifully written prose that is intertwined with the imagery and eloquence of poetry. As such, one does not have to be a Chicana to enjoy and appreciate this literary work.

In my humble opinion, I believe this novel should be recognized as a true American classic. Sandra Cisneros has created a masterpiece that effectively utilizes Chicana feminist theory to defy the virgin/whore dichotomy found in traditional Chicano literature. She has become a voice for those who cannot find their own, and she has become an example of Chicana feminist strength and accomplishment.

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