

There's No Place like Aztlán: The Quest for Queer Homeland through Re-visionist  
Re-presentation in Chicana Feminist Fiction

By

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore how authors Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Helena María Viramontes, Ana Castillo, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Sandra Cisneros, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Carla Trujillo and Felicia Luna Lemus represent Chicana queer sexual and gender identity through female Mexican religious, historical and mythological figures – which act as archetypes for character, plot, and symbolism – throughout their creative works (poetry, short prose, short stories, plays and novels) according to Chican@ Queer Theory in order to imagine Queer Aztlán. The female Mexican religious, historical and mythological figures that I will analyze are: La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, La Llorona, La Muerte, La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl), Cihuacoatl, Chalchiuhtlicue, Cihuateteo, Coyolxauhqui, Atlacoaya, Chantico, Coatlicue, Itzpapalotl, Mictlancihuatl, Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal. Foremost, I will examine the authors' use of the Coyolxauhqui imperative conceptualized in Chican@ Queer Theory. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is the idea that Chicana artists are daughters of Coyolxauhqui – the dismembered Aztec warrior goddess – and are thus tasked with re-membering her (as well as other feminine figures within Chicano culture) and themselves by reconstructing their identities and histories through processes of excavation, decolonization, reclamation, re-vision, and renarrativization in their autohistorias (fiction wherein personal experiences and collective experiences are incorporated into narratives that reflect counterhegemonic lived realities).

Through my exploration, I will answer the following questions: What are the characteristics of the authors' Queer Aztlán? How do each of the authors' works contribute to the formation of Queer Aztlán through their use of mythological/religious/historical feminine figures? Who is included in (or excluded from) their Queer Aztlán? What is/was/will be the sociocultural significance of their Queer Aztlán?



There's No Place like Aztlán:

The Quest for Queer Homeland through Re-visionism in Chicana Feminist Autohistorias

A Thesis Presented To the Faculty of the Department of English at East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master's of Arts in English

By

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Re-presentation in Chicana Feminist Fiction

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate my thesis to my Aunt Bobby, who gave a single simple suggestion on a summer day years ago, which triggered a chain of events that set me on the path that led me here.

## **Agradecimientos/Acknowledgements**

Throughout the conceptualization and creation of my thesis, I was fortunate enough to receive assistance in a diversity of forms and fashions from the numerous classmates, mentors, professors, friends, co-workers, and family members with whom I have shared experiences of radical personal and intellectual growth over the grueling years of my academic career.

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## Chapter 1: Introducción/ We're Here and We're Queer

### You Are Here and Here Am I

In this thesis, I analyze how authors Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Helena María Viramontes, Ana Castillo, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Sandra Cisneros, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Carla Trujillo and Felicia Luna Lemus imagine Queer Aztlán by reclaiming female Mexican religious/historical/mythological figures according to the Coyolxauhqui imperative of Queer Chican@ Theory by re-narrativizing them in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future throughout their autohistorias. As such, my thesis differs from much of the scholarly work that has previously been performed on the authors' fiction that I have chosen to analyze. Foremost, the central assertion that I make throughout the analyses in my thesis directly opposes Norma Alarcón's assertion in "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'The' Native Woman" that the writers do not attempt to "recover a lost 'utopia'" by incorporating the female figures into their fiction, but only do so in order to heal "the cultural and psychic dismemberment that is linked to imperialist racist and sexist practices" (251). Yet, I insist that imagining the utopic future of Queer Aztlán is a necessary aspect of the healing process undertaken by each of the authors.

Further, I disagree with Sara Alicia Ramírez's statement in "Subjects of Trauma: The Decolonial Tactics of Self-Making and Self-Healing by Queer Xicana Feminist Teatristas" that the author's excavate the female figures in order to "identify the 'Fall,'" the divisive heteropatriarchal logic internalized through centuries of colonization, which has impeded the decolonization efforts of the Chicano Movement (17, 56-57). Instead, I believe that – as expressed through their own critical and theoretical works – the authors are already overwhelmingly familiar with the nature of "the Fall" and its detriment to the Chicano community and the Chicano Movement.

Additionally, I refute Patricia Ybarra and T. Jackie Cuevas's arguments in "The Revolution Fails Here: Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman* as a Mexican Medea" and "Ambiguous Chicax Bodies" and Keri-ann Blanco's "Turrrtle": Displacing and Recovering a Queerly Gendered Body in Helena Maria Viramontes's *Their Dogs Came with Them*" that the LGBT+ protagonists of some of the works cannot hope to realize Moraga's Queer Aztlán. Rather, I contend that each of the authors' works contribute to the realization of a Queer Aztlán.

Moreover, I challenge analyses such as Silvio Sirias and Richard McGarry's "Rebellion and Tradition in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*," Sylvia López-Medina's "Cantora," Cathryn J. Merla-Watson's "Staging Darker Desires: BDSM and the Coloniality of Affect in Latina Feminisms and Lorna Dee Cervantes's *Ciento*," and Suzanne Chávez-Silverman's "Chicanas in Love: Sandra Cisneros Talking Back and Alicia Gaspar De Alba 'Giving Back the Wor(l)d,'" which view the works as expressions of heterosexual desire and female comradery. Nonetheless, I argue that some works in Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, through word choice and imagery, explore lesbian desire. Likewise, I suggest that Cervantes's dedication to all of her readers, as well as the diction and imagery used to describe sexual acts, in *Ciento* opens potentialities of lesbian, bisexual or pansexual readings of the sexual desires expressed in the poems. Further, I argue that one of the central protagonists in Castillo's *So Far from God* experiences lesbian sexual desire.

In diverging from the previous analyses of my fellow scholars, I investigate the following questions: How do each of the authors/works contribute to the formation of Queer Aztlán through their use of mythological, religious and historical feminine figures? What are the characteristics of the authors' Queer Aztlán? Who is included in/excluded from the

authors'/theorists' Queer Aztlán? What is the significance/purpose of their Queer Aztlán socioculturally within the Chicano community and beyond?

In order to answer these questions, the second chapter will focus on providing the theoretical basis of the authors' vision of Queer Aztlán as imagined throughout their autohistorias. Accordingly, I will define the major concepts within Chican@ queer theory, as well as several of those that the authors borrow from feminist, race, queer and postcolonial schools of thought. And, I will elucidate my theoretical approach .– which includes many of the same concepts established in the theoretical basis – to the analysis of representations of queer sexual and gender identities through renarrativizations of female Mexican religious, historical and mythological figures within the authors' autohistorias. The third chapter of my thesis will then provide summaries of the hegemonic narratives, characteristics and symbolism associated with each of the female religious, historical and mythological figures from Mexican culture that the authors use as literary devices within their autohistorias. Then, in the fourth chapter of my thesis, I will identify the literary devices associated with the female Mexican religious, historical and mythological figures that the authors use in representations of queer gender and sexual identities. Moreover, I will analyze how the representations of queer sexual and gender identities using the literary devices contributes to the envisioning of Queer Aztlán. Finally, in the fifth chapter of my thesis, I will contemplate the sociocultural and political significance of the authors' Queer Aztlán for the Chican@ community. Similarly, I will explore the potential of the authors' theoretical basis as a means by which other marginalized groups might affect cultural paradigm shifts. Furthermore, I will discuss how my thesis might be useful in Queer (LGBT+) Literature, Chican@ Literature, or Feminist Literature courses within the academy. And, I will

conclude by imagining how my work might be expanded in the future research and analysis of others, as well as myself.

Throughout each chapter of my journey, I follow the map established by the authors' according to their theoretical basis in order to reach an understanding of the Queer Aztlán that they imagine in their autohistorias. However, before taking the first steps, I must locate myself by delineating a short autobiography of my identity formation. I was born anatomically/biologically female to mixed race parents in North Carolina in 1995. My parents both being heteronormative cisgender individuals, they thus immediately designated me as a girl. Shortly thereafter, I was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church as dictated by the cultural traditions of my family and socialized into the heteropatriarchal values and practices of the religious institution concerning gender and sexuality. Accordingly, as I experienced a sexual awakening during the onset of puberty as an adolescent, I was coerced through social conditioning mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality within the Church and my community into the denial and repression of my bisexual desires and genderqueer expressions, passing as cisgender and heterosexual.

However, in 2016, after being introduced to feminist theory in my Women's Studies courses at Salem College, I finally came out. Yet, in coming out, I quickly plunged into the Coatlicue State. I realized that I was claiming membership to more intersecting categories of identity that would only further marginalize me – not only was I subject to racism and sexism, but I would now also be subject to homophobia and transphobia. These realizations felt as though they came at the worst possible time - a time when my nation's hegemonic culture was reiterating its heterosexist, nationalist, racist, sexist, ethnocentric roots through the presidential election of Donald Trump. As the president of the United States, a position of social and political

leadership that sets cultural precedent for the rest of the nation, Trump set an example for dominant White heteronormative male Americans seeking to Make America Great Again. Through his actions against the press and his own White House Administration, Trump gave them license to denigrate the realities of Others, regardless of the proof of their existence through established facts and supported evidence and accepted truths, by labeling it “fake news.” Consequently, our national culture entered a state of retrograde wherein the progressive attitudes toward the celebration of diversity popularized under the Obama Administration as evidenced in measures such as the federal legalization of same-sex marriage, the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and the recognition of the Stonewall Inn as a national monument has been reversed through new legislation like the military transgender ban and the failure to recognize Pride Month. I felt utterly vulnerable and hopeless and frightened as I watched the silencing of my reality fall over me like a dark veil.

With my eyes set firmly on what I could not help but to perceive as a dismal future through the distortion of the veil as I graduated to the “real world,” the post-graduate world, I began searching for answers. Part of this search took the form of an independent study with my advisor and mentor, Dr. Jo Dulan. It was at this time that I stumbled across Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In this, her most celebrated theoretical work, Anzaldúa shares a powerful framework for transformation deeply rooted in the feminist belief that the personal is political. Anzaldúa’s call to action resonated deep within me. It was not just some high theory written for the prestigious critics of the academy, it was practical and accessible and applicable wisdom from a queer-of-color like myself. I distinctly remember reading the text and feeling as though she directed her words specifically to me in that moment of my life when she said:

Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become....I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world. It’s a validation vision....I seek an exoneration, a seeing through the fictions of white supremacy, a seeing of ourselves in our true guises and not as the false...personality that has been given to us and that we have given to ourselves....free of the tainted biases of male dominance. I seek new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question. Rejection strips us of self-worth....We can no longer...disown the white parts, the male parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let’s try it our way, the mestiza way, the Chicana way, the woman way. (70, 71, 87, 88)

It seemed as though the theory was intended specifically for the situation in which I found myself. A perfect counter to the silencing effects of the “fake news” philosophy, it provided a way that I can equally enact a cultural shift through my own re-narrativization and re-vision and re-memoring of the hegemonic narrative. As such, Anzaldúa’s work awoke a Mestiza consciousness within me. In analyzing the authors’ works, I assume the Coyolxauhqui imperative, using *la facultad* to interpret their allusions, symbolism, characteristics and narrative structures associated with the historical, mythological and religious feminine figures in order to create meaning and decipher sociocultural significance. Yet, I am not just analyzing texts through a Chican@ Queer theoretical approach in order to earn a degree. I am looking back through the works of Anzaldúa and other author-theorist-activists in order to share their vision of Queer Aztlán, as well as to receive the tools to imagine my own queer utopian future. As such,

having located myself, it is equally important to understand the origins of the authors – tracking their path from Aztlán to Queer Aztlán.

### **Origins of Aztlán in Hegemonic Mitología Azteca**

In the beginning, after the fall of the fourth sun, when the earth was flooded and creation was destroyed once more, Quetzalcoatl (god of the morning and evening star) traveled to Mictlan (the land of the dead) to retrieve the bones of the first humans. Having retrieved the bones, damaged and broken, he brought them to Tamoanchan (the paradise of the gods) and gave them to Cihuacoatl (goddess of fertility). Cihuacoatl gathered the bones, shattered into pieces like kernels of corn, and ground them into a fine flour. Sacrificing a few drops of Quetzalcoatl's blood to the flour in order to give it life, she kneaded the mixture into dough. Quetzalcoatl then took the dough and formed it into humans. To them, he gave a portion of the Earth, an island paradise in the center of a great lake where they might reproduce themselves. On the island was a large hill with seven caves that would shelter the humans. Having provided them with shelter, Quetzalcoatl populated the island with fish and waterfowl for the humans to hunt. Quetzalcoatl then imparted knowledge unto the humans so that they might also cultivate the soil. Finally, Quetzalcoatl dedicated himself to protect the humans from drought, disease and disaster. This paradise was named Aztlán and the people were called Aztecs.

Later, when the fifth sun had risen and the gods sacrificed themselves to put the world into motion, the goddesses birthed new gods. Of Coatlicue, more than 400 gods and goddesses were born. One afternoon, while tending chores on the mountain of Coatepec, a mysterious orb of light and feathers descended unto Coatlicue from the sky. Fascinated by the strange object, Coatlicue placed it in her apron for safekeeping. Upon placing it into her apron, she spontaneously and inexplicably conceived the sun god of warfare and human sacrifice -

Huitzilopochtli. After learning of their mother's condition, Coyolxauhqui led her 400 siblings, called Centzon Huitznahua, to decapitate Coatlicue in an attempt to prevent the abominable birth. However, as they approached Coatlicue, Huitzilopochtli sensed their presence and emerged from the uterus fully-armed. Single-handedly defeating his 400 siblings in battle, Huitzilopochtli decapitated Coyolxauhqui and discarded her corpse over the mountainside – her body dismembering upon impact. After saving his mother from his siblings' matricidal plot, Huitzilopochtli revealed to her a prophecy. Huitzilopochtli stated that his destiny was to lead the Aztecs from Aztlán to Tenochtitlan, where they would grow and prosper, conquering new lands and people in his honor. However, he prophesized that just as the Aztecs conquered new lands and people, strangers would one day conquer the Aztecs. Once defeated, Huitzilopochtli foretold that he would lead the Aztecs in their return to Aztlán. And so, Huitzilopochtli descended unto Aztlán in the form of a hummingbird and guided the Aztecs to Tenochtitlan, their arrival marked by the divine sign of the eagle perched on a nopal cactus with a rattlesnake in its beak.

### **The Chicano Movement & El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán**

As prophesized by Huitzilopochtli, the Aztecs were conquered and colonized by Spanish forces led by Hernán Cortés in 1521. After three centuries of subjugation under the Spanish – during which the Aztecs were decimated through genocide, miscegenation and acculturation while their cultural and religious relics were desecrated and destroyed – the descendants of the Aztecs won their independence in 1821, establishing the nation of Mexico. However, the descendants residing in the northern territories of Mexico – now the states of Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and Utah – were conquered and colonized once more in 1848, this time by the armed forces of the United States of America after the Mexican-American War. Under the oppressive rule of their new colonizers, the descendants were further

subjugated through institutionalized discrimination and acculturation that denied them the basic civil rights of citizenship, expurgated their cultural identity, and excluded or vilified their ancestors within the dominant historical narrative.

Yet, during the 1960s, as various social justice movements gained significant recognition and influence within the United States, the Chicano Movement was formed by the Mexican-American descendants of the Aztecs. At the First National Chicano Conference in 1969, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán was formulated as the platform for the movement. They began the resolution by declaring their destiny as foretold by Huitzilopochtli:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano, Mexican, Latino, Indigenous inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our sangre is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. ("El Plan Espiritual" 42)

Perhaps the most important of the aspects listed in the resolution as a means of fulfilling this destiny was a unanimous commitment to and promotion of the values and practices of the Chicano community throughout the political activism of organizations such as MECHA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán), as well as the cultural activism of artists such as Victor Ochoa ("El Plan Espiritual" 44). Yet, even as a proponent for the inclusion and empowerment of the Chicano community, the movement's commitment to and promotion of certain practices and values proved problematically oppressive for many of its members, particularly its female members.

## **Catolicismo, Machismo y la Chicana Feminist Movement**

As previously mentioned, under Spanish colonial rule, the Aztecs were forcibly acculturated. One aspect of this acculturation was religious conversion to Roman Catholicism, which was the national religion of Spain as maintained by the Royal Crown. Accordingly, over the centuries the heteropatriarchal structures of the Roman Catholic Church were internalized by the descendants of the Aztecs and incorporated into various aspects of their cultural values and practices. In “*Talkin’ Sex: Chicanas and Mexicans Theorize about Silences and Sexual Pleasures*,” Patricia Zavella identifies the veneration of La Virgen de Guadalupe, the Aztec incarnation of The Virgin Mary that was adapted from Coatlicue, the mother goddess (240). As the mother of Christ (the Christian messiah) and Queen of Heaven, La Virgen de Guadalupe was viewed within the Chicano community as the archetype for the ideal righteous woman. As such, Chicanas were compelled by the Church and the community to emulate her characteristics and behavior – especially her complete deference to male authority, her immaculate virginal chastity, and her selfless maternal sacrifice.

One way in which the Church emphasized virginity and deference to male authority through the addition of an unofficial sacramental ceremony specifically celebrating the virginity of pubescent girls in recognition of La Virgen de Guadalupe: la quinceañera (Zavella, “*Talkin’ Sex*” 240). Resembling a wedding ceremony or the ceremony of taking the veil<sup>1</sup>, the event

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<sup>1</sup> Taking the veil is a traditional Roman Catholic ceremony performed by female postulants preparing to enter the convent by taking sacred vows and receiving a habit to become a nun. It shares many of the same aspects of the conventional Roman Catholic wedding, such as the exchange of rings and the adornment in white gown and veil. The similarities between the ceremonies associated with weddings and taking the veil results from the metaphorical conceptualization of nuns as brides of Christ.

features a celebratory mass to which the girls wear both a white veil and white dress, and are accompanied by fourteen female attendants who are escorted by chamberlains (Zavella, "*Talkin' Sex*" 240). After the mass, the girls and their guests attend a reception during which the girls cut a large multi-tiered cake and dance the waltz with their father or another elder male relative (Zavella, "*Talkin' Sex*" 240).

Further, the Church implemented doctrine such as the *Humane Vitae* written by Pope Paul VI, wherein the Church staunchly denounces fornication and condemns abortion or contraception – defining sex as a conjugal act of reproduction. As such, the doctrine further prohibited masturbation due to its perception as a sexual act of pleasure rather than a sexual act of reproduction (Blake, "*Las Historias*" 130). Likewise, the doctrine's emphasis on the reproductive aspect of sex condemned homosexuality as sinful (Blake, "*Las Historias*" 121, 123). Lesbianism in particular was especially vilified because it not only rejected the reproductive imperative, but it also defied patriarchal authority (Gaspar de Alba, "*Malinche's Revenge*" 52-53).

Another measure taken by the Church, in order to ensure deference to male authority, was the restriction of females' clerical roles within the Church so that they at all times served in positions subservient to men. Similarly, outside of the Church, within the home, females' deference to male authority and role as selfless maternal figures was enforced through the restriction of their roles to those that were subservient to men. For instance, following their quinceañera, pubescent girls' would be expected to fulfill informal domestic training aimed to shape them into subservient wives and selfless mothers through tasks such as babysitting, cooking and cleaning (Zavella, "*Talkin' Sex*" 241). Further, pubescent girls' virginity would also

be strictly enforced, their sexuality policed by an elder male relative who would supervise a customary courtship period (Zavella, “*Talkin’ Sex*” 240).

As a result of this legacy of internalized heteropatriarchal values and practices within the Church and la familia, the Chicano Movement assumed a heteropatriarchal structure that enforced female deference to male authority by relegating females to subservient roles. Accordingly, the movement offered male activists opportunities for advancement into public leadership roles while few of their female counterparts were promoted to any positions of influence and were instead designated menial tasks that they considered “women’s work” (López, “The Role of the Chicana” 105). As a member of UMAS (United Mexican-American Students), Jennie V. Chávez provides personal testimony of the machismo in the movement, mentioning the manner in which she and other female members’ participation was often limited to vocal performances and catering at events for the organization (“Women of the Mexican American Movement” 37). Similarly, Nancy Nieto shares her experience of machismo in the movement as a member of MECHA, wherein female activists’ responsibilities were limited to secretarial duties (“Macho Attitudes” 117).

Female activists who refused to comply with the machismo<sup>2</sup> (or sexism) of the movement were stigmatized as “vendidas” (sellouts) and “malinches” (traitors) (Nieto, “Macho Attitudes” 117; Bebout “Queer Genealogies” 152). Complicit or not, female activists who openly identified or were perceived as lesbians due to feminist political beliefs were ostracized from the

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<sup>2</sup> Machismo is a form of sexism within Chicano and Mexican culture wherein male men express their hypermasculinity and exercise their patriarchal authority through the social subjugation and sexual objectification of women. Moreover, it is used to describe the masculinist values within Mexican and Chicano culture, wherein masculine personality traits, physical features and social behaviors – such as physical violence – are elevated to a position of superiority over those considered feminine.

movement (Saldívar-Hull, “Chicana Feminisms” 35-36; Bebout “Queer Genealogies” 152). In “A Long Line of Vendidas,” Cherríe Moraga explains “I would have been murdered in El Movimiento....During those years as an active feminist lesbian, I became increasingly aware of the fact that *my* sexuality had not only made me an outcast from my culture” (113, 125). Likewise, Ana Castillo expressed that her experience with the movement was “[s]obering because [she] felt [her] physiology was demeaned, misunderstood, objectified, and excluded by the politic of those men with whom [she] had aligned myself on the basis of [their] mutual subjugation as Latinos in the United States” (Castillo, “La Macha” 121). As a result, she asserts: [M]ost lesbians of our culture have not politicized their desires nor openly declared them....The traditions of our heritage, the rules of the Church...make most women who feel themselves to be lesbian or bisexual...negate this awareness or to hide it so as not to lose social status (“La Macha” 134). María Lugones adds that, not only do lesbians in the Chicano Movement hide their sexuality, but they actively attempt to pass as heterosexual by altering their clothing, speech and mannerisms, as well as participate in “explicit displays of homophobia” (“El Pasar Discontinuo” 154). Nonetheless, others refused to be either ostracized or closeted, instead breaking away from the Chicano movement to form their own autonomous movement<sup>3</sup> (López, “The Role of the Chicana” 103, 106).

Subsequently, in 1971, 600 Chicanas from 23 states held the First National Chicana Conference in Houston, Texas (López, “The Role of the Chicana” 104). During the conference,

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<sup>3</sup> The need for an autonomous movement for Chicana feminists, particularly those of queer sexual and gender identities, was also drive by their exclusion from other social justice movements of the era. In “Chicana Feminisms: From Ethnic Identity to Global Solidarity,” Sonia Saldívar-Hull explicates Chicanas encountered exclusion and discrimination as members of the Women’s Liberation Movement due to racism, principally in the form of micro-aggressions, structural violence and eurocentrism resulting from the universalization of womanhood that ignored issues of intersectionality and racialized sexuality (35-36). Likewise, in “Queer Genealogies: Chicana Lesbian Feminism and the Postmovement Era,” Lee Bebout discusses how the LGBTQ+ movement was a predominantly gay, middle-class, White, male movement with many of the same issues as the Women’s Liberation Movement (157).

they created a platform, similar to that of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, consisting of various resolutions focused exclusively on issues concerning women's rights in the Chicano community (López, "The Role of the Chicana" 104). Lugones states that the central idea of the platform was to urge the Chicano community to reject the oppressive machista values and practices that were internalized as part of Chicano culture through centuries of colonization ("El Pasar Discontinuo" 140). Likewise, Gloria Anzaldúa urged that the purpose of the platform was to "push against any boundaries that have outlived their usefulness....and prevent us from extending beyond ourselves" ("Geographies of Selves" 75). Accordingly, one of the most important resolutions iterated within the platform was the renunciation of the machismo of the Roman Catholic Church (López, "The Role of the Chicana" 104). From the resolutions expressed in the platform, the Chicana Feminist Movement was born.

### **Re-visions of Aztlán/Visiones de Queer Aztlán**

As cultural activists of the Chicana Feminist Movement, Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa began to write about their vision for a different kind of Aztlán – a Queer Aztlán. In "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe," Cherríe Moraga shares a statement much like that expressed in the opening of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, iterating:

[W]e seek a nation strong enough to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender. We seek a culture that can allow for the natural expression of our femaleness and maleness and our love without prejudice or punishment. In a 'queer' Aztlán, there would be no freaks, no 'others.' (264)

In a later work, "Still Loving in the (Still) War Years: On Keeping Queer," she adds to this statement, saying: "In the Aztlán that *I* imagine, our queer bodies, as they were born, would no

longer be marked by society. Or better said, we would not have to change our bodies so that they cease to be marked” (Moraga 187).

According to Moraga, the most important of the aspects listed in her resolution as a means of fulfilling this destiny was that “lesbians and gay men...actively redefine familia, *cultura*, and comunidad” by “drawing from the more egalitarian models of Indigenous communities” wherein “[f]amilia is not dependent on male-dominance or heterosexual coupling” (“Queer Aztlán” 265-266). In “A Long Line of Vendidas,” Moraga expounds upon her vision for familia, explaining that “[f]amilia is cross-generational bonding, deep emotional ties between opposite sexes, and within our sex. It is sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm. It springs forth from touch, constant and daily....It is finding familiar among friends where blood ties are formed through suffering and celebration shared” (111).

Gloria Anzaldúa further details the reconceptualization of familia as tribe in “Geographies of Selves – Reimagining Identity: Nos/Otras (Us/Other), las Nepantleras, and the New Tribalism,” stating “new tribalism is about working together to create new ‘stories’ of identity and culture, to envision diverse futures,” particularly “to include what has previously been excluded or has not been a part of consensual reality” (84, 85). In order to do this, Anzaldúa describes: “First you must recognize and acknowledge la herida. Second, you must ‘intend’ to heal. Then you must....dialogue with the wound. This dialogue, in turn, opens imaginings, and images awaken an awareness of something greater than our individual wounds, enabling us to imagine ways...to achieve wholeness” (“Geographies of Selves” 89-90).

Although the journey to Queer Aztlán as imagined by Anzaldúa and Moraga seems straightforward at a glance, it is based on complex processes of identity and ideology. Therefore, I have dedicated the next chapter to delving deeper into the nuances of their theoretical basis.

## **Capítulo 2: Theoretical Basis/The Path Desarrollarse**

### **Mapping el Camino to Queer Aztlán**

The first questions mentioned in Chapter 1 that I propose to answer in my thesis are: (1) How do each of the authors/works contribute to the formation of Queer Aztlán through their use of mythological, religious and historical feminine figures? (2) What are the characteristics of the authors' Queer Aztlán? In order to answer these inquiries, it is important to detail the theoretical basis of the authors' works and the theoretical approach of my analysis. In detailing their theoretical basis, I am defining the theoretical concepts borrowed from feminist, queer, postcolonial and race theories, as well as those developed within Chican@ queer theory, that I observe the authors follow so that I might present the reader with a roadmap of the process that I believe they use to imagine Queer Aztlán throughout their literature. However, in doing so, I am also simultaneously establishing a theoretical approach for analyzing the authors' works using some of the same concepts defined in the theoretical basis, which allow me to interpret each work as a step on the path of a collective literature that imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **La Equis Marks the Spot**

Foremost, it is important to emphasize that the Queer Aztlán conceptualized by Anzaldúa and Moraga is a metaphysical imagined community based in the specific ethnic, racial, sexual and gender experiences of Chicanas. Intrinsically, as iterated in Chapter 1, Aztlán is an allusion to a geographic location within an ethnically and culturally specific mythological origin story that recounts the creation of the Aztec ancestors of the Chicano community. In addition to this, the concept of queerness stems from an understanding of gender and sexuality established by the Roman Catholic Church as a result of the colonization of the Chicano community's Aztec

ancestors by the Spanish conquistadors. Consequently, the conceptualizations of gender and sexual identities in imagining Queer Aztlán are inseparable from racial and ethnic identity.

In *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire*, Sandra K. Soto describes this phenomenon as racialized sexuality (3-4, 6-7). According to Soto, racialized sexuality resembles the feminist concept of intersectionality, however it differs in that, rather than aspects of an individual's identity coexisting, it asserts that aspects of an individual's identity combine (Soto 3-4, 6-7). So, if intersectionality locates identity as the entire X that forms when two lines intersect, then racialized sexuality locates identity as the fulcrum or the single point where the two lines meet. Soto thereby explains that, intersectionality might allow an individual to define themselves as Chicana and queer, wherein one possesses experiences of both a Chicana and a queer separately yet simultaneously (Soto 1, 8-9). Yet, racialized sexuality might allow someone to define themselves as a Chicana queer, wherein the experiences one possesses associated with being a Chicana are deeply influenced by their identity as a queer and vice versa (Soto 1, 8-9). In this manner, instead of identities wherein the individuals stand simultaneously within the different spaces of consciousness separated by the lines of the X that represent the borders of each identity, the authors represent hybrid identities wherein the individuals stand on the point where the lines of the X overlap to form a single consciousness on the border shared between the different spaces.

Each of the authors discussed in my thesis inhabit identities at the fulcrum of the X. As a baseline, all of the authors identify as Chicanas, a term expressing the hybrid identity of individuals who are of Mexican-American heritage and who were raised as cisgender women. However, each of the authors also possess sexual and gender identities that overlap with their identities as Chicanas. Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as a non-binary lesbian. Cherríe Moraga and

Alicia Gaspar de Alba identify as lesbian dykes - wherein the term dyke signifies their identities as masculine women. Ana Castillo identifies as cisgender, however she rejects identity labels, nonetheless describing her sexuality as most closely aligned with bisexuality or polysexuality. Sandra Cisneros identifies as a chingona, which is conventionally a derogatory term for lesbians within the Chicano community, but which she reinvented to describe her single child-free lifestyle. Helena María Viramontes and Lorna Dee Cervantes identify as heterosexual and cisgender. Carla Trujillo identifies as a cisgender and lesbian. And, Felicia Luna Lemus identifies as a dyke – wherein the term dyke signifies her identity as a masculine woman and a lesbian. Although the authors represent a wide array of sexual and gender orientations, as previously discussed, each of these identities are influenced by understandings of gender and sexuality established by the heteropatriachal values and practices of the Roman Catholic Church as part of their culture and history as Chicanas. It is from this ideological standpoint of racialized sexuality, the fulcrum of the X, that the authors are able to perceive Queer Aztlán. Anzaldúa terms this space of racialized sexuality as la Nepantla.

### **Cartographers de la Nepantla**

The term Nepantla is a word in the Nahuatl language within Aztec culture that is used to express a state of liminality or a middle space. In “Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera,” Anzaldúa uses the term to refer to an ideological state that she describes as “the threshold of transformation,” where the separate aspects of an individual’s identity collide in conflict with one another to create wounds or cracks “in the membrane surrounding, protecting, and containing the different cultures and perspectives” (56). Those individuals who arrive at this state and choose to explore the cracks are Nepantleras (Anzaldúa “Let Us Be” 310). Anzaldúa expounds that, through these cracks, Nepantleras can “see through...the illusion of consensual

reality” (“Let Us Be” 310) to view an uncharted tertiary space in the future where they might pave “alternative roads, creating new topographies and geographies of hybrid selves who transcend binaries” (Anzaldúa “Geographies” 82, 84). Anzaldúa describes the ability of the Nopantlera to perceive these possibilities through the cracks as la Mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 77-79, 194).

In utilizing la Mestiza consciousness to look through the cracks, Anzaldúa explicates that the Nopantlera is swallowed into the wound where they are forced to confront the conflicts between the different aspects of their identities, exposing their innermost fears and painful experiences associated with exclusion and oppression – which are deemed the shadow beast (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 46-49, 20). As such, Moraga explains that the Coatlicue State functions as a sort of psychological breakdown, however the breakdown acts as a type of queer failure (Moraga “A Long Line” 124). In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam explains that queer failure is a “failure [that] allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior” and provides “ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings” (2, 3). Accordingly, Moraga explains that the failure represented by the shadow beast in the Coatlicue state eventually gives way to the Coyolxauhqui imperative. Moraga delineates the Coyolxauhqui imperative as the task of interpreting and translating the vision they perceive with their Mestiza consciousness in looking through the cracks during the Coatlicue state via artistic expressions like creative writing (Moraga “Modern-Day” 150). Anzaldúa defines this ability to interpret and translate these visions through artistic expression like creative writing as la facultad (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 38, 79). In assuming the Coyolxauhqui imperative and using la facultad, the Nopantleras are thereby able to heal the wound created by the shadow beast by reconciling the conflicts in their identities (“En Busca” 74) through artistic expressions that form a map of

the vision of the future perceived with *la Mestiza* consciousness (“Indígena” 85). Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez explains that the stages in this process, however, are ongoing and “do not take place in any specific order, they overlap and occur simultaneously” (“Gloria Anzaldúa’s” 33-34)

### **The Tools of *la Cartografía***

In charting the map of Queer Aztlán through the use of *la facultad* with creative writing according to the Coyolxauhqui imperative, the *Nepantleras* utilize a genre known as *la autohistoria*. In “To(o) Queer the Writer,” Anzaldúa discusses the concept of the *autohistoria* as a form of writing that exists as an act of identity formation due to its representation of the lived and living experiences of the author, as well as the author’s community (269, 270-274). Norma Klahn expounds upon this concept further in “Literary (Re)Mappings: Autobiographical (Dis)Placements by Chicana Writers,” explaining that the genre might most accurately be described as testimonial autobiographical fiction wherein each of the characters assume “the voice of a real rather than fictional person” who is “acting in a real social history” with detailed events from the actual personal lives of the *Nepantleras* and the collective memory of their community merged into a polyvalent portrayal of their reality (115-116, 119-120, 123). By drawing from the collective memory of their community, Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez explains that the *Nepantleras* act as historians searching to excavate “referents and tools to express Chicana experience” in all of its complexity (“Gloria Anzaldúa’s” 46). Amongst the referents used by the *Nepantlera* is the pantheon of Aztec goddesses who might act as “beyond-the-human figurations of the ethnoracialized and sexualized Chicana” (Pérez “Cherríe Moraga’s” 57, 63).

In “Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard,” Emma Pérez describes the *Nepantleras*’ use of historical, religious and mythological feminine figures to represent Chicana sexuality and gender as a form of decolonial imaginary, which is

defined as the reclamation of aspects from a colonized culture with the purpose of renarrativizing and repurposing them (123-124). According to Rosaura Sánchez in “Deconstructions and Renarrativizations: Trends in Chicana Literature,” renarrativization is the process of reconfiguring aspects of the dominant narrative by inserting their own images and histories into counterhegemonic narratives to envision and create spaces of inclusion for marginalized groups (55). Moreover, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz describes the Nепantleras’ specific use of the pantheon of Aztec goddesses as an act of queer remembrance within the decolonial imaginary wherein individuals conjure structures and concepts from the past with the intention of juxtaposing them against the current oppressive hetero-patriarchal structures (35). Norma Alarcón asserts that the Nепantlera thereby “heals through re-membering the paradigmatic narratives that recover iconographic figures, memory, and history, but also rewrites...the present” (“Anzaldúa’s Frontera” 366-367).

By offering alternative concepts and structures, the Nепantleras are performing what Marti Ruti calls opting out – rejecting the values and practices that current dominant culture associates with success, like sexual reproduction within heteronormative Church-sanctified marriage, and choosing to desire in alternative ways (“Queer Theory” 18-22). While opting out of the present oppressive reality of the White heteropatriarchy through the decolonial imaginary that uses queer remembrance in their autohistorias, the Nепantleras participate in the process of queer utopianism, wherein an alternative reality is mapped through the Coyolxauhqui imperative that translates the vision accessed through la Mestiza consciousness and the Coatlicue state to readers who might then reimagine the “actual conditions of possibility” to transform their lived realities and arrive at Queer Aztlán (Muñoz 32, 35, 37, 40).

## **Llegar at Queer Aztlán**

As previously mentioned, rather than a physical destination, Queer Aztlán is a metaphysical imagined community. In the introduction of *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson defines the theoretical concept of imagined communities as a socio-politically constructed community of individuals united by a shared ideology that constitutes a common identity amongst them regardless of physical proximity to one another (1-7). Accordingly, Queer Aztlán can be established amongst any group of individuals in any location. Further, Queer Aztlán can exist in multiple locations amongst multiple groups simultaneously. Although this may seem abstract, it is essentially the same as any number of modern nations.

For example, new foreign territories might be admitted into the union of the United States through a vote by Congress if its people share the ideology represented by the nation's constitution and present a petition for statehood. Moreover, individuals born in California, individuals born in Puerto Rico, individuals born in a military base in Japan, individuals born in England to American parents, and individuals from Mexico who immigrate and undergo naturalization may all be considered United States citizens. Consequently, in order for individuals to arrive at Queer Aztlán, they need only to follow the path illuminated through the theoretical basis in order to share the vision of utopia imagined by the authors, then adopt the ideological values and practices depicted throughout the authors' autohistorias into their formations of community. As mentioned in my introduction, in order to do this, individuals must create diverse, inclusive, egalitarian familial structures that consist of intergenerational, non-biological, emotional bonds formed through shared suffering and celebration between individuals of all abilities, genders, sexualities, races and ethnicities.

### **Chapter 3: Recursos Literarios/If You Don't Know Where You Come From...**

As part of the queer remembrance and the decolonial imaginary undertaken in the authors' autohistorias as a method of queer world making according to the Coyolxauhqui imperative in order to imagine Queer Aztlán, the authors excavate and renarrativize a number of religious, mythological and historical feminine figures. In order to understand the authors' renarrativization of the figures, it is necessary to first understand their narratives, as well as their associated symbolism and significance, within hegemonic Chicano culture.

#### **Coyolxauhqui & Chantico**

Chantico is the Aztec goddess of fire, hearth, volcanoes, war, violence and death – however she also presides over wind and rain (Kroger “Chantico” 174). Considered a minor goddess within Aztec mythology, few records about her narrative and her role have survived. However, the *Codex Borbonicus* – written by Aztec priests shortly before the Spanish Conquest – provides a brief iteration of her narrative (Kroger “Chantico” 174). The codex states that she was the first goddess to offer tribute to the gods in the form of ritual sacrifice, which required a period of fasting (Kroger “Chantico” 174). However, Chantico broke the fast by consuming a fish (Kroger “Chantico” 174). Enraged by Chantico's disrespectful transgression, Tonacatecuhtli (god of procreation), transformed her into a dog (Kroger “Chantico” 174).

Depictions of Chantico illustrate her face painted yellow with black and red lines across her mouth and chin – colors associated with fire (Kroger “Chantico” 174). Her head is adorned with a red headdress that is covered in white eagle feathers, which are symbolic of death, war and sacrifice (Kroger “Chantico” 174). From her waist hangs a white skirt – typical of women – covered in a pattern of black and red rectangles (Kroger “Chantico” 174). Additionally, over her skirt, she wears a loincloth – typical of men – decorated with a human skull (Kroger “Chantico”

175). At her feet sits a container used in ritual sacrifice for hearts and blood, as well as a serpent (Kroger “Chantico” 175). In her hands, she holds a maguey cactus spike and an obsidian blade, both symbols of sacrifice and death (Kroger “Chantico” 175). Her ears are adorned with the same earrings used in depictions of Coyolxauhqui, with whom it is believed her image and worship was eventually merged (Kroger “Chantico” 175).

Coyolxauhqui is most famously depicted on a circular stone relief, which was found at the base of el Templo Mayor (Kroger “Coyolxauhqui” 189). She is depicted with golden bells in her cheeks and earrings consisting of trapezoidal, circular and triangular shapes (Kroger “Chantico” 175). Her head is crowned with a headdress of serpents (which represent transformation and regeneration) and eagle feathers (which represent death and sacrifice) (Kroger “Coyolxauhqui” 189). At her waist, she wears a belt decorated with serpents and a human skull (Kroger “Coyolxauhqui” 189). Her body is represented as a dismembered pile of head, torso, arms, legs, hands and feet (Kroger “Coyolxauhqui” 189).

Unlike Chantico, Coyolxauhqui is one of the most important goddesses in Aztec mythology, playing a major role in the narrative of Huitzilopochtli. Coyolxauhqui is goddess of fertility and the moon, daughter of Coatlicue and sister of Huitzilopochtli (Kroger “Coyolxauhqui” 189). As iterated in my introduction, Coyolxauhqui led Centzon Huitznahua – a group of her 400 siblings – in an attempt to commit matricide against Coatlicue in order to prevent the birth of Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. However, Huitzilopochtli emerged from the womb fully armed and defeated all 400 of his siblings in battle. Finally, Huitzilopochtli decapitated Coyolxauhqui, discarding her corpse over the side of Mount Coatepec, the future site of el Templo Mayor. According to Debra J. Blake, the battle between Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui within Aztec mythology coincides with the historical migration of the Aztecs

from Mount Coatepec (“The Power of Representation” 32-34). This migration marked the beginning of Aztec imperialism, as well as a major shift in Aztec culture wherein matrilineal egalitarian social structures were replaced by class hierarchy and patrilineal royal rule (“The Power of Representation” 33-34). Consequently, Coyolxauhqui’s death at the hands of Huitzilopochtli holds special significance in the Aztec mythohistorical origins of the Chicano community.

### **La Virgen de Guadalupe & Coatlicue**

Mother of Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui, alongside countless other gods and goddesses, Coatlicue is the Aztec goddess of earth, fertility, sacrifice – who embodies dualities such as creation & destruction, light & darkness, masculinity & femininity, future & past, and life & death (Kroger “Coatlicue” 186-187). As discussed briefly in my introduction, according to Aztec mythology, Coatlicue was decapitated by her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, who led Centzon Huitznahua in an attempted matricide. The attempted matricide resulted from Coyolxauhqui’s desire to prevent the birth of the god of war, Huitzilopochtli – who Coatlicue conceived Huitzilopochtli spontaneously and inexplicably after placing a mysterious orb of light and feathers into her apron.

In depictions of Coatlicue, her head consists of two serpents sprouting from the base of her neck, their heads turned toward one another to form a face (Kroger “Coatlicue” 186-187). Around her neck hangs a necklace of hands and hearts with a human skull at its center (Kroger “Coatlicue” 187). Her torso is bare, revealing two flaccid breasts (Kroger “Coatlicue” 187). At her waist is a skirt consisting of nettled serpents (Kroger “Coatlicue” 187). Each of her arms and legs are also serpents (Kroger “Coatlicue” 187).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa explains that, due to the similarities between the roles of the Virgin Mary and Coatlicue as immaculate mothers of the messiah and symbols of maternal sacrifice within their respective religions (Christianity and Aztec mythology), Coatlicue (also referred to as Coatlopeuh) was syncretized with the Virgin Mary by Roman Catholic priests in order to accelerate the acculturation of indigenous Aztec people during the colonization of Mexico (27-28). The syncretization of the two figures was also the result of the phonetic similarity between the names Coatalopeuh and Guadalupe (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 29-30). Conveniently, Guadalupe was the name of a city in Spain where the Virgin Mary was celebrated as the patron saint, dubbed Our Lady of Guadalupe (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 29-30). In 1660, the Vatican officially recognized Our Lady of Guadalupe as a synonym of Virgin Mary, Mother of God (Anzaldúa *Borderlands* 29-30).

La Virgen de Guadalupe is popularly depicted with brown skin and brunette hair with a crown upon her head (Kroger “Our Lady of Guadalupe” 232). Her body is clothed in a rose tunic covered by a blue mantle, which is covered with gold stars (Kroger “Our Lady of Guadalupe” 232). Her hands are pressed together in the traditional Roman Catholic gesture of prayer (Kroger “Our Lady of Guadalupe” 232). Her feet stand atop a crescent moon, which is held by a cherub – whose wings are outstretched (Kroger “Our Lady of Guadalupe” 232). Around her is a golden halo of light surrounded by vines of pink and red roses (Kroger “Our Lady of Guadalupe” 232).

La Virgen de Guadalupe’s appearance as a major figure in Mexican culture is most frequently traced back to the winter of 1531, when she is said to have appeared before an indigenous Catholic convert named Juan Diego in the hillsides outside of Mexico City (Blake “The Power of Representation” 55-56). According to the legend, La Virgen de Guadalupe

instructed Diego to erect a church at the site where she materialized before him (Blake “The Power of Representation” 55-56). Diego went to the bishop of his diocese in order to appeal for the construction of a church as directed to him by La Virgen de Guadalupe (Blake “The Power of Representation” 55-56). However, the bishop dismissed Diego’s claims (Blake “The Power of Representation” 55-56). In order to prove his claims, La Virgen de Guadalupe further instructed Diego to go to a nearby rose bush and retrieve flowers from its branches, which had miraculously bloomed despite the cold and frost (Blake “The Power of Representation” 56). With the roses in hand, Diego returned to the church and presented the blooms to the bishop cloak (Blake “The Power of Representation” 56). As he laid the flowers before the bishop, an image of La Virgen de Guadalupe appeared on the back of his cloak (Blake “The Power of Representation” 56).

Due to La Virgen de Guadalupe’s syncretic origins, her image was appropriated as a symbol of Mexican nationalism during the 1810 Mexican War of Independence and during the 1965 Chicano worker’s liberation movement (Blake “The Power of Representation” 58-59). Today, her image continues to be used as a symbol of Chicano pride in their Mexican heritage, as well as an expression of religious devotion.

### **La Muerte, Mictlancihuatl, & Itzpapalotl**

Whereas La Virgen de Guadalupe is associated with life in Roman Catholic tradition through her role as a divine maternal figure, Itzpapalotl and Mictlancihuatl are goddesses of death within Aztec mythology. Goddess of earth, night and death, little knowledge survives regarding the narrative surrounding Itzpapalotl. However, she is said to have offended the gods by committing adultery, which is signified in the *Codex Borgia* by an image of Itzpapalotl cutting bleeding branches from a sacred tree in Tamoanchan – the divine paradise of the gods

(Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 194-195). Due to her transgression, a pair of deer sent by Mixcoatl (god of hunting) descended from the sky and pierced her heart with their antlers, tossing her into a fire (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 193-194). As her corpse was engulfed by the flames, she exploded into a kaleidoscopic rainbow of flint stones (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 194). Consequently, she is the patroness of evil women, a central figure in a purification ritual during which adulterers traveled to a crossroads in the night where they stripped themselves of their clothes (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195).

Itzpapalotl is depicted in codices wearing the eagle ornament of Mixcoatl atop her head (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195). Her head is a human skull painted red and white with an obsidian blade projecting from the nasal cavity (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195). Each of her hands are clawed with the talons of a jaguar and her feet are clawed with talons of an eagle (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195). On her back are two wings, like those of a butterfly or moth, with flints on each tip (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195). From her waist hangs a rainbow skirt of flints (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195). Before her sit a sacrificial container filled with hearts and a vase of water, adjacent to a serpent and a spider (Kroger “Itzpapalotl” 195).

Like Itzpapalotl, Mictlancihuatl is goddess of death, reigning over Mictlan – the Aztec underworld where the souls of the dead reside – alongside her husband, Mictlantecuhtli (Kroger “Mictlancihuatl” 199). Moreover, bearing a similar appearance to Itzpapalotl, Mictlancihuatl also possesses a human skull for her head, yet her body features the full breasts and bulging stomach of a pregnancy (Kroger “Mictlancihuatl” 200). She is frequently depicted consuming human flesh, holding a human heart in one hand and a maguey cactus spike in the other hand (Kroger “Mictlancihuatl” 200). Yet, while she is popularly depicted in numerous codices, there is no surviving evidence of her narrative (Kroger “Mictlancihuatl” 199).

In “Historia y Actualidad del Culto a la Santa Muerte,” Claudia Reyes Ruiz explains that, much like Coatlicue and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Mictlancihuatl and Itzpapalotl were syncretized with Roman Catholic conceptualizations of the Angel of Death – which stemmed from imagery of St. Michael the Archangel prevalent in religious art and literature following the bubonic plague in Europe<sup>4</sup> – during the acculturative processes of colonization to form la Santa Muerte (Ruiz 52-53). Like St. Michael, Felipe Gaytán Alcalá expounds that La Santa Muerte is said to escort the souls of the deceased to Heaven upon the hour of their death (“Santa entre los Malditos” 41-42). Furthermore, both saints are invoked through prayer – as well as statues, medals, holy cards and the like – in appeals for protection (Alcalá “Santa entre los Malditos” 43). Yet, la Santa Muerte retains many of the physical characteristics of Mictlancihuatl and Itzpapalotl, often portrayed as a female skeleton cloaked in a black robe, scythe in hand, with large angelic wings extending from her back (Alcalá “Santa entre los Malditos” 41-42). In modern times, many Chicanos maintain altars of offerings and prayers in veneration of la Santa Muerte, who is celebrated as a representation of the duality of life and death, particularly the manner in which death acts as a transformative rebirth into the egalitarian paradise of Heaven (Alcalá “Santa entre los Malditos” 43-45, 48-49).

### **Xochiquetzal & Tlazolteotl**

Alongside Itzpapalotl, both Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal are goddesses whose significance is tied to acts of sexual transgression. Particularly, Tlazolteotl was regarded as the “embodiment of sexual excess, perversion and illicit love” within Aztec culture (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 203). While no specific narratives surrounding Tlazolteotl have been preserved in

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<sup>4</sup> Roman Catholic belief credits St. Michael the Archangel for imprisoning Satan in Hell and celebrates his role in escorting souls of the deceased to Heaven.

Aztec codices, she is sometimes identified with Itzpapalotl – suggesting a possible connection between the two goddesses (potentially romantic or sexual) may have existed, though now forgotten (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). Nonetheless, some information about Tlazolteotl has survived. Also referred to as Ixcuiname (which means “Lady Cotton”), Tlazolteotl is a creative earth goddess of spinning and weaving (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 203). Additionally, Tlazolteotl is a moon goddess of pregnancy, fertility, creativity and childbirth (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 203). Perhaps due to her association with sexual transgression, pregnancy and spinning, it was believed that Tlazolteotl could create purity from filth (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 203). Consequently, she played a central role in confession rituals for the purification of individuals who were believed to have been lured into lustful acts under her influence (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 203).

Depictions of Tlazolteotl in *Codex Borgia* portray her head crowned with spindles of cotton, and her face painted black (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). At her waist is a black and red skirt that features the symbol of the moon (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). In her hands, she holds a shield and arrows, dragging a captive behind her (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). Similarly, depictions of Tlazolteotl in *Codex Borbonicus* her head is crowned with a black and red cone stacked atop a bundle of cotton (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). Her face is painted red and her ears are decorated with bundles of cotton (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). She wears a skirt made of human flesh that has been branded with the symbol of the moon (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). Her legs are spread as she gives birth to an image of herself (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 204). In her hands, she holds a maguey cactus spine (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 205). Before her stands a naked man surrounded by a snake, a human heart, and a spider (Kroger “Tlazolteotl” 205).

Akin to Tlazolteotl, Xochiquetzal is associated with illicit love as the patron goddess of prostitutes and unwed mothers (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 213). Moreover, equal to Tlazolteotl, Xochiquetzal is a goddess of fertility and childbirth, in addition to beauty and female sexuality (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 213). However, unlike Tlazolteotl, Xochiquetzal’s narrative is well recorded in several Aztec codices. One of the narratives surrounding Xochiquetzal explain that all flowers originated from a piece of her flesh that was transformed after being torn from her vagina by a bat while she slept (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 213). Another narrative surrounding Xochiquetzal explains that Xochiquetzal was abducted and seduced by Tezcatlipoca (god of time) in an act of adultery that was interrupted by her husband, Tlaloc (god of rain) (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 213). Due to her adultery, Xochiquetzal was incorporated into a confession ritual for individuals who committed sexual transgressions – much like the confession ritual involving Tlazolteotl – wherein their tongues were pierced repeatedly for each of their sins (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 215).

Xochiquetzal is depicted in *Codex Borbonicus* with her head crowned by a quetzal bird, its bright feathers cascading down her shoulders like a veil (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 215). Her face is painted yellow and blue with two flowers pressed between her lips (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 216). She wears a blue blouse embroidered with gold beads (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 216). Her skirt, which is trimmed in white beads, is decorated by a pattern of blue, red and yellow stripes (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 216). A snake slithers around her feet amongst yellow flowers placed in front of a couple embracing on a bed (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 216). Watching Xochiquetzal and the couple from a distance is Tezcatlipoca, transfigured into the form of a coyote (Kroger, “Xochiquetzal” 216).

## La Malinche

Also known as the Mexican Eve, La Malinche shares key narrative features with Itzpapalotl, Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal – namely sexual transgression (Blake “The Power of Representation” 35-40). However, unlike the mythological narratives of the Aztec goddesses, La Malinche’s narrative is derived from historical records dating back to 1519, which were recovered from the journals of several conquistadors (Blake “The Power of Representation” 35-37). According to their accounts, Hernán Cortés possessed a young, female, Aztec slave, who was interchangeably referred to as Malintzin Tenepal or Malinal (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 35-37). Throughout her enslavement to Cortés, Malintzin acted as a linguistic interpreter, topographic guide and cultural mediator between the conquistadors and the Aztecs, a role which garnered high regard for her intellectual ability (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 35). However, Malintzin also gained a reputation amongst the Aztecs and the conquistadors as Cortés’s concubine, giving birth to his son – Martin (allegedly the first Mestizo) – in 1522 (Blake “The Power of Representation” 37). Moreover, Malintzin was sexually involved with Cortés’s lieutenant, Juan Jaramillo – by whom she bore a daughter in 1524 (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 37). Little else is known about Malintzin beyond these few details since records and documents containing information about her narrative are limited the three year span between Cortés’s arrival to Mexico and departure to Honduras (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 35-37).

Nonetheless, Ana Del Castillo provides an account of Malintzin’s hypothetical origins that is based on knowledge of Aztec history and culture during the era in which she lived (Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal 123). She infers that Malintzin was probably a Mayan slave who had been exchanged several times before the arrival of Cortés, which serves as a possible

explanation for her fluency in various dialects of Nahuatl and several other indigenous languages – such as Quiché (Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal 123-124). Due to her linguistic ability, Malintzin probably would have served Moctezuma II – ruler of the Aztec Empire – as a linguistic interpreter and political diplomat (Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal 124). In this role, she would have been brought into contact with Cortés, at which time she was potentially offered as a gift to the conquistador due to Moctezuma’s overwhelming conviction that Cortés was the reincarnation of Quetzalcoatl – the Aztec god of wind and knowledge, whose anticipated year of return coincided with the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico (Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal 124). Having been enslaved by the Aztecs, Malintzin may have colluded in Cortés’s conquest of the Aztec Empire as a means to seek revenge and survival (Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenepal 125).

Malintzin’s narrative gained prevalence in Mexican popular culture during the rise of nationalism that accompanied the Mexican War of Independence in 1810, when criollos – Mexican-born citizens of Spanish descent – rose to power against españoles – Spanish-born citizens of “pure blood” (Blake “The Power of Representation” 40-41). As a result of her role in the Spanish Conquest, wherein she acted as lover and interpreter for Hernán Cortés, La Malinche was vilified as the embodiment of anti-nationalism and treason (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 40-41). Consequently, Malintzin became known as the “Mexican Eve,” “La Chingada” (the fucked one), “La Despedida” (the despised one), and “La Vendida” (the sellout) (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 40-41). In addition to her appropriation as a political symbol, the name “Malinche” was adopted as pejorative slang used against women whose social, political, religious or cultural values are considered traitorous to traditional hegemonic values within the Chicano community (Blake, “The Power of Representation” 35- 40).

### **La Llorona, Cihuacoatl, Chalchiuhtlicue, Cihuatateo & Atlaacoaya**

Several versions of the narrative surrounding La Llorona exist. One popular version of the narrative identifies La Llorona as the ghost of La Malinche (Blake “The Power of Representation” 48). According to the narrative, Cortés refused to legitimize his relationship with La Malinche through marriage due to her “Indian blood,” instead expressing his intent to return to Spain with their son – who shared his criollo blood (Blake “The Power of Representation” 48). Devastated by her lover’s rejection and desperate to maintain custody of her child, La Malinche suffered a major depressive episode during which she drowned her son and herself in a nearby river (Blake “The Power of Representation” 48). I

Similarly, a different version of the narrative describes La Llorona as a severely impoverished young mother (Blake “The Power of Representation” 45). After discovering the infidelity of her husband, she was abandoned by her spouse, who was the sole provider of sustenance for herself and her children (Blake “The Power of Representation” 45). In order to avoid the pain of starvation and the social stigma of abandonment, she drowned her children and stabbed herself to death (Blake “The Power of Representation” 45). Following her death, she was cursed to haunt the earth in perpetual grief for her deed, wailing as she seduces men and lures children into nearby rivers and lakes so that she might drown them in order to make them her eternal companions (Blake “The Power of Representation” 46).

Yet, in other versions of the narrative, La Llorona is connected to a number of Aztec goddesses who share various characteristics and motifs. One of these narratives portrays La Llorona as “The Hungry Woman” or “La Diosa Hambrienta” – the Aztec goddess (possibly Huixtocihuatl: the goddess of salt, tears, urine and oceans) who sacrificed her body during the creation of the Earth, her tears composing the rivers, lakes and oceans of the world. Further,

some interpretations of the narrative correlate La Llorona with Atlacoaya, the gender ambiguous goddess of lakes who is depicted in a blue dress holding a serpent staff and to whom over 400 rabbits were sacrificed in ritual worship (Kroger “Atlacoaya” 169-170).

Another variation of the narrative characterizes La Llorona as Cihuacoatl, the goddess of death in childbirth who aided in the creation of humanity as previously discussed in the introduction of my thesis (Carbonell, “From Llorona to Gritona” 53-55; Blake “The Power of Representation” 46; Kroger “Cihuacoatl” 183). Cihuacoatl is depicted sculptures and codices with the body of a snake and the head of a woman (Kroger “Cihuacoatl” 184). Sometimes she is depicted as a snake only from the waist down, carrying a shield in one hand and a batten in the other (Kroger “Cihuacoatl” 184). Her breasts are concealed by a white blouse embroidered with flowers; a white skirt is tied around her waist (Kroger “Cihuacoatl” 184).

La Llorona has also been recognized as Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of lakes, rivers and springs, as well as fertility and baptismal purification (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 170; Blake “The Power of Representation” 46). According to Aztec creation myth, Chalchiuhtlicue drowned the entire Earth in a great flood during the period of the fifth sun, causing all mammals to transform into fish (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 170-171). In some codices, she has been described as the wife of Tlaloc, god of rain (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 171). In *Codex Borgia* Chalchiuhtlicue is illustrated with her head crowned by a coiled serpent (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 173). Her nose is decorated by a piercing in the shape of a serpent; her wrists are decorated with turquoise bracelets and gold bells (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 173). She wears a snakeskin skirt decorated with white feathers (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 173). From between her legs rushes a waterfall (Kroger “Chalchiuhtlicue” 173).

Moreover, La Llorona is sometimes equated with the Cihuateteo, a group of female warriors who died in childbirth (Kroger “Cihuateteo” 179). The Cihuateteo wander the night at crossroads, seducing men into sexually transgressive acts and to luring children to their deaths (Blake “The Power of Representation” 46; Kroger “Cihuateteo” 179). They are also said to incite insanity (Kroger “Cihuateteo” 179). Each of the Cihuateteo are represented in codices with their faces painted white and their bodies completely nude, revealing the stretch marks on their breasts and stomachs as the result of pregnancy (Kroger “Cihuateteo” 180). In their hands, they carry sacrificial knives, maguey cactus spines, and human bones (Kroger “Cihuateteo” 180).

Regardless of her narrative origins, La Llorona is often used as a social control device within Chicano culture, intended to prevent children from wandering too close to bodies of water or too far away from home. Her name is also “Llorona” used as a pejorative phrase for women who have miscarried, aborted or killed a child. However, women who have been abandoned, divorced or widowed by their husbands may also be referred to as “Lloronas.” The name signifies social stigma that marks these women as bad omens for other women, especially women who are newlywed or pregnant. “Lloronas” are therefore often ostracized within the Chicano community, excluded from the ceremonies of baptisms and weddings.

## Capítulo 4: Literature Analyses/Hijas de Puta

**Carla Trujillo**

### *What Night Brings*

Published in 2003, *What Night Brings* has garnered recognition for Carla Trujillo as a recipient of the Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction. The novel, which is classified as a lesbian Bildungsroman autohistoria, focuses on the traumatic childhood events that are experienced by a 14-year-old Chicana (Marci) as zie<sup>5</sup> becomes increasingly aware of zir gender and sexual identity within the abusive household of zir father in 1967 San Lorenzo, California. Although zir gender and sexuality are never explicitly identified, there is ample supporting evidence throughout the text to suggest that the protagonist's identity may be lesbian transgender. This gender and sexual identity is represented through narrative plot structures that parallel Marci to Chantico and Coyolxauhqui. In paralleling Marci to Coyolxauhqui and Chantico, Trujillo reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddesses' mythologies in order to remember the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization acts as the map by which Marci is able to use zir mestiza consciousness in order to fail queerly and opt out of the oppressive heteropatriarchy of zir father's home so that zie can arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The first suggestion of Marci's gender and sexuality occurs in the beginning of the novel as zie provides the reader with a brief synopsis of zir family life. Marci explains:

Right before I go to sleep, I turn into Supergirl....On TV, George Reeves plays Superman.... I'd make a better Superman because I'm stronger and smarter....Every night I dreamed I saved beautiful girls. Usually, a mean man was hurting the girl. I'd beat

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout my analyses, I will use the gender neutral pronouns zie/zir/zim/zieself to refer to characters whose gender identities are non-binary or unspecified.

the man up, then carry her away. She would be so happy I saved her, she'd want to marry me. I'd say yes and the dream would end with me kissing her neck and feeling her chiches. (Trujillo 11-12)

The plot and the protagonist at the center of Marci's dreams - zir transformation into the most iconic superhero in hegemonic United States culture – subtly parallels the characterization and the plot that are associated with Coyolxauhqui. Superman, as described by Marci, is a god-like superhuman defender who fights against violent misogynist men who harm women. Similarly, within hegemonic mythological narratives, Coyolxauhqui is described as a warrior goddess who fights against Huitzilopochtli - the sun god of warfare and human sacrifice who is associated with the shift in Aztec culture toward patriarchal imperial conquest and whose worship involved the sacrificial ritual decapitation and dismemberment of women.

This parallel between Marci and Coyolxauhqui is reinforced throughout the central conflict of the novel, wherein – like the goddess who conspires with zir 400 siblings to prevent the birth of Huitzilpotchli – zie conspires with zir friends and family members in order to protect zir mother and zir sister from the physical abuse of zir father. The conflict between Marci and zir father is established immediately following the description of zir dreams. Marci explains that zir dreams are often disrupted when zie is abruptly awakened by the sounds of the domestic disputes between zir mother and father, stating: “There are lots of times me and Corin wake up hearing Mom and Dad yelling....Me and my sister ran to the living room to find Dad crying and pulling the rifle out of its case..... Every time that rifle comes out he sticks in four bullets” (Trujillo 12-13). Marci explains that, while her father claims to be suicidal, zie understands that his real intent is to terrorize his wife and children (Trujillo 12-13). Marci provides support for this understanding by describing his physical inability to fire the rifle into his own mouth (Trujillo

12-13). Moreover, Marci justifies zir understanding by noting the number of bullets that he loads into the gun, as well as the way in which he brandishes the gun, as follows: “he loads four bullets, undoes the safety latch, and waves the gun around for the rest of the night till Mom begs him enough to live and he puts it away” (Trujillo 13). As a result of zir father’s threats to harm Marci, Corin (Marci’s sister) and their mother, Marci confesses to the reader: “[e]very single day of my life I went to bed asking God to make my dad disappear” (Trujillo 8). Later, Marci further confesses: “I don’t even like him and maybe I hate him, even though I know it’s probably a sin to hate” (Trujillo 49).

As the story continues, the parallel is strengthened when the threats develop into actual acts of violence committed by zir father against Marci, zir mother and zir sister. Marci reveals:

One minute he was laughing and playing. Next thing you know, bam! He’s lashing across our legs with a doubled belt....He liked to yell at us while he hit us....“You little bitch, I’ll show you this time!”....He took the belt, brought it up over his shoulder, and swung it across my mouth....My lips swelled up like innertubes. I licked them and swallowed the metal taste of blood. (Trujillo 15-16)

These acts begin to occur with increasing frequency, the abuse taking place “two, sometimes three times a week” (Trujillo 78). Moreover, these acts become increasingly violent. At one point, Marci fears that zir father will beat zie and zir sister to death when he begins strangling Corin, causing their mother to interfere by yelling ““Eddie, stop! You’re gonna kill her!”” (Trujillo 16). Marci notes that zir mother’s interference signals the extreme severity of the beatings by establishing that “[s]he must have felt [he] really was going to kill Corin, because that was the only time she said anything” (Trujillo 16). Consequently, Marci vows to zir sister: ““if he tries anything, I’ll do everything I can to keep him from hurting us”” (Trujillo 83).

Initially, Marci attempts to prevent the beatings by simply obeying zir father's commands and predicting zir father's patterns of behavior, explaining: "I dealt with Eddie now by going along with everything he said, just so he wouldn't get mad" (Trujillo 115). However, Marci notes that zir father's beatings seem to be unprovoked and unpredictable rather than being caused by zir disobedience, stating "I never knew what he was thinking" (Trujillo 34). However, Marci hints at a possible source for his anger, contemplating: "I sometimes wondered what Dad would do if he knew I liked girls" (Trujillo 34).

While the implication is that zir father is unaware of Marci's sexual and gender identity, there are major hints to suggest that he is aware. Moreover, it is suggested that Marci's sexual and gender identity – which he interprets as a challenge to his male authority – is the motivation behind zir father's violent abuse. For example, during the beatings, zir father repeatedly refers to Marci as a bitch - for which the technical definition is "a female dog." By referring to Marci as a bitch, Marci is being paralleled with Chantico – the goddess who was transformed into a dog as punishment for disrespectfully defying the authority of the gods in disobeying their rules. Notably, Chantico possesses a queer gender and sexual identity, which is portrayed in popular gender ambiguous depictions wherein the goddess is clothed in both a feminine skirt and a masculine loincloth simultaneously. Parallel to Chantico, Marci possesses behavior and characteristics that reveal a queer gender and sexual identity.

Principally, Marci's queer gender and sexual identity is revealed through zir desire to be transformed into a boy, which zie requests repeatedly in zir prayers to God and the Virgin Mary:

I have to change into a boy. This is what I want and it's not an easy thing to ask for. Not like wanting a new bike or a football. This takes special powers, and let me tell you, I've been wanting it a long time.....I don't know how or when it happened. Maybe I was born

this way....And it needs to happen by the time I'm fourteen since my science books say that's when a boy's birdy gets bigger. (Trujillo 14)

In *Decolonizing Aztlán: La (Re)Construcción Del Individuo, La Familia y La Historia En La Narrativa De Autoras Chicanas Lesbianas*, Carolina E. Alonso asserts that this expression of desire to be a boy results solely from zir lesbian desires (62-63). Alonso states: "Marci considera necesario poseer un falo...de permitirle querer a otras mujeres" (63). Further, Alonso argues that "por un proceso de aceptación en cuanto a su sexualidad y de madurez tanto emocional como física y sexual....el personaje empieza la narración deseando un falo, pero al terminar...se transforma aceptando una sexualidad alternativa que le permitirá realizar sus deseos sexuales y sentimentales sin necesidad de convertirse en hombre" (63). Undeniably, Marci explains that zie desires a penis because "you can't be with a girl if you are a girl" - therefore, if "[zie] wanted to be with Raquel," then "[zie] needed a birdy to do it" (Trujillo 14). However, I believe that Marci's rejection of transgender identity stems from zir ignorance about queer sexual and gender identities, as well as sexuality and gender in general.

In explaining the rationale for becoming a boy, Marci asserts that: "It's not because I think I'm a boy, though sometimes it sure seems like I am" (Trujillo 14). Accordingly, although zie knows that zie is not a boy, since zie is anatomically female, zie does sometimes feel as if zie is a boy. This demonstrates that zie does not understand the spectrum on which transgender identity can occur. Some individuals may express transgender identity by simply adopting masculine behavior, while others may do so by dressing in masculine clothing. Still others may express transgender identity by taking hormones to develop masculine features, while yet others may do so by undergoing a full sex change operation. However, Marci is utterly unaware of the

complex dynamic experiences that may fall within transgender identity. In fact, Marci is unaware even of the meaning of “queer.” At one point, Marci explains:

I decided to look up queer in the dictionary. This is what it said: “Queer: adj [origin unknown] 1 a: differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal b: (1) eccentric, unconventional (2) mildly insane: touched c: obsessed, hipped d: slang: sexually deviate: homosexual 2 a: slang: worthless, counterfeit [~ money] b: questionable, suspicious 3: not quite well: Queasy; syn see strange —queerish / adj—queerly adv—queerness n.” I sat in the library a long time. (Trujillo 100)

While Marci is unaware of the spectrum on which transgender identity may be expressed, zie participates in activities that fall within the spectrum. Most notably, Marci attempts to alter zir physical appearance in order to appear more masculine by lifting weights at zir cousin’s house so that zie may develop a more muscular physique (Trujillo 18). Moreover, while Marci states that the desire for a birdy is purely intended for zir lesbian desire, evidence suggests that Marci may indeed want to embody a male body. For example, when Marci experiences being transformed into a boy with a penis in zir dreams, zie exclaims: “It felt good!” (Trujillo 63). Moreover, Marci explains “I started getting excited” (Trujillo 63). Marci becomes enamored with the visage of ziesself as a boy, ecstatically exploring zir new body:

I got braver using the tips of my fingers to stroke it. It was soft and smooth like velvet. I thought I could look now to see if I had huevos. I never really thought about them much. I just knew they were part of a set. If you had a birdy, then you had to have huevos. I didn’t know what they were for. And I didn’t think I’d need them for anything. In fact, they looked like they could get in the way of lots of things like running, pooping, or riding a bike. But if I was going to be a boy, I guess I’d have to get used to them. I slowly

reached down below my birdy. I wasn't sure what I'd find. Slowly, carefully, I moved my hand lower and lower. Just a little more and I'd be there. (Trujillo 63)

Additionally, Marci expresses jealousy of one of zir peers in zir neighborhood, Randy Torres. Marci explains that Randy is "a big sissy kid" who "didn't like baseball or football" (Trujillo 29). Watching as Randy "dropped a ball that was perfectly thrown into his mitt," Marci becomes outraged, asking: "How did Randy end up a boy and me a girl?" (Trujillo 29). Marci continues this frustrated train of thought, sharing: "I wondered who got to make the choice of what you were when you were born....I didn't think life was fair making me a girl and Randy a boy" (Trujillo 29). While Marci never confesses zir desire to be a boy to zir family members, undoubtedly zir father's comparison of Marci to Chantico suggests that he had noticed hints of zir gender and sexual identity within zir behavior.

For example, when a 16-year-old girl named Racquel moves in nextdoor, Marci becomes enamored with her, stating: "I liked lots of girls, but not like this....I was in love with her" (Trujillo 26). Accordingly, Marci begins to alter her daily activities in order to catch the attention of Racquel, explaining: "In my house, I was a hawk, listening and looking for any sign of her....I thought of ways to get her to look at me. I played football by myself, pitched tennis balls against the wall, skateboarded, anything so I could hopefully see her, or better yet, get her to come over and talk to me" (Trujillo 34). Noticing that Marci has been watching Racquel, zir father also begins to watch the teenage girl. Marci recounts that as he stood next to Marci watching Racquel, "he'd practically glue his eyes to her butt" and share comments with Marci. For example, in one instance, he gives Marci a strange look before exclaiming: "'Hijo! She sure has a nice ass....There ain't nothing wrong with looking at something good'" (Trujillo 34). Due to his participation in watching Racquel alongside Marci, as well as his reference to Marci as "Hijo"

(which translates as “son”), it is suggested that zir father is acutely aware of Marci’s lesbian desire and transgender identity.

Other evidence that zir father is aware of Marci’s lesbian and transgender identity lies within Marci’s revelations about by the relationship between zie, zir father and zir mother. Based on Marci’s descriptions, the relationship resembles the dynamics of the Oedipus-complex that is often said to occur between fathers, sons, and mothers. Therefore, in establishing a sort of Oedipus-complex amongst Marci, zir father and zir mother, there is an inherent implication of Marci’s development of a lesbian and transgender identity that intimidates zir father. For example, Marci describes the way in which zie emulates zir father, iterating:

Any chance I got I practiced shaving. I’d get my dad’s shaving cream and squirt it in my hands, and spread it from the bottom of my eyes down. I’d fill the sink with water just like Dad, then get a bobby pin and shave, slowlike around my lips and nose. Then I’d stick my tongue on the inside of my bottom lip so the little patch in the middle would stick out. When I finished, I rinsed off my face and put on Dad’s Old Spice cologne. It made me feel fresh and handsome. It was Saturday morning and Mom was cooking breakfast. She always made fresh tortillas....I loved them” (Trujillo 39).

Marci further expounds upon the Oedipus-complex and zir father’s subsequent reaction, stating: “My mom never hugs or kisses me. She used to but not anymore. When I was little she used to kiss me and let me put my head on her whenever I wanted....That made my dad mad...don’t ask me why” (Trujillo 38).

Irrefutably, at the climax of the novel, it is confirmed that Marci’s gender and sexual identity are indeed the motivation behind zir father’s abuse. As he prepares to beat her yet again, he begins to rile himself up by ranting about zir queer gender and sexual identity, stating:

‘You don’t like it that I called you *hombrecito*? Well hell, that’s what you are. I’m not gonna lie to you. Right? Right?’ ...He started laughing again.... ‘Este, mira, Marci. Your mother and I made a big mistake when we named you. We should have called you Mauricio. No? Mauricio. Pero, how did we know you’d be a boy when we saw your little *bizcocho*? We just went with what we saw....But I’ll tell you one thing,’ he said pointing... ‘you’re gonna have to figure out sooner or later that you ain’t never gonna be man enough to take on your father.’ (Trujillo 107)

As a result of the continuation of *zir* father’s violent abuse despite Marci’s efforts to placate him, Marci conspires with *zir* sister in an attempt to appeal to their mother for help. However, their mother – who has been psychologically traumatized by her husband’s physical and emotional abuse – dismisses their pleas. Rather than investigating their allegations by confronting her husband, she remarks: “Don’t use that language to talk about your daddy. You keep this up, little girl and I’m going to spank you....I don’t believe you. Your daddy hit you before, but he wouldn’t hit his girls *como un hombre*. It’s not true” (Trujillo 89).

Consequently, Marci conspires with Corin to develop a plan wherein they will seek refuge with Uncle Tommy, who is queer like Marci (Trujillo 95). As such, after another severe beating, Marci calls Uncle Tommy, who immediately picks them up to stay with him in his home (Trujillo 97). After learning that Marci and Corin have run away to their Uncle Tommy’s house, *zir* father – supported by their mother – confronts Uncle Tommy to demand that their children be returned to them (Trujillo 98). Jabbing his finger in Uncle Tommy’s face, *zir* father taunts him: “I think you’re a bit mistaken, there, kid brother. These here are my kids, and if I say they’re going with me, then that’s exactly where they’re going....Now I sure as hell know that no queer can kick nobody’s ass. Just because you got a few extra muscles don’t mean shit. Because a

queer with muscles—is still a queer” (Trujillo 97-98). However, Uncle Tommy thwarts zir father away by punching him in the face (Trujillo 98). Nonetheless, zir mother convinces Uncle Tommy to release Marci and Corin back into her custody (Trujillo 100). However, word of the incident reaches their grandmother, who sends Marci a letter that reads as follows:

Mijitas, I feel bad for you....I am sending you money to take the bus to come here and stay with me. Your mama is too crazy over your daddy and she no gonna leave him. So come here and be with your gramma Flor and your Tio. Tell your Tia Leti or Uncle Tommy to show you how to catch the bus. I give you my phone number so you can call me when you get hear. I will come and get you. 5555257764. (Trujillo 104)

Additionally, their grandmother gives Marci a switchblade with which to defend herself (Trujillo 75).

Undeterred by this failure, Marci conspires with Corin to ““make Eddie change”” by intimidating him with the switchblade in order to “show him that [their] not gonna take anymore shit from him” (Trujillo 105). One afternoon, when zir father falls into a drunken slumber after zir mother leaves for work, Marci and Corin (with the assistance of their neighbor Randy) restrain zir father’s arms and legs to the bed posts with old scarves and gags zir father’s mouth with duct tape (Trujillo 108-111). Upon awakening, Marci holds the switchblade near zir father’s genitals and begins to read a list of demands:

Here’s number one. You, Mr. Eddie Cruz, can never hit us again. Not with your hands, not with the belt, not with anything, no matter how much you want to, or how mad you get....Number two. You, Eddie Cruz, can never call us names or say things to make us feel bad, or look stupid, even though that’s what you might be thinking.... Number three. You, Eddie Cruz, can never be mean anymore to anybody. That includes us, Mom, Uncle

Tommy, Father Chacón, and especially Grandma Flor. You have to always be nice to us and them, even if you don't want to. (Trujillo 112)

In order to coerce a promise to comply with their demands, Marci then cuts thin wounds on zir father's cheeks and throat (Trujillo 114). Terrified by Marci's threats, zir father subsequently loses consciousness as the blood from his wounds pools on his chest (Trujillo 115).

Marci and Corin's ambush of their father as he sleeps in their mother's bed parallels Coyolxauhqui and Centzon Huitznahua's ambush of Huitzilopochtli as he slept in Coatlicue's womb. Moreover, Marci's use of the knife to torture and intimidate zir father by inflicting wounds from which blood is drawn signifies yet another parallel to Chantico. Within various codices, Chantico is depicted with an obsidian knife in her hands, which she uses in ritual sacrifices to draw blood from male human sacrifices. Further, like Chantico, Marci's actions against zir father are punished by an increase of the frequency and intensity of the physical abuse. Marci explains: "[h]e still hit us in that new way where it hurt a lot but didn't show anything" (Trujillo 93). The severity of zir father's physical abuse reaches its highest intensity after zir mother discovers evidence of his extramarital affair (Trujillo 160-165).

It is at this point that Marci's conflict with zir father diverges from its parallel to Coyolxauhqui's conflict with Huitzilpochtli. After finding photos of her husband and his mistress, Marci's mother demands that he leave their house and their lives (Trujillo 163-165). Infuriated by her rejection, zir father physically assaults her, punching her repeatedly in the head (Trujillo 165-166). Desperate to save their mother, Corin retrieves the rifle with which he had often threatened their lives and shoots their father in the back, injuring severely though not fatally (Trujillo 166). Accordingly, whereas Coyolxauhqui kills her mother yet fails to kill Huitzipochtli, Marci saves zir mother yet fails to kill zir father. Despite this, rather than embrace

her daughters in gratitude for saving her life, zir mother throws herself over zir father's bleeding torso and orders Marci to call an ambulance, crying and pressing him to her breast (Trujillo 166).

Marci's mother's rejection of zir and embrace of zir father causes yet another divergence between Marci's narrative and the hegemonic narrative of Coyolxauhqui. Recognizing zir mother's loyalty to zir father, Marci relinquishes zir hope of saving zir mother. Instead, as the police and EMTs arrive at their home, Marci instructs Corin to pack their bags and pocket the money given to them by their grandmother (Trujillo 167). Zie then further instructs Corin:

“I want you to pay attention to everything I say.... We'll have to go out the back way....If a cop stops us, we'll just tell him our names are Sally and Cindy Alvarez and that we're going over to Ana Marie Dominguez's to spend the night.... We're going to Grandma Flor's. It'll be better if we stay with her. If we stay here, the cops will come and take us away and probably put us in jail....Grandma Flor can take care of us and won't let anyone come and get us.” (Trujillo 167-168)

Following this plan, Marci and Corin navigate to the bus station, where they purchase tickets as instructed by their grandmother (Trujillo 167). Upon arriving to their grandmother's home, she promises her granddaughters: “Mira hijas, your mama . . . .She just don't want to do what's right....From now on, you don't worry, 'cause I'm gonna take care of you” (Trujillo 171).

In addition to safety from physical violence enacted against Marci due to zir gender and sexual identity, zir grandmother's home also offers a safe space to come out of the closet. Settling into zir new home, Marci meets another teenage female named Roberta. Like Marci, whose birth-given name is Marcia, Roberta prefers to be called by a gender neutral nickname – Robbie (Trujillo 172-173). Further, like Marci, Robbie experiences lesbian desire, which zie has attempted to hide from zir father (Trujillo 174). Likewise, Robbie is able to relate to Marci's

desire to turn into a boy (Trujillo 174). Sharing their gender and sexual identities with one another, Marci and Robbie quickly bond as blood sisters (Trujillo 174). One afternoon, after their relationship becomes increasingly intimate, the nature of Marci and Robbie's relationship changes. Marci recounts the incident, describing:

“I couldn't believe she felt the same as me.... Then slowly, softly, she reached out and touched my hand....I looked at Robbie's hand, taking in how it felt to have her touch me. Then I carefully moved my fingers into hers. For the first time ever, I was holding hands with a girl. We sat underneath that tree without saying anything and watched the sun go down....Then, without a word, she leaned in and kissed me.” (175)

Hence, whereas Coyolxauhqui's failure to kill Huitzipochtli ultimately leads to her decapitation and dismemberment within the hegemonic narrative surrounding the goddess, Marci's failure to kill her father leads to her escape to a relative utopia.

Having been paralleled with Coyolxauhqui and Chantico, Marci's narrative acts as a modern re-membering of the hegemonic narratives of Coyolxauhqui and Chantico, which renarrativizes and reclaims the mythologies of the goddesses. Moreover, in diverging from their narratives, the renarrativization of the goddesses' narratives through Marci's narrative re-visions an alternative future for the goddesses. Rather than dying at the hands of a violent patriarch, Marci escapes to utopia, Coyolxauhqui and Chantico escaping vicariously with her. This utopia is a home originating from shared suffering, which consists of a familial structure that is characterized by a single matriarchal guardian, wherein queer gender and sexual identity may be expressed without fear of punishment in the form of physical abuse. As such, this utopia fits Moraga's descriptions of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which envision Queer Aztlán as a homeland “strong enough to

embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender...without prejudice or punishment” that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family “formed through suffering and celebration shared” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Marci to Coyolxauhqui and Chantico throughout the narrative of *What Night Brings*, Trujillo imagines Queer Aztlán.

## **Gloria Anzaldúa**

### ***Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza***

Having earned Anzaldúa countless awards and recognition since its initial publication in 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* has been the subject of a plentitude of critical analytical works across virtually all disciplines within the field of humanities. However, as discussed by Anzaldúa with Kakie Urch during an interview entitled “Working the Borderlands, Becoming Mestiza: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa,” many critics have overlooked the poems that were included in later editions of the work (85). When asked about the trend, Anzaldúa commented: “There are certain poems that never get read or talked about. The ‘Goddess’ poems, the poems that deal with religion. Maybe 18 years from now, those will be the ones that will be read” (85). Explicitly, Anzaldúa identifies “Antigua, Mi Diosa” as one of the most notable of poems which have been neglected critical analyses from the majority of literary scholars.

Consequently, in “Spirit, Culture, Sex: Elements of the Creative Process in Anzaldúa’s Poetry,” Linda Garber argues that, since most academic criticism focuses on Anzaldúa’s theories associated with Mestiza Consciousness and its implications for postcolonialism, they miss important themes that “are only fully visible in the poetry” – for example “it is only in the poetry that Anzaldúa depicts sex—not merely queer or lesbian identity but orgasmic physical

pleasure.... (214, 215). For example, in “Algo Secretamente Amado,” Moraga comments that “[l]esbian desire is not a compelling force in the book. In fact, desire in the sexual sense is noticeably absent —whether heterosexual or lesbian” (155). Accordingly, Garber states that several of the poems need much deserved analysis of Anzaldúa’s use of symbolism and metaphor related to Coatlicue in the representation of queer sexuality and gender (215). Particularly, Garber lists the poems “Antigua, mi diosa” and “Canción de la diosa de la noche” (among others), for which – in the following sections – I analyze the representation of queer gender and sexuality through the symbolism that is associated with various additional religious, mythological and historical feminine figures (215).

### **“Antigua, Mi Diosa”**

Throughout the poem, an unidentified narrator describes their perception of a feminine goddess referred to as Antigua. Although the narrator is not explicitly identified within the textual body of the poem, due to its nature as autohistoria, the narrator may be inferred to be an individual much like Anzaldúa - who possess a similar gender and sexual identity. As such, my analysis treats the narrator as a gender queer lesbian. Similarly, since Antigua is not explicitly identified as any particular mythological, historical or religious figure, it is unclear whether she is a literal mythological goddess who appears before the narrator or an actual female acquaintance who is adored by the narrator as a goddess. Nonetheless, she does share characteristics with several Aztec goddesses. Namely, Antigua is paralleled with Itzpapalotl and La Muerte through descriptions of her physical appearance and behaviors. In paralleling Antigua with these figures, the narrator uses language that conjures highly erotic imagery between herself and Antigua. Accordingly, the poem uses parallels with Itzpapalotl and La Muerte to represent the narrator and Antigua’s queer gender and sexual identity. In so doing, Anzaldúa

reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddesses' mythologies in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Antigua is first paralleled with Itzpapalotl and La Muerte through the narrator's description of zir encounter with her as occurring during a stroll in "la noche" (the night) (188). Notoriously, due to their association with death, both La Muerte and Itzpapalotl are also associated with night. Further, Itzpapalotl is the goddess of death and night, whom adulterous women are required to meet at crossroads in the night as part of a purification ritual that entails full nudity. Additionally, Antigua is compared to Itzpapalotl due to her description as smelling of "copal y almendras quemadas" (resin and burned almonds) (188). This smell is an allusion to Itzpapalotl's hegemonic narrative, wherein her body was burned in a fire. Antigua is described as having fingers "como espadas" (like swords), comparable to Itzpapalotl's fingers – which are depicted as talons in hegemonic imagery (188). Further, akin to Itzpapalotl's kaleidoscopic rainbow shards of flint stones, Antigua is said to have "semillas de luz" (seeds of light) (188). Further, the narrator states that Antigua "[m]e diste tu golpe de hacha" (hit zir with an axe), causing zir to "caí como un árbol despetalando mis ojos" (it fell like a tree removing the petals of my eyes) (188). The axe is a reference to the scythe that La Muerte carries, while the tree is an allusion to the sacred tree in Tamoanchan that is often incorporated in hegemonic illustrations of Itzpapalotl. Further, like La Muerte and Itzpapalotl, Antigua is said to have "alas" (wings) (188). Additionally, Antigua has "piel negrísima" (black skin), which is similar to La Muerte's black robe.

Thereby characterized as an embodiment of La Muerte and Itzpaplotl, Antigua is then further paralleled with the two figures through her sexual interactions with the narrator. Notably, all of the sexual contact that Antigua initiates with the narrator is associated with physical pain. For example, when describing the performance of oral sex, the narrator states: “[m]e consumaste enterita” (you consume my insides) (188). Likewise, in conveying the experience of being vaginally penetrated by Antigua’s fingers, the narrator iterates: “[l]a cosecha: esta inquietud / que se madura en agoniia” (the harvest: this curiosity / which grows in agony) (188). The narrator then explains that the agony is due to the fact: “nada me satisface. / Ancient, querida, parece que no tengo cura” (nothing satisfies me. / Antigua, lover, it seems that I do not have the cure) (188). As part of this intense sexual desire, the narrator expresses: “[m]i incendiada piel urge el saberte” (my burned flesh yearns to know you) (189). These metaphors, therefore, may be yet another allusion to Itzpaplotl – who was burned as punishment for her sexual transgression.

Yet, the sexual encounter is not only associated with physical pain, but also psychological pain. For example, during the encounter, the narrator states “por ti sacrifique / las plantas de mis pies” (for you I sacrificed / the soles of my feet) (188). This is an allusion to the ritual performed by adulterous women in association with Itzpaplotl, wherein the women must be fully unclothed as they walk to meet the goddess at the crossroads. Moreover, it implies that the sexual encounter with Antigua requires zir to sacrifice a part of zir body that is extremely sensitive and associated with mobility. As such, the lines that describe Antigua’s sexual interactions with the narrator serve as metaphors for the manner in which the narrator’s lesbian sexual relationship with Antigua is agonizingly physically pleasurable. However, they also imply that their lesbian relationship is psychologically painful since it causes social stigma within the Chicano community that limits social mobility. The metaphors, therefore, may be yet another

allusion to Itzpapalotl – who is the patron goddess of adulterous women who are required to travel from the community in order to complete purification rituals for their sexual transgressions.

Additionally as Antigua lays beside the narrator, Antigua's sword-like fingers caress his face, "hacienda dibujos en mi cara" (drawing pictures on my face) – which implies that Antigua left scratches on the narrator's face with her sharp fingernails (188). Similarly, the narrator expresses: "[m]e diste tu golpe de hacha / caí como un árbol despetalando mis ojos" (you hit me with an axe / it fell like a tree removing the petals of my eyes) (188). This is a metaphor for the sexual encounter forcing the narrator to suffer a painful realization to which he had previously been willfully blind. And, the narrator expounds: "[d]eseos insepultos velan la noche / Mira como me has aruinado" (Buried desires are exposed in the night / Look how you have ruined me) (189). Accordingly, the narrator explains how the sexual encounter with Antigua has caused repressed lesbian sexual desires to surface within her so intensely that they can no longer be ignored, ruining her ability to pass for heterosexual. Nonetheless, despite the psychological pain and social stigma that is caused by the narrator's sexual relationship with Antigua, she embraces it. Rather than describing it as a condemning act that signifies a social death (like the physical death that is symbolized by La Muerte and Itzpapalotl), the narrator describes the sexual encounter as a rebirth – stating: "[e]ste pobre cuerpo renacido / tres veces ha resurrecto" (this poor body reborn / three times you have resurrected) (189).

By paralleling Itzpapalotl and La Muerte with Antigua, the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the figures' hegemonic narratives, wherein their mythologies are renarrativized and reclaimed. However, by altering the nature of their narratives, the narrator's renarrativization of the figures' narratives through the description of the sexual encounter with Antigua re-vision

an alternative future for the figures. Rather than social death within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, the narrator is reborn into a utopia of sexual pleasure, Itzpapalotl vicariously reborn alongside zir. In referring to Antigua as “madre” (mother), the narrator compares this utopia to a familial home originating from shared pain and pleasure, wherein queer gender and sexual identity may be embraced without fear of social stigma or psychological pain. As such, this utopia fits Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which describe Queer Aztlán as a homeland “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” that consists of families outside of heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family “formed through suffering and celebration shared” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Antigua to Itzpapalotl and La Muerte throughout the sexual encounter described by the narrator in “Antigua, Mi Diosa,” Anzaldúa imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **“Canción de la Diosa de la Noche”**

The poem, as spoken by an unidentified first person narrator, describes an encounter with “La Diosa de la Noche.” Although the narrator is not explicitly identified within the textual body of the poem, due to its nature as autohistoria, the narrator may be inferred to be an individual much like Anzaldúa - who possess a similar gender and sexual identity. As such, my analysis treats the narrator as a gender queer lesbian. Similarly, since “La Diosa” is not explicitly identified as any particular goddess within the Aztec pantheon, it is unclear whether she is actually a revered mythological goddess or simply a respected female acquaintance. Regardless, “La Diosa” is comparable to Itzpapalotl through descriptions of her physical appearance and behaviors. In paralleling “La Diosa” with Itzpapalotl, the narrator uses language that is both

maternal and sexual. Accordingly, the poem uses the parallel with Itzpapalotl to represent the narrator and the unnamed goddess's queer gender and sexual identities. In so doing, Anzaldúa reclaims and renarrativizes Itzpapalotl's mythology in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

"La Diosa de la Noche" is first paralleled with Itzpapalotl through the title, which translates as "the goddess of the night." Within her hegemonic mythology Itzpapalotl is the goddess of night, earth and death. This parallel is reinforced through the narrator's description of the goddess as having "Death's warm hand" (198). Similarly, the characterization of the goddess as a "darkly awesome" figure with large wings that extend from her back parallels hegemonic depictions of Itzpapalotl, wherein she is depicted with large wings (198). Further, the goddess is paralleled with Itzpapalotl when she is described as standing "[a]t the crossroads / where her spirit shocks" – the purification ritual in which Itzpapalotl plays a central role requiring sexual transgressors to travel to a crossroads at night (196).

"La Diosa de la Noche" thus paralleled with Itzpapalotl, the narrator parallel's herself with the goddess in describing her sexual identity, stating "In love with my own kind, / I know you and inspire you" (198). The parallel is strengthened when the narrator discloses: "I wander on a path / come to the patio of a ruined temple. / Flutes lure me to a fire. / A litany fondles my hip / horns pin me to the ground. / To cast out the brute" (196). This description alludes to Itzpapalotl's death, wherein she was burned on a fire and pierced through the heart by the antlers of a pair of deer that were sent to punish her for her sexual transgression. The narrator expounds upon this allusion, stating: "The godhead is unstrung. / He has a grudge against me and all flesh. / He rejects the dark within the flame" (197).

Moreover, the parallel between the narrator, the goddess and Itzpapalotl is extended through the narrator's statement: "I buff the old scratches from bone. / With flint knife cut in our marks" (198). The symbol of the bone and the knife allude to Itzpapalotl's head, which is a human skull with an obsidian blade projecting from her face. Likewise, the symbol of flint refers to Itzpapalotl's skirt, which consists of flints. Akin to the mention of the flint knife and bone, the narrator also expresses: "[w]e don the feathered mantle" – which alludes to the ornament of eagle feathers that Itzpapalotl wears atop her head (199).

The narrator then continues to use the parallel between Itzpapalotl and the goddess in order to express both sexual and maternal desire. For example, the narrator requests: "Night, unfurl your wings / and your long hair over me. / Bring your breast / to my mouth" (198). The imagery of the narrator sucking the breast of the goddess may refer to the maternal act of breastfeeding a child or the sexual act of titillating a lover's nipples. However, unlike Itzpapalotl who dies as the result of her punishment by the gods for her sexual transgression, the narrator states: "I am mad / but I choose this madness. / The godhead is unstrung. / He has a grudge against me and all flesh. / He rejects the dark within the flame / As for me, I renounce my kinship / with the whole and all its parts, / renounce my fealty" (197).

Upon rejecting the Chicano "gods" heteropatriarchal authority to stigmatize her due to her sexuality, the narrator explains that "[m]emory / ignites like kindling / the time when I filled the sky. / Parting brought death. / Now, I drum on the carcass of the world / creating crises to recall my name" (197). Accordingly, the narrator draws upon her memory of a pre-Columbian past when her sexual identity was allowed to be expressed openly before the eyes of all the world ("filling the sky"). In so doing, the narrator embraces her lesbianism openly in order to revive the values and practices of embracing lesbianism, which had died alongside the Aztecs upon the

arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the past, within her present reality. Furthermore, by doing so, the narrator inspires others like herself to join in a community based on the characteristics embodied by Itzpapalotl (goddess of night), which exists outside the heteropatriarchal Chicano community that draws its origins from the sun god Huitzilopochtli. Consequently, the narrator expresses: “I descend into black earth / dark primordial slime, / no longer repellent to me, / nor confining. / The four winds / fire welds splinter with splinter. / I find my kindred spirits. // The moon eclipses the sun. / *La diosa* lifts us” (198-199).

Hence, by paralleling Itzpapalotl with the narrator and “La Diosa,” the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the goddess’s hegemonic narrative, wherein her mythology is renarrativized and reclaimed. However, by altering the nature of their narratives, the narrator’s renarrativization of the goddess’s mythology (through the description of the sexual encounter with “La Diosa”) re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Rather than social death caused by stigmatization within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, the narrator opts out and creates her own community of like-minded individuals, Itzpapalotl vicariously opting out alongside her. In suckling the goddess’s breast as both a mother and a lover, the narrator constructs the community through both sexual and familial relationships, wherein queer gender and sexual identity may be embraced without fear of social stigma or psychological pain. As such, the narrator’s community actualizes Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which understands Queer Aztlán as a homeland “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between

friends and family (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling La Diosa and the narrator with Itzpapalotl in “Canción de la Diosa de la Noche,” Anzaldúa imagines Queer Aztlán.

### ***The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader***

Whereas *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* has garnered a plethora of critical analyses, literary criticism for many of the short prose and poetry that were published posthumously within *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* has been scarce. The little criticism that exists focuses primarily on the evolution in Anzaldúa’s theory and writing style that is represented through comparison of the two works. For example, in “Shamanic Urgency and Two-Way Movement as Writing Style in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa,” Betsy Dahms examines Anzaldúa’s writing style as a shamanic practice, which combines political activism, artistic expression and religious spiritualism (9-10). Additionally, in “‘Now Let Us Shift’ the Subject: Tracing the Path and Posthumanist Implications of La Naguala / The Shapeshifter in the Works of Gloria Anzaldúa,” Kelli D. Zaytoun explores Anzaldúa’s use of La Naguala, a term that refers to a shapeshifter within Aztec culture, in order to represent the process of continual evolution in intellectual perspective and fluid shifts in categories of self-identification described in Anzaldúa’s theoretical works (70-71, 81-82). And, in “Shifting Subjectivities: Mestizas, Nepantleras, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s Legacy,” Martina Koegeler-Abdi discusses the differences between the manner in which Mestiza Consciousness and Neplantlism are explicated in Anzaldúa’s early and later works (71-75).

### **“The Postmodern Llorona”**

The poem is narrated by an unidentified voice who characterizes an anonymous young woman. Throughout the poem, the narrator portrays the queer gender and sexuality of the young woman. While the title of the poem directly identifies her as “The Postmodern Llorona,” the

young woman is also explicitly identified as La Llorona within a line the poem. This parallel between the young woman and La Llorona is extended throughout the body of the poem through descriptions of her physical appearance and behaviors. As such, in characterizing the young woman, the narrator uses the parallel with La Llorona to represent her queer gender and sexual identity. In so doing, Anzaldúa reclaims and renarrativizes the figure's folklore in order to remember the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The narrator first parallels the young woman with La Llorona by explaining: “[t]he young woman is not afraid of La Llorona. / She has become La Llorona” (262). The narrator then expounds that “[s]he is the macha woman, the femme, / La Llorona is a lesbian” (262). As such, the parallel with La Llorona is named as the device through which the narrator will enumerate several aspects of the young woman's identity as a lesbian macha femme.

The parallel is first used to describe the young woman's identity when the narrator describes her as a young woman who feels no sense of longing or sorrow for any former male lovers. Accordingly, the narrator iterates that “[i]f ever she remembers the macho / who abandoned and betrayed her / it does not render her paralyzed in susto and grief” (262). The trope of being paralyzed in susto and grief due to abandonment and betrayal by a man serves as an allusion to the version of La Llorona's hegemonic narrative wherein a young mother is cursed to eternally haunt the earth after she commits infanticide and suicide incited by her husband's betrayal and abandonment, wailing in perpetual grief and sorrow as she searches for men and children to replace her murdered family. The parallel is reinforced when the narrator explains that “[t]he dismembered missing children are not / the issue of her womb – she has no children.

She seeks the parts of herself / she's lost along the way" (263). Similarly, the parallel is established when the narrator explains: "She sports a short spiked asymmetrical haircut with a magenta swathe, / having long ago shorn her long black pelo / and thrown it into the river. / Attached to her key ring is a pen knife / and a tiny cradle" (262). The knife and cradle and river that are referenced in this line are symbols of the young mother's infanticidal and suicidal acts, which were committed through drowning and stabbing.

Further, the parallel with the version of La Llorona involving the young wailing mother is strengthened when the narrator describes: "[h]er high-pitched yell is curdling the blood of her parents / raising the hair on the back of their necks" – a reference to La Llorona's wails of sorrow (262). Another reference is made to La Llorona's wails when the narrator explains that the young woman does not wander the night in search of revenge or romance, instead "you will only hear her screaming / at Take Back The Night rallies" – which is an annual feminist protest event wherein females share their stories of sexual objectification, exploitation and abuse (263).

In addition to the parallel with La Llorona as represented in the narrative of the young mother, the narrator also parallels the young woman with Cihuacoatl – another version of La Llorona. This parallel is conveyed when the narrator states that the young woman "has shed her ancient mythical white dress / for white jeans and a white sweatshirt / with the words SERPENT WOMAN / in fluorescent lime green" (262). Notably, Cihuacoatl is depicted as a serpent woman within hegemonic sculptures that portray her with the body of a snake and the head of a woman. Likewise, Cihuacoatl is illustrated in various codices, which display the goddess as a woman with the body of a snake from the waist down, her breasts and genitals concealed by a white blouse and skirt.

In this manner, the narrator's parallel of the young woman with Cihuacoatl and La Llorona provides a "postmodern" re-membering of the figures' hegemonic narratives, wherein their folklore and mythology are renarrativized and reclaimed. However, by altering their characteristics and actions, the narrator's renarrativization of the figures' narratives (through the description of the young lesbian macha femme woman) re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Rather than being condemned to eternal sorrow and grief for her transgression in desperate reaction to her husband's abandonment and betrayal, Cihuacoatl vicariously protests the sexual objectification and exploitation of females within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community alongside the young woman. Accordingly, through the parallel, the narrator places the young woman and Cihuacoatl within a female community united in shared pain that embraces queer sexual and gender identity in protests against the sexual objectification, abuse and exploitation of females within heteropatriarchal cultures. As such, this community fits Moraga's description of Queer Aztlán in "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe" and "A Long Line of Vendidas," which describes Queer Aztlán as a homeland "strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender...without prejudice or punishment" that consists of communities outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family "formed through suffering and celebration shared" (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the young woman to La Llorona and Cihuacoatl throughout the narrator's characterization of her in "Antigua, Mi Diosa," Anzaldúa imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **"Dream of the Double-Faced Woman"**

Throughout the short work of prose, the narrator's describes the experience of an anonymous gender non-binary lesbian female – referred to only as "she" and "her" – as zie

gradually accepts and embraces her gender and sexual identity. This gender and sexual identity is exemplified through the narrator's parallel of "her" with Coatlicue. The parallel between the protagonist and Coatlicue is constructed through the narrator's use of symbolism that is associated with the goddess. In using this parallel to represent the protagonist's gender and sexual identity, Anzaldúa reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddess's mythology in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The protagonist is first paralleled with Coatlicue through the title of the work, which alludes to the "Double-Faced Woman." While the work is told from a third person omniscient perspective, the narrator's omniscience is limited exclusively to the innermost thoughts and feelings of the protagonist. The protagonist is identified as a cisgender female through the use of "she" and "her," as well as the reference to "her clitoris" (53). Therefore, as the only woman addressed by the narrator, the "Double-Faced Woman" is assumed to be the protagonist. The term "Double-Faced Woman" is an allusion to Coatlicue – who is represented in hegemonic depictions with a head that consists of serpents, which compose the two sides of her face.

With the protagonist paralleled with Coatlicue in this manner, the limited nature of the narrator's omniscient perspective suggests that the narrator and the protagonist could be two aspects of a single individual who embodies the duality of the "Double-Faced Woman." The suggestion of the protagonist's and the narrator's identities as dual aspects of a single individual is supported when the narrator explains that:

She attributed most of her ills to the separation of the flesh from the spirit.... She was not allowed, nor had she allowed herself, to express who she was sexually. She had

abnegated the responsibility to be who she was, to act out who she really was. The body-split. She knew absolutely nothing about her body. Her clothes estranged her from it. The tight jacket, the tight pants, the cramped waist. (52-53)

Accordingly, the protagonist may represent a cisgender heterosexual identity which is imposed upon the narrator, while the narrator represents the non-cisgender homosexual identity that the protagonist gradually accepts and embraces. Thus, when referring to *ziesself*, the narrator uses third person feminine personal pronouns in order to reflect the cognitive dissonance between the queer gender and sexual identity which *zie* has freely chosen and the cisgender heterosexual identity that *zie* was compelled to assume. Thereby, the two snakes that compose Coatlicue's face symbolize the two oppositional identities that the narrator embodies.

Symbolism associated with Coatlicue to portray the protagonist/narrator's gender and sexual identity is further employed when *zie* describes *zir* genitalia. In describing *zir* clitoris, the narrator/protagonist labels it "her serpent's tongue" (53). The description of the clitoris as a "serpent's tongue" is a reference to Coatlicue, whose genitals are concealed by a skirt of nettled snakes within hegemonic depictions of the goddess. Within these hegemonic depictions, Coatlicue's skirt of serpents (wherein the serpent is a phallic image) is juxtaposed against her bare flaccid breasts, signifying her dual embodiment of both masculine & feminine and male & female aspects. Thereby, the identification of the protagonist/narrator's clitoris as a "serpent's tongue" suggests that *zie* possesses a gender non-binary identity, which encompasses both feminine and masculine aspects. The recognition of the protagonist/narrator's gender non-binary identity, which encompasses both masculine and feminine characteristics simultaneously, is reinforced when the narrator/protagonist recognizes that "[s]he did not have a language nor a vocabulary to talk about [*zir*] body" (53). As a gender queer who identifies as simultaneously

man and woman myself, I can attest to the difficulty naming such an identity. It is not accurately described as transgender, which implies a transition from man to woman (or vice versa).

However, it is also not accurately described as gender fluid, which implies a continual flux from man to woman (or vice versa). Rather, it lies within a broad vague category of gender queer or gender non-binary. This internal conflict to find the language with which to express zir gender non-binary identity enables yet another parallel with Coatlicue. Comparable to the internal conflict that occurs due to the narrator's inability to find language in order to reconcile the oppositional aspects of man & woman that are encompassed by the duality of zir identity as the "Double-Faced Woman," Coatlicue's narrative centers on the conflict between her son Huitzilopochtli and her daughter Coyolxauhqui.

Initially, this conflict is avoided through the narrator/protagonist's repression and suppression of the gender non-binary lesbian identity through self-imposed and externally imposed practices of compulsory heterosexuality that silence the expression of zir true identity. For example, zie laments:

The clit, her serpent's tongue, her sexual tongue had been silenced. Or because of disuse, she had forgotten to speak its language, how to move its tongue. She was not allowed, nor had she allowed herself, to express who she was sexually. She had abnegated the responsibility to be who she was, to act out who she really was. (53)

However, when zir body begins to fail due to illness, the protagonist/narrator experiences a psychological shift – "only when illness scared her did she deign to listen to the body" (53). Zie expounds, stating: "[i]t is then that she measured the beat of its burp, fart, sigh. And what an incredible song she heard" (53). This song then empowers the narrator/protagonist to overcome "the tradition of muteness" and "transform [zir] relation to another's body" by sexually liberating

ziesself, finally pursuing the fulfillment of zir lesbian sexual desires by engaging in intercourse with another female (53). In so doing, the narrator/protagonist explains that zie is empowered to create a utopia of zir own making – “[f]or if [zie] changed [zir] relationship to [zir] body and that in turn changed [zir] relationship to another’s body then [zie] would change [zir] relationship to the world. And when that happened [zie] would change the world” (53).

As such, the narrator/protagonist’s parallel of ziesself Coatlicue provides a modern remembering of the goddess’s hegemonic narrative, wherein her mythology is renarrativized and reclaimed. Subsequently, the narrator’s renarrativization of Coatlicue’s mythology (through the description of the gender non-binary lesbian female) re-visioning an alternative future for the goddess. Rather than being decapitated during the conflict between Huitzipochtli and Coyolxauhqui, Coatlicue vicariously resolves the conflict alongside the narrator/protagonist as zie breaks the silence imposed upon zir by practices of compulsory heterosexuality within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community. Accordingly, through the parallel, the narrator/protagonist is able to transform zir world into a utopia wherein zie is able to openly embrace zir queer gender and sexual identity. As such, the narrator/protagonist’s utopia matches Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which constructs Queer Aztlán as a society outside heteropatriarchal dominance that is “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the protagonist/narrator with Coatlicue in “Dream of the Double-Faced Woman,” Anzaldúa imagines Queer Aztlán.

## **Cherríe Moraga**

Set in the distant future during which Queer Aztlán has been colonized by neo-conquistadors, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* relates the narrative of Medea, a lesbian mother who must struggle to win a battle against her ex-husband over custody of their son. While Moraga's Medea is directly paralleled with the Medea of Greek mythology, she is also paralleled with several feminine figures from Mexican culture. Identified explicitly as a lesbian, Medea's sexuality is represented through narrative structures and symbolism that parallel her with Coatlicue, La Malinche and La Llorona. By paralleling Medea with these figures, Moraga reclaims and renarrativizes the the narratives of Coyolxauhqui, La Llorona and Coatlicue in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization acts as the map by which able to fail queerly and opt out of the oppressive heteropatriarchy of the new Aztlanian government and her ex-husband (Jasón).

In the Prelude for the second act, stage directions explicitly identify Medea as the embodiment of Coatlicue through a reenactment of the goddess's narrative (55). Throughout the reenactment, the stage direction directly name Medea as Coatlicue and Luna (Medea's love) as Coyolxauhqui (55). Luna is further identified with Coyolxauhqui implicitly as a result of her name – "luna" being the Spanish word for "moon" and Coyolxauhqui being the goddess of the moon. Moreover, the parallel between Luna and Coyolxauhqui is extended when Huitzilopochtli dismembers her limbs and decapitates her head, tossing her skill into the sky as "La Luna" at the reenactment's conclusion (57). Chac-Mool (Medea's estranged son) is cast into the role of Huitzilopochtli who emerges from Coatlicue's womb as the reenactment commences (55). Thereby, Medea, Chac-Mool and Luna are ostensibly paralleled with the three major figures of Coatlicue's mythology.

These parallels are reinforced in representations of Medea's sexuality throughout the rest of the drama. For example, Medea's sexual identity represents a duality wherein her maternity juxtaposes her lesbianism due to the inability of two women to reproduce biological offspring. Similarly, since lesbianism within itself is considered a transgression against the hegemonic role of women as indicated through adherence to the biological imperative as defined by the Roman Catholic Church within the Chicano community, Medea's gender identity also represents duality. This duality is comparable to the various oppositional binaries represented by Coatlicue – such as light & darkness, life & death, masculine & feminine. Moreover, the fact of Medea's maternity despite the biological impossibility of the reproduction of offspring between two lesbians serves as an allusion to Coatlicue's conception of Huitzilopochtli, wherein she became spontaneously and inexplicably pregnant after placing a mysterious orb of light and feathers into her apron.

Further, the contradiction between Medea's lesbianism and maternity becomes the a major site of internal conflict, Medea continually experiencing ultimatums between her son and her lover, her maternity and her lesbianism, her gender and her sexuality. Hence, Medea's internal conflict acts as yet another parallel with Coatlicue. Within her hegemonic narrative, Coatlicue is presented with the following ultimatum: if she protect Huitzilopochtli from Coyolxauhqui, she condemns the daughter to execution by the son; but if she defends Coyolxauhqui against Huitzilopochtli, she condemns the son to execution by the daughter. Likewise, having born a son within her prior heteronormative marriage with her ex-husband, Medea's maternity represents her participation within the very heteropatriarchal structures of the Chicano community that expatriated Medea and Luna from Aztlán due to their lesbianism (71).

Therefore, in order to fully embrace her lesbianism through a display of loyalty to Luna, Medea must relinquish custody of her son to her ex-husband. However, in relinquishing custody of her son, Medea condemns Chac-Mool to be indoctrinated with the heteropatriarchal values of his father. Subsequently, during Scene 3 of Act 2, when Jasón confronts Medea in an attempt to persuade her to relinquish custody of Chac-Mool, she contests: ““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!....[H]e will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example”” (69). Consequently, Medea will lose her son, both physically and psychologically. Therefore, in Scene 8 of Act 2, Medea expresses her regret when she states:

‘Hijo! Mensajero! How much simpler had you been born a daughter that first female seed inside of me. You would have comforted me in old age held vigil at the hour of my death washed my body with sweet soap anointing it with oil. You would have wrapped me in colored cloths/ worthy of the meeting of mothers. My finest feathers and skins would adorn me as you returned me to the earth.’ (92)

Yet, if Medea wishes to maintain legal custody of her son, she will be required to acquiesce to her ex-husband’s stipulations wherein she must commit to full sexual and romantic engagement with him (53-54). As such, in Scene 10 of Act 1, Jasón offers Medea: ““You don’t have to stay here either, you know....You’re not a lesbian, Medea, for chrissake. This is a masquerade....I want you to reconsider”” (53-54). As a result, she will lose Luna, both physically and emotionally. Thus, during the Epilogue of Act 2, Medea laments:

‘What crime do I commit now, Mama? To choose the daughter over the son? You betrayed us, Madre Coatlicue. You, anciana, you who birthed the god of War, Huitzilopochtli. His Aztec name sours upon my lips, as the name of the son of the woman

who gave me birth. My mother did not stop my brother's hand from reaching into my virgin bed. Nor did you hold back the sword that severed your daughter's head.

Coyolxauhqui, diosa de la luna....Ahora, she is my god. La Luna, la hija rebelde. Te rechazo, Madre' (92).

Yet, unwilling to forgo either her lesbianism or her maternity (her sexuality or her gender), Medea conspires to temporarily seduce and blackmail Jasón in an act of sexual subversion in order to maintain custody over her son while continuing her lesbian affair (46-48, 53-54). In seducing Jasón, Medea is paralleled with La Malinche, who betrayed her people by participating in sexual intercourse with Hernán Cortés. Furthermore, Medea is also paralleled with La Malinche long before she seduces Jasón, due to her participation in a sexual and romantic affair with Luna throughout her marriage to her ex-husband (65). Overtly, she is identified as La Malinche during Scene 4 of Act 2, when a border guard refers to Medea as "La Despedida" – one of many aliases for La Malinche (79).

After discovering Medea's betrayal, Luna ends their relationship, moving out of their home (79). Devastated by Luna's desertion, Medea becomes severely depressed, her weeping overhead by Chac-Mool and Mama Sal (Medea's mother) during Scene 6 in Act 1 (37). Reflecting on his mother's behavior, Chac-Mool refers to Medea's cries as "el llanto de La Llorona" (37). Still determined not to forgo either her lesbianism or her maternity, Medea does something radical. In Scene 8 of Act 2, Medea wears a flowing white gown as she carries her son to an altar of blue maize to be ritually sacrificed. The scene is described in the stage directions as follows:

*[MEDEA takes CHAC-MOOL into her arms. She rocks him, singing....He passes out. It is a pieta image, MEDEA holding him limp within her arms. Then, with much effort, she*

*tries to drag CHAC-MOOL's body into the small field of corn. She is unable to. The CIHUATATEO enter, dressed in the traditional Aztec. They lift CHAC-MOOL and take him into the center of the field. Meanwhile, MEDEA starts pulling up all the overgrown corn stalks in the field, piling them into a mound higher and higher. She becomes frenzied, a frightening image, her white nightgown flowing in the sudden wind. The pile of blue corn stalks have formed a kind of altar. The CIHUATATEO heave CHAC-MOOL's body on top of it.] (91)*

Both the white gown and the color blue act as symbols that allude to La Llorona. The white gown parallels the white blouse and skirt worn by Cihuacoatl, one of the many versions of La Llorona. The color blue symbolizes water, which parallels Chalchiuhtlicue, La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl) and Atlacoaya – goddesses of rivers, lakes, oceans and rain. Moreover, in sacrificing Chac-Mool after being abandoned by Luna, Medea is paralleled with the version of La Llorona represented by the hegemonic narrative of the young mother who commits infanticide after the desertion of her husband.

In “Cultural Anxieties and Truths: Gender, Nationalism, and La Llorona Retellings: La Llorona: Disrupting Gender Relations and National Narratives” by Debra J. Blake, “Out of the Fringe: Desire and Homosexuality in the 1990s Latino Theater” by Teresa M. Marrero and “The Revolution Fails Here: Cherrie Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman*” by Patricia Ybarra, the ritual sacrifice performed by Medea is interpreted as the literal murder of her son, representing Medea’s inability to reinvent familia and arrive at Queer Aztlán (Blake 179-182; Marrero 291; Ybarra 74-76). However, in the Epilogue, it is revealed that Medea did not kill Chac-Mool, the ritual being symbolic rather than actual. Visiting Medea in her prison cell, where Jasón has arranged to have her incarcerated in order to coerce custody of their son, Chac-Mool informs his

mother that he has come to take her home (98). As he gathers her in his arms, he informs her that Luna has forgiven her and returned to their home, stating: “Watch the moon. By the full moon, you’ll be looking at saguaros. You’re going home” (99).

Hence, through the parallel of Medea with Coatlicue, La Llorona and La Malinche, Moraga provides a modern re-membering of the figures’ hegemonic narratives, wherein their mythology, folklore and historical accounts are renarrativized and reclaimed. Moreover, this renarrativization re-visions an alternative future for both Medea and the feminine figures outside the heteropatriarchy of the Chicano community. Unlike hegemonic characterizations of La Llorona, she does not commit infanticide as the result of spousal desertion. And, unlike hegemonic characterizations of Malinche and Coatlicue, she betrays nor loses either Luna or Chac-Mool. Rather, Medea escapes to the Queer Aztlán that Moraga describes of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas” – which envisions the utopia as a homeland “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family “formed through suffering and celebration shared” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Medea with Coatlicue, La Malinche and La Llorona in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Moraga imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **Helena María Viramontes**

#### ***Their Dogs Came with Them***

Viramontes’s 2007 novel, *Their Dogs Came with Them*, has received critical acclaim for its commentary on social injustice stemming from institutionalized racism and classism against poor urban Chicano populations in Los Angeles, California amidst gentrification. Of particular

interest to various literary scholars is the novel's portrayal of the effects of institutionalized racism and classism from the dominant society as they are compounded upon the effects of intragroup homophobia and sexism within the Chicano community for one of the novel's protagonists - Turtle. Much of the novel focuses on Turtle's daily activities related to survival on the streets of L.A. as a member of the McBride Boys gang who has become homeless following the deployment of zir brother to Vietnam during the military draft. Turtle, whose sexual and gender identity is never explicitly stated, is nevertheless identified as queer through evidence within the text that suggests a gender neutral asexual identity. In "Engendering a Queer Latin@ Time and Place in Helena Maria Viramontes' *Their Dogs Came with Them*," T.J. Cuevas asserts that , while Turtle is undoubtedly queer, zie possesses "no usable Chican@ past to recall and no access to a queer history with which to insert herself as an imaginable and legible subject of experience" (39). However, I disagree. I believe that Turtle identifies zieself and is identified by others as a modern embodiment of Xochiquetzal, La Muerte, La Llorona and La Malinche through various allusions and symbolism throughout the text. Additionally, I believe that Turtle's experience and expression of zir sexual and gender identity is continually paralleled to the narratives of La Malinche and La Llorona, both directly and indirectly by Turtle zieself. Consequently, I assert that Turtle not only possesses knowledge of a Chican@ mythohistorical past, but also draws upon that knowledge in zir narrative. Accordingly, I argue that Viramontes reclaims and renarrativizes the figures' narratives in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization provides an alternative path through queer failure and opting out that allows Turtle to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Early in the novel, Turtle is established as the embodiment of Xochiquetzal, La Llorona, La Muerte, and La Malinche through various allusions and symbolism due to zir gender and

sexual identity. For example, Turtle is identified as a “malflora” or “bad flower” by zir aunt due to zir shaved head, which is described as “the start of going bad” (Viramontes 167-168). Zir aunt then expounds that a similar “malflora” in their neighborhood had notoriously murdered zir father, who was an abusive drunkard (Viramontes 167). Accordingly, Turtle’s masculine appearance (as conveyed through zir shaved head) is recognized as an early manifestation of a “bad” gender and sexual identity that leads to transgression against violent heteropatriarchal authority. Thereby, reference to Turtle as “malflora” is an allusion to Xochiquetzal, the goddess of sexual transgression and female sexuality from whose vaginal labia all flowers were created.

Similarly, Turtle is identified by zir brother (Luis) as “la chingada” as he teases zir by referring to zir as a “cabeza de melón because of [zir] shaved head” (Viramontes 157). Luis’s impetus for referring to Turtle as “la chingada” is revealed when the narrator explains that “he had a girl for a brother and he profoundly resented it” (Viramontes 25). Luis’s resentment against Turtle’s gender and sexual identity is further detailed in a flashback wherein zie is caught stealing by “the bagman,” who pinched zir nipples and “dug his metal-cold fingers between [zir] thighs” in order to determine whether “what he felt on [zir] chest were...stolen apples” or whether “this boy was really a braless girl” (24). In this manner, Turtle’s sexual and gender identity, which is conveyed through zir shaved head and developing breasts that prompt confusion and molestation from “the bagman,” is recognized as a traitorous treachery that shames zir brother. Therefore, the reference to Turtle as “la chingada” is an allusion to La Malinche, who is also known as “La Chingada” as a result of her sexual affair with Cortés – which was regarded as the ultimate treason against her people.

Moreover, Turtle is indirectly compared to La Muerte through characterizations of zir body and zir belongings. For instance, after days of struggling to obtain sufficient nutrition

during zir bout of homelessness, Turtle is described as tall, bald, “deflated and lanky” with eyes sunken and discolored from sleeplessness (Viramontes 18, 21). Therein, Turtle’s head resembles a skull and zir body assumes a boney thinness, almost like a skeleton. Additionally, zie wears a black leather jacket, with the collar flipped up (Viramontes 21). Accordingly, Turtle is paralleled with La Muerte, who is frequently illustrated as a skeleton that wears a black shroud. Similarly, Turtle is also paralleled with La Muerte due to their shared asexuality. While La Muerte is deemed physically incapable of sexual desire due to her skeletal body’s lack of sexual organs or nerve endings with which to experience the sensation of arousal, no mention - implicit or explicit - is given in regard to Turtle’s sexual desires or sexual experiences. Turtle is also thereby paralleled with Mictlancihuatl and Itzpapalotl, the goddesses depicted with skulls for heads from whom La Muerte is derived. In further parallel with Itzpapalotl, Turtle carries a screwdriver in zir hand, which zie uses as a weapon for self-defense, resembling the maguey cactus spike that is carried by the goddess (Viramontes 17). Moreover, just as Itzpapalotl carries flints, which are commonly used to start fires, Turtle carries a matchbook in zir pocket (Viramontes 21).

Finally, Turtle is indirectly paralleled with La Llorona. Foremost, the parallel with La Llorona is established through Turtle’s gender neutrality. Turtle’s gender ambiguous appearance is established through zir shaved head and zir encounter with “the bagman,” as previously discussed. However, Turtle’s gender neutrality is also established through zir name. Named Antonia Maria at birth, zie adopts the name Turtle during zir childhood. Notably, the name also belongs to an order of animals that are characterized by a hard shell, which covers the majority of their body from view. Turtles’ shells therefore make it extremely difficult for humans to determine their individual sexes or genders. Akin to turtles’ shells, the clothing that covers the majority of Turtle’s body makes it nearly impossible to determine zir gender. For example,

Turtle wears a pair of boxers, a leather jacket, an oversized t-shirt, and a pair of high-top sneakers – which effectively cause the “erasure of [zir] breasts...and all that was outwardly female” (Viramontes 19, 25). In addition to zir clothing, Turtle’s body is large and muscular (Viramontes 19-20). Further, Turtle’ learns “to pee like a man, standing up, legs apart” (Viramontes 157). Despite these masculine behaviors and characteristics, the narrator still refers to Turtle by feminine gendered pronouns, which suggests that Turtle identifies neither as a woman nor a man. Thereby, Turtle’s gender neutrality parallels zir to Atlacoaya, the gender ambiguous goddess who is thought to be one of many versions of La Llorona.

Yet, Turtle’s parallel with La Llorona is also established through zir perpetual hunger. In various scenes throughout the novel, Turtle is portrayed on the precipice of starvation wherein zir “[h]unger became unbearable” and meals seemed fleeting (Viramontes 17, 18). Everywhere that Turtle goes, zie is tantalized by food that zie cannot eat. For example, when Turtle sees a woman carrying groceries from a store, the narrator states that “the scent of pork rinds escaped from the opened doors and the leafy tops of carrots peeking out of the woman’s grocery bag agitated Turtle’s hunger” (Viramontes 18). Likewise, Turtle smacks a box of cereal from a junkie’s hand, “kneeling to scrape up some of the Kellogg’s cereal flakes that spilled” (Viramontes 19). And, envisioning the fruit bins that would be displayed outside of the local grocery market, Turtle “considered...making a fast food break with some oranges or pears” (Viramontes 19). In this manner, Turtle is paralleled with La Diosa Hambrienta, a version of La Llorona whose name translates as “The Hungry Woman.”

The parallel between La Llorona and Turtle is extended throughout the novel in the form of comparable narrative plot structures. Principally, like La Llorona, Turtle is abandoned by an intimate male figure who represents zir only form of social legitimization, support and

protection: zir brother, Luis. Throughout their childhood, Luis protects Turtle against the physical abuses of zir father and mother, who beat Turtle brutally as punishment for zir queer gender and sexual identity (Viramontes 160). For example, zir mother (Ama) physically abuses Turtle, yanking zir by the hair during “an argument over her erasure of...all that was outwardly female, over her behaving like some unholy malflora” (Viramontes 25). After zir mother finishes her assault against Turtle, Luis “took a pair of manicure scissors and sat Turtle down on the toilet seat and cut Turtle’s hair, asking, What she gonna grab now?” (Viramontes 25). However, in his attempts to protect Turtle, Luis often also becomes the target of their parents’ rage, who “used an ironing cord to whip Turtle, fists...for Luis Lil Lizard when he tried to interfere” (Viramontes 160). Yet, even when he is unable to protect zir from their parents’ physical abuse, Luis offers Turtle emotional support and psychological refuge (Viramontes 25). For instance, Luis convinces Turtle to believe his stories about a utopic homeland in New Mexico, where “you awoke banging your head against the sky or sucked sweet cactus pulp for lunch or watched lizards transform into alligators in the afternoon” (Viramontes 25).

Further, Luis organizes Turtle’s initiation into the McBride Boys gang, who jump zir in a cemetery one night as part of their hazing ritual (Viramontes 232-233). In “‘Turrrtle’: Displacing and Recovering a Queerly Gendered Body in Helena Maria Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*,” Keri-Ann Blanco argues that Turtle joins the gang as an attempt to substitute the familial bond that is absent within the household of zir biological parents by gaining acceptance with the McBride Boys (244-251). However, I contest that Luis, who is the leader of the McBride Boys, organizes Turtle’s initiation into the McBride Boys gang in order to protect zir from the Lote M Homeboys - to whom he knew “she loomed as inviting to them as a bulls-eye target” (Viramontes 20, 227). After being jumped in a cemetery one night as part of their hazing ritual,

Turtle is offered membership into a brotherhood. While zir fellow gang members are at first reluctant to accept zir gender and sexual identity since “Turtle was the only McBride Boy lacking...huevos,” they eventually “learned not to care” – providing social legitimization of zir identity (Viramontes 25, 229, 232-233). Moreover, as a member of their gang, the McBride Boys provide Turtle with security and protection since they “all vowed to be there for each other, always and por vida, hasta la muerte, because that’s what it’s all about...[a]bout protecting...[a]bout saying with firm conviction, I’ll kill you if you don’t leave her alone” (Viramontes 26). Further, the McBride Boys teach Turtle “how to work the streets, how to avoid the Quarantine Authority who enforced the curfew, how to hide from the Lote M Homeboys” (Viramontes 20).

Subsequently, Turtle forms an extremely close bond with Luis wherein “the two were known as half-and-half of the cold-blooded Gamboas” (Viramontes 16). However, this relationship is torn apart after Luis is drafted into the military, which deploys him to Vietnam (Viramontes 17, 22). While T. Jackie Cuevas argues in “Ambiguous Chicanx Bodies” that Turtle is involuntarily displaced by zir family and friends’ rejection as a result of zir gender and sexual identity, I believe that it is Luis’s deployment which causes Turtle to willingly leave zir childhood home in zir rejection of them instead (70). This is supported in the text when the narrator expresses that, upon learning that Luis was being drafted, Turtle went to speak with zir aunt and zir mother for consolation (Viramontes 166). During the visit, Turtle’s aunt labels zir as a “malflora,” causing Turtle to “[I]oiter in the kitchen hoping they’d forget about her and slowly resume their conversation” (Viramontes 168). Yet, ultimately “[u]nable to withstand Aunt Mercy’s guffaws,” Turtle opts out and chooses to live on the streets because “without the other half of the cold-blooded Gamboa brothers, [zie] didn’t know what else to do” (Viramontes 168).

Turtle's decision to leave home and instead wander the streets through the day and night as a result of the unbearable grief that zie suffers from zir brother's abandonment and the decision to cut off all ties to zir family serves as yet another parallel to La Llorona. Specifically, Turtle is paralleled with the version of La Llorona wherein a young mother is abandoned by her soulmate and husband, causing her to murder her family with a knife – an act for which she her spirit is cursed to eternally wander the earth in perpetual grief. Likewise, Turtle is also compared to one version of La Llorona that identifies her as the Cihuatateo, who are said to wander the night as crossroads.

The parallel between Turtle and the Cihuatateo is further reinforced while zie lives on the streets. As zie wanders the streets, Turtle suffers a constant state of pain and sorrow, the narrator stating that “[i]t hurt so badly...[t]o miss her brother this much” (Viramontes 23). This extreme grief causes Turtle to suffer hallucinations and nightmares. For example, Turtle is haunted by dreams of “Luis Lil Lizard crouching in the jungle somewhere in ‘Nam’” (Viramontes 17). In addition to the dreams, Turtle hears voices in the wind, which zie believes to be Luis calling “*Turtle ticktock....What are you waiting for? Come on*” (Viramontes 171). On one particular night, as zie sleeps in the cemetery where zie was jumped into the McBride Boys, Turtle hears the voice of Luis in zir head as he states: “I’m dead, somewhere in ‘Nam, bullets whisking by” (Viramontes 235). Turtle's hallucinations and nightmares represent a psychological break bordering insanity, which parallel the Cihuatateo – who were often associated with the incitement of insanity.

After receiving the news of Luis's death, Turtle begins to consider reconnecting with zir former family and friends. Accordingly, Turtle considers visiting a childhood friend who might offer shelter and food, thinking: “if [zie] knocked on Chavela's door right now, a Grade-A cold-

blooded malflora with studded ears...would Chavela welcome her?...Offer a meal? A bed?” (Viramontes 236). Further, Turtle visits a local convenience store, where zie accepts a job offer so that zie may obtain enough money to buy “a bus ticket to wherever Ama was living” (Viramontes 261, 264). In “Engendering a Queer Latin@ Time and Place in Helena Maria Viramontes’ *Their Dogs Came with Them*,” Cuevas interprets Turtle’s consideration of visiting Chavela’s house as stemming from a desire for acceptance that is thwarted only by zir fear of rejection (40). However, I insist that Turtle’s actions are the result of a loss of all hope that stems from the devastating death of zir brother, whom zie “loved him worse than [ziesself]” and without whom “she didn’t know what else to do with herself” (Viramontes 265, 168). Subsequently, I believe that Turtle decides to opt back into life within violent heteropatriarchal structures of zir childhood by returning to zir former friends and family, willing to compromise zir gender and sexual identity and subject ziesself to their homophobia due to a loss of self-worth and purpose.

However, before Turtle is able to start work in zir new position, zie encounters one of zir fellow McBride Boys – who zie had not seen since zie isolated ziesself in zir grief (Viramontes 266-267). He invites Turtle to join several of the McBride Boys as they search for a Lote M Homeboy who had recently attacked one of their fellow gang members (Viramontes 268-270). Upon finding the perpetrator (Nacho), Turtle and the McBride boys surround him and begin to jump him (Viramontes 321-322). Emboldened by the presence of zir brotherhood, Turtle takes the lead in assaulting the perpetrator, repeatedly stabbing him in the ribs with zir screwdriver (Viramontes 322). Nacho’s corpse collapses into a puddle of water as a torrential downpour of rain washes the blood from Turtle’s hands and face (Viramontes 325). The stabbing of Nacho serves as another parallel to La Llorona. Namely, Turtle is equated with the version of La

Llorona wherein the young mother is said to commit suicide by stabbing herself. However, Turtle is also compared to the version of La Llorona which is represented by Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of baptismal purification and wife of the rain god (Tlaloc). And, Turtle is paralleled with the Cihuatateo, who carry sacrificial knives and maquey cactus spines in their hands.

After Turtle murders Nacho, the police quickly arrive to the scene, causing the McBride Boys to flee the scene – except Turtle (Viramontes 323). Discovered with the murder weapon and the murdered corpse, Turtle is immediately shot by the police (Viramontes 323). The shots fired are heard by a young mother (Tranquilina), who ran a Christian soup kitchen at which Turtle had once eaten (Viramontes 18). Tranquilina quickly sprints to the scene, embracing Turtle in her arms as zie bleeds to death in a puddle of bloody water amidst the pouring rain (Viramontes 324). As Turtle dies, zie is yet again paralleled with La Llorona through the symbolism associated with water. For example, the versions of La Llorona that involve the young mother and Malinche describe drowning. Moreover, the young mother is said to lure victims to their deaths in bodies of water such as lakes. Similarly, La Diosa Hambrienta is said to have sacrificed her body in the creation of the lakes and oceans of the world. Further, Atlacoaya is the goddess of lakes.

Cuevas argues that Turtle’s death is a tragic ending with zir “dead body twisted and bleeding on the street,” which illustrates that zir life in the L.A. barrio was an existence “far removed from the imagined unity of an Aztlán homeland” (“Ambiguous” 72; “Engendering” 40). But, I believe that Turtle’s death represents zir arrival to Queer Aztlán, a beginning rather than an end. This is supported in the text when the narrator reflects: “Luis Lis Lizard had once told [zir] that them two lived in a stay of execution” (Viramontes 324). Consequently, Turtle experiences death as an expected and welcome event – “[o]nly the pain, which overwhelmed,

surprised her” (Viramontes 324). Rather than a permanent state, Turtle views death as a peaceful slumber, which implies its transience (Viramontes 324). Moreover, as Turtle dies, zie feels Tranquilina cradling zir “as tight and strong as her brother... until sleep came to her fully welcomed” (Viramontes 324). Most poignantly, after Turtle exhales zir final breath, Tranquilina continues to hold zir body as she “lift[s] one foot forward....[t]wo inches, four, six, eight, riding the currents of the wilding wind.....beyond the borders...out to limitless space where everything was possible if she believed” (Viramontes 325). As such, like La Muerte, death for Turtle represents zir transcendence into the paradise of the afterlife, where zie is accompanied by zir brother and Tranquilina.

Through the parallels established between Turtle and La Muerte, Xochiquetzal, La Llorona and La Malinche, the novel acts as a modern re-membling of the figures, renarrativizing and reclaiming their narratives from hegemonic renderings. Furthermore, established as embodiments of the figures, Turtle’s divergence from several of the hegemonic La Llorona folklore results in a renarrativization that re-visions an alternative future for the young mother, La Malinche, and La Diosa Hambrienta. Rather than wandering the earth in perpetual sorrow, Turtle escapes to paradise in the afterlife, the young mother, La Malinche, and La Diosa Hambrienta escaping vicariously with zir. This utopia consists of an egalitarian familial structure outside of heteropatriarchal models, wherein queer gender and sexual identity may be expressed without fear of punishment in the form of physical abuse, which consists of zir sibling and a benevolent stranger. As such, this utopia fits Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which portray Queer Aztlán as a homeland “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” that consists of families outside

heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family “formed through suffering and celebration shared” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Turtle to La Muerte, La Malinche, Xochiquetzal and La Llorona in *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Viramontes imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **Ana Castillo**

#### ***So Far from God***

Classified as historical fiction, magical realism and autohistoria, the novel focuses on the lives of four sisters (Caridad, Fe, Loca and Esperanza) and their mother (Sofia), who live on a ranch in New Mexico during the 1990s. While each of the female protagonists is paralleled with a major feminine figure from Mexican culture, only Caridad is paralleled with La Llorona, Coyolxauhqui and La Virgen de Guadalupe in order to represent her sexual and gender identity. Although her gender and sexuality are never explicitly identified, there is ample supporting evidence throughout the text to suggest that Caridad is a bisexual cisgender female. Through the parallel of Caridad with La Virgen de Guadalupe, Coyolxauhqui and La Llorona, Castillo reclaims and renarrativizes the figure’s folklore in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization acts as the map by which Caridad is able to fail queerly and opt out of the oppressive heteropatriarchy of her marriage and her numerous sexual affairs so that she can arrive at Queer Aztlán.

At the start of her narrative, Caridad is paralleled with La Llorona through the description of her divorce. She is abandoned by her husband (Memo), who deserts her and their unborn child only two weeks after their wedding, when “Caridad got wind that Memo was still seeing his ex-girlfriend, Domitila, who lived in Belen; and Caridad went back home” (23). Due to Memo’s status as Caridad’s first love and high school sweetheart, his desertion causes her extreme

emotional distress, sending her into a severe depression (Castillo 23). As a result of her depression, Caridad miscarries their unborn child, which intensifies the severity of her depression (Castillo, *So Far* 23). In order to cope with the unbearable loneliness and grief suffered due to the death of her child and the desertion of her husband, Caridad begins to frequent local bars in an attempt to drown her sorrows with “shots of Crown Royal with beer chasers” (Castillo, *So Far* 24). Additionally, Caridad attempts to recuperate her self-worth and substitute her absent spouse by “giving her love to... anyone she met at the bars who vaguely resembled Memo” (Castillo, *So Far* 24). As an unintended consequence of her promiscuity, Caridad experiences several unwanted pregnancies, which she chooses to terminate through illegal abortions performed by her sister, Loca (Castillo, *So Far* 24). In this manner, Caridad is paralleled with La Llorona, who drowned her children after being abandoned by her husband – an act that is punished by a curse wherein she haunts the earth in perpetual grief, seducing and murdering men in order to make them her eternal companions.

However, following one of her excursions to the bar, Caridad is sexually assaulted by a shadow beast who is described as the epitome of malevolent male violence. During the assault, Caridad’s “nipples had been bitten off. She had also been scourged by something, branded like a cattle. Worst of all, a tracheotomy was performed because she had also been stabbed in the throat” (29). The narrator recounts the event as relived in her nightmares, stating:

[I]t wasn’t a man with a face and a name who had attacked and left Caridad mangled like a run-down rabbit. Nor two or three men. That was why she had never been able to give no information to the police. It was not a stray and desperate coyote either, but a thing, both tangible and amorphous. A thing that might be described as made of sharp metal and splintered wood, of limestone, gold, and brittle parchment. It held the weight of a

continent and was indelible as ink, centuries old and yet as strong as a young wolf. It had no shape and was darker than the dark night, and mostly, as Caridad would never ever forget, it was pure force. (74)

Accordingly, the wounds suffered by Caridad parallel her with Coyolxauhqui - the goddess who was dismembered by the god of war, Huitzilopochtli. However, unlike the dismemberment of Coyolxauhqui (which was considered a duly punished transgression), Caridad's assault is condemned and she is identified as a martyr. For example, after Caridad is rushed to the hospital by emergency ambulatory services, she is visited regularly by a dozen nuns – who “came each night to Caridad's hospital room to say the rosary, to wail, to pray” (29). In further contrast to Coyolxauhqui, Caridad miraculously recovers from her wounds in what is referred to as a “Holy Restoration,” whereupon she is “brought back from the hospital...whole and once again beautiful...in what furthermore appeared to be Fe's wedding gown” (40, 34). As well as being fully restored to her former physical appearance, Caridad develops clairvoyant abilities (52). A local curandera (Doña Felicia) identifies these clairvoyant abilities as a sign of healing powers bestowed onto Caridad “directly from Him” (God), offering her spiritual mentorship (52).

As part of her spiritual mentorship, Caridad is required to complete a pilgrimage to a holy site in Chimayo during Lenten Week – the week before Easter wherein Catholics recognize the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – the Christian Messiah. After arriving at Chimayo, Caridad's sexual identity is brought out as the result of an encounter with a mysterious woman. Upon seeing the woman, Caridad's “whole body was affected by a stranger and she couldn't explain why....Woman-on-the-wall was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen—but she had scarcely had more than a glimpse of her....In and of herself there was nothing about her that was unusually striking....There was just something about her” (75-76). The narrator then explains

that “for the first time in years, since way before the attack, her heart was renewed, moved by another human being” (76). Following this encounter with the woman during the pilgrimage, “Caridad returned at dawn on Easter Sunday to her little trailer with her inner being blooming bright red like the flowers on a prickly pear cactus” (77). Caridad is so moved by the encounter with the woman that she spontaneously journeys into the Sangre Cristo Mountains, where she lives in the seclusion of a cave for an entire year in observation of nature’s sanctity (78-82). As such, Caridad’s encounter with the woman serves as an allusion to the hegemonic narrative of La Virgen de Guadalupe – referring to the Virgin Mary’s observation of the crucified Christ. Moreover, the symbolism of the red flowers of the prickly pear parallels the symbolism of the red rose, which serves as an allusion to the red roses that La Virgen de Guadalupe caused to bloom during her materialization before Juan Diego within her hegemonic narrative. Caridad’s encounter with the woman further parallels her with La Virgen de Guadalupe upon her return home. Eventually, Caridad returns from the mountains, endowed with increased psychic abilities (84-85). The strength of these abilities cause Caridad to attract religious pilgrims who “claimed to have been touched and blessed by her,” garnering her fame as the “handmaiden of Christ” (87). Further, the narrator states that one man claimed to see “a beautiful halo radiate around her whole body, like the Virgen de Guadalupe” (87).

Accordingly, in “Queering Chicano/a Narratives: Lesbian as Healer, Saint and Warrior in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*,” Colette Morrow argues that Caridad’s intensified abilities are the result of her encounter with the woman at Chimayo, which brought out the transformative healing power of lesbian desire (68-73). However, while I agree that the increased intensity and scope of Caridad’s abilities is the result of her sexual desire for the woman that she encountered at Chimayo, I disagree that her transformative healing power is brought out by lesbian sexual

desire. Foremost, Caridad's transformative healing power exists well before her encounter with the woman at Chimayo as demonstrated in her Holy Restoration. Upon learning of Caridad's inexplicable recovery, Doña Felicia informs Caridad: "It was with the help of God...but you healed yourself by pure will" (51-52). Moreover, I am wary of labeling Caridad's sexual desire as lesbian since Caridad is not a lesbian. Instead, Caridad's sexual desire for the woman signifies a bisexual identity. This is supported by the fact that, rather than being compelled into her heterosexual relationship with Memo, Caridad is described as having been entirely in love with Memo (23). Moreover, upon experiencing sexual desire for the woman at Chimayo, the narrator states: "Caridad, who had not been in love with anyone since Memo, fell in love that Holy Friday, and this took her by such surprise that every other marvel around her paled in comparison" (71). Accordingly, I suggest that Caridad's encounter with the woman brings out her bisexual desire. Further, this bisexual desire does not enhance her healing power, rather it enhances her clairvoyance. For example, it is only after the encounter with the woman that Caridad is able to directly communicate with the spirit of her dead sister (Esperanza), as well as travel through space and time via the astral projection of her spirit (172, 201). Thus, Caridad is paralleled with la Virgen de Guadalupe in order to represent her bisexuality.

After returning to her former home, Caridad again encounters the mysterious woman, who then begins to visit her regularly in order to receive psychic healing and reveals her identity to Caridad as a woman named Esmeralda (88-89, 201-202). During one of the psychic readings, Caridad has a vision of her death at the hands of a shadowy male figure, warning Esmeralda of her vision. While out together one afternoon on yet another holy pilgrimage, Caridad sees the man and begins to cry hysterically. Esmeralda, frightened by Caridad's sudden loss of composure, "looked up and uttered 'Oh my God,' because she recognized among the small group with the

guide a tall, lean, lonely coyote trying to camouflage himself as a tourist. And while we know that Esmeralda was not afraid “[s]he started to run” (207). Caridad then chased Esmeralda, the two women until they reach the edge of a cliff, “flying off the mesa like a broken-winged moth and holding tight to her hand was Caridad, more kite than woman billowing through midair” (207-208). Rather than their bones shattering and their bodies dismembering against the rocky floor of the cliff, “[t]here was nothing” – “a voice like the wind, guiding the two women back, not out toward the sun’s rays or up to the clouds but down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever” (209). While the narrator identifies the event as an allusion to “the spirit of Tsichtinako” (a legendary female figure within the culture of the Acoma Native Americans), it also serves as an allusion to Coyolxauhqui – whose body was thrown from the Coatepec Mountain.

Despite what eyewitnesses believed to be her certain death, Caridad’s spirit continues to visit her loved ones on Earth at the “annual conference of M.O.M.A.S” (243-248). The conference, whose title is an acronym for “Mothers of Martyrs and Saints,” is organized by Caridad’s mother (Sofia) after receiving “hundreds of petitions she received in the mail every day, asking for prayers from the mother of the little crazy saint who died twice and her similarly ethereal sisters” (243). During the conference, the narrator explains that the ghostly children of women from all over the world materialized before their mothers and other relatives (248). In this manner, Caridad is paralleled with La Llorona once more. However, Caridad diverges from the hegemonic version La Llorona with which she had been paralleled earlier in the novel. Rather than haunting the Earth in perpetual sorrow in order to seduce men and lure children to their deaths, Caridad haunts the Earth in eternal happiness in order to visit her mother and religious devotees.

Therefore, in paralleling Caridad with Coyolxauhqui, La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe, the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the figures' hegemonic narratives, wherein their mythology, folklore and hagiography are renarrativized and reclaimed. Moreover, this renarrativization re-visions an alternative future for both Caridad and the feminine figures outside the heteropatriarchy of the Chicano community. Unlike hegemonic characterizations of La Llorona, she does not commit suicide as the result of spousal desertion that stems from the sexual objectification of females. Unlike hegemonic characterizations of Coyolxauhqui, she is not murdered and dismembered in an act of misogynistic male violence. Unlike hegemonic characterizations of La Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not condemned to an existence of pleasureless chastity in adherence to the *Humane Vitae* written by Pope Paul VI that relegates sexuality to the fulfillment of the reproductive imperative within marriage. Instead, Caridad escapes to a utopic place "deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever" and participates in a community of loving family and friends at the annual M.O.M.A.S conference. Thereby, the community and the utopia that Caridad inhabits following her "death" actualize Moraga's description of Queer Aztlán in "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe" and "A Long Line of Vendidas," which envisions Queer Aztlán as a community "strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment" that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family "formed through suffering and celebration shared" (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Caridad with Coyolxauhqui, La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe in *So Far from God*, Castillo imagines Queer Aztlán.

**Alicia Gaspar de Alba**

*The Curse of the Gypsy: Ten Stories and a Novella*<sup>6</sup>

**“The Tattoo” and “Artemis House”<sup>7</sup>**

Throughout the short story, the narrator focuses on a teenage female protagonist named Little Jay as she visits a henna tattoo artist’s tent with her two sisters on the boardwalk of Venice Beach in Los Angeles, California during the 2010s (as indicated by the inclusion of text message formatted according to Apple iPhone default settings). Explicitly, Little Jay identifies herself as a lesbian dyke, however her gender and sexual identity is also represented through the narrator’s deployment of symbolism and characterization. The symbolism and characterization used to express Little Jay’s lesbian dyke identity parallels her with. Accordingly, Gaspar de Alba reclaims and renarrativizes the goddess’s mythology in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization provides an alternative path through queer failure and opting out that allows Little Jay to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Little Jay explicitly states her sexual and gender identity at the beginning of the story as the henna artist begins to tattoo her arm. The artist informs her that her chosen design, a peacock’s tail, is typically used by women for their weddings, stating: “[p]eacock mendhi is sacred to the goddess, my friend. Will bring longevity in love, fertility and good luck. You will get married young. Rich man” (“The Tattoo” 72). Immediately, Little Jay responds: “I’m a dyke, okay? I’m not gonna get married unless it’s to a girl, got it?” (“The Tattoo” 73). Infuriated by the man’s failure to inform her of the tattoo’s significance before applying the henna to her

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<sup>6</sup> Currently, there is no available published literary criticism for *The Curse of the Gypsy: Ten Stories and a Novella*, perhaps because the anthology was only recently published in 2018.

<sup>7</sup> I analyze “The Tattoo” and “Artemis House” as a single work since “Artemis House” offers a continuation of Little Jay’s narrative from a different perspective.

arm, she then begins to contemplate the irony of the tattoo's meaning in comparison to her rationale for seeking the tattoo. For instance, Little Jay's friend, Bethany, reminds her that the tattoo will prevent her from being involved in Bethany's sister's quinceañera since "all the girls in the court have dresses with short sleeves" ("The Tattoo" 71, 72). However, the narrator explains that:

She didn't care about not being allowed to be one of the seven girls in Bethany's sister's stupid *quinceañera* court. She'd never wanted to do that anyway. The thought of having to wear that Pepto Bismol-colored satin dress with a huge bow hanging off one shoulder, and having to dance with one of the seven guys in the court gave her nightmares....All she needed was some guy asking her to get married at Bethany's sister's *quinceañera* because of the dumb wedding mendhi design she'd chosen. Made her want to puke.

("The Tattoo" 72)

Moreover, Little Jay's sister, Diana, scolds her decision, stating: "Mami's gonna die of embarrassment when she sees that thing" ("The Tattoo" 75). However, upon rolling her eyes and shrugging with a dismissive "[g]et over it" and "[w]hatever," it is quickly revealed that defying her mother was a central desire that motivated Little Jay's decision to get the tattoo ("The Tattoo" 73, 75). Accordingly, Diana reprimands Little Jay: "I guess you want to give Mami a heart attack" ("The Tattoo" 70). This accusation of Little Jay's defiance being an attempt to kill her mother serves as an allusion to Coyolxauhqui, who decapitated her mother in the ultimate act of defiance.

After the tattoo is completed, Little Jay leaves the tent, only to remember that she had left book bag, which contained her lucky 50-peso coin – forcing her to return in search of it. As Little Jay panics over the loss of the coin, the narrator explains that the coin, which was given to her by

her uncle, is “imprinted with an image of the Aztec warrior goddess, Coyolxauhqui, whose name meant Bells on Her Cheeks” (“The Tattoo” 77). Arriving to the location of the tent and discovering that the artists had already left, Little Jay sits down on a bench near the shoreline and meditates in order to visualize where the coin’s location (“The Tattoo” 81). As she sits on the bench, a homeless woman sits next to her - “her dreadlocks flying behind her like Medusa snakes” (“The Tattoo” 80). While the coin is a direct reference to Coyolxauhqui, the homeless woman acts as an indirect allusion to the goddess’s narrative. Significantly, within hegemonic depictions of the goddess, she is portrayed wearing a headdress composed of serpents.

As the woman sits next to her, Little Jay begins to experience a sensation of being “transported...to a parallel universe...and it was as if she could see herself walking without feeling her legs moving or even her body leaving the bench” (“The Tattoo” 80). Suddenly, she starts to envision the scenes that she recorded in her private journal entries “in which she talked about liking girls” and “the crazy dreams...about kissing Selena Gómez” – acknowledging that she “felt a definite surge over that” (“The Tattoo” 80). Her trance is interrupted when the henna artists approaches her, carrying the lost book bag that contained the coin (“The Tattoo” 80). Diana then discovers Little Jay on the bench, urging her to hurry back to their car so that they might return home. However, as Little Jay rises from the bench, her lucky coin slips from her backpack and falls into a storm drain (“The Tattoo” 81). When the coin hits the bottom of the drain, “[s]torm clouds thickened over the beach. Rocks and planks and glass panes catapulted through the air as one tsunami-sized wave hovered over the pier like a gigantic dark green hand tipped with foamy white fingers” (“The Tattoo” 82). As the wave rushes toward the shore where Little Jay stands, the most poignant allusion to Coyolxauhqui is made:

“Instead of crashing down, the tsunami vortex opened wide and something rose straight out of the sea. . . . a huge round stone at least fifty feet in diameter, carved with shapes that made no sense but that seemed to be separate body parts: a leg and foot, an arm and hand, a torso of breasts and loins, a head wearing a feathered helmet. The parts were scattered across the stone, like a body that had been dismembered, a woman’s body cut into pieces, trussed with snakes and wedged with skulls” (“The Tattoo” 82).

This imagery of the round stone alludes to the famous circular stone relief located at the base of el Templo Mayor, which depicts the dismembered body of Coyolxauhqui at the spot whereupon her corpse was discarded over the mountainside. As Little Jay beholds the supernatural phenomenon before her, she falls to her knees and exclaims: “‘it’s the moon goddess’” (“The Tattoo” 82). Upon being recognized by Little Jay, “[t]he severed body parts started to move toward each other, the legs to the loins, the arms to the shoulders, the head to the neck, and suddenly she was whole again. The dismembered goddess, the mutilated sister, in one piece” (“The Tattoo” 82-83). Accordingly, Little Jay’s open recognition of her sexuality during the act of defiance against her mother conjures the goddess, who appears before her. Yet, rather than immortally dismembered in stone as punishment for her transgression, the goddess is resurrected and re-membered by Little Jay’s embrace of her queer sexual identity.

However, it is quickly revealed that the entire event surrounding the goddess’s emergence from the sea is but a dream when Little Jay is awakened by Diana on the bench (“The Tattoo” 83). Her backpack under her head and the coin safe in her pocket, Little Jay realizes that “she must have passed out” due to a drop in her blood sugar as a result of her diabetes (“The Tattoo” 83-84). Seeing her sister, Little Jay immediately breaks into tears, “crying like a lost kid trying to find her way home” (“The Tattoo” 84). Diana then begins to scold Little Jay about her

negligence in regard to her health. As she listens to her sister berate her, Little Jay looks down at her henna tattoo, only to realize that “instead of the elaborate tail feathers...the image had morphed into the full-bodied image of Coyolxauhqui” (“The Tattoo” 84). In this manner, the remembering of Coyolxauhqui is paralleled with Little Jay’s self-acceptance of her sexuality. Consequently, she is paralleled with the goddess, her body then identified as the embodiment of the Coyolxauhqui through the reconfiguration of her tattoo into the image of goddess.

Following this experience, Little Jay is empowered to run away from home, where she had been sexually abused by her mother’s boyfriend (“Artemis House” 93). While Little Jay initially attempted to seek assistance from her sisters, she is forced onto the streets when they dismiss her by insisting that their mother’s boyfriend “was just trying to wake [her] up so [she] wouldn’t be late to school. They said don’t make a big deal about it, don’t tell Mami for sure” (“Artemis House” 93). However, rather than being forced to remain in isolation and hunger on the streets (like Turtle in Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*), Little Jay escapes to the Artemis House (“Artemis House” 90-91). The Artemis House is a group home for homeless homosexual and transgender females run by a former high school teacher (Agnes), who started the organization after being brought out of the closet at the age of 52 (“Artemis House” 85-90). Agnes founded the Artemis House in order to offer shelter for young females who were runaways from domestic abuse or outcasts from familial homes, whose isolation due to social stigma as LGBT+ marked them as easy prey for male sex offenders (“Artemis House” 88-91). In addition to offering shelter from sexual abuse within the heteropatriarchy, the Artemis House “was a safe hang-out space and a classroom space about self-empowerment techniques and feminist principles” that were taught by Agnes’s friend, who led “Shadow Beast workshops based on Gloria Anzaldúa’s theories at UCLA as a guest lecturer” (“Artemis House” 88-89).

Thus, Little Jay finds a safe haven amongst other females like herself, who share similar experiences and identities, where she is safe from sexual abuse and social stigmatization.

Therefore, in paralleling Little Jay with Coyolxauhqui, the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the goddess's hegemonic narrative, wherein her mythology is renarrativized and reclaimed. Moreover, the parallel between the two females involves the narrator's renarrativization of the goddess's mythology that re-visions an alternative future for both Coyolxauhqui and Little Jay. Rather than being coerced by compulsory heterosexuality and sexually abused by violent male sex offenders within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, Little Jay escapes to the Artemis house after re-membering Coyolxauhqui at Venice Beach. At Artemis House, Little Jay is welcomed into a community of females like herself wherein queer gender and sexual identity is embraced and empowered without fear of social stigma, compulsory sexuality or sexual abuse. As such, Artemis House fits Moraga's description of Queer Aztlán in "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe" and "A Long Line of Vendidas," which envisions Queer Aztlán as a community "strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender...without prejudice or punishment" that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family "formed through suffering and celebration shared" (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Little Jay with Coyolxauhqui in "The Tattoo" and "Artemis House," Gaspar de Alba imagines Queer Aztlán.

## Sandra Cisneros

### *Loose Woman*

#### **“You Bring out the Mexican in Me”**

Akin to the literary criticism surrounding the works of Cervantes, the majority of the scholarly literary analyses of Cisneros’s poetry *Loose Woman* have focused on the representation of heterosexual cisgender women’s sexual liberation. For instance, in “Sandra Cisneros” (a chapter of *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* that provides brief analyses of several works by the author), Deborah L. Madsen asserts that poems like “I Let Him Take Me” and “A Man in My Bed Like Cracker Crumbs” in *Loose Woman* describe the “subversive enjoyment of one’s own [hetero]sexuality, as a source of power for women” (121). Further, in “Chicanas in Love: Sandra Cisneros Talking Back and Alicia Gaspar De Alba ‘Giving Back the Wor(l)d,’” Suzanne Chávez-Silverman states that the poetry in *Loose Woman* is an attempt for the poetic speaker to “articulate a sexual voice, in open confrontation with ‘father, brother, and god’ ...with the good girl in herself....[e]ven if the subject position and sexuality...is ultimately contained by the master narrative of heterosexual romance” (38).

Yet, I contest that the poem expresses lesbian sexual desire. Told by an unidentified narrator, the poem illuminates the sexuality that is “brought out” by a lover (the reader). Accordingly, similar to Cervantes’s poems, a lesbian reading of the poem is made possible through the use of a first person narrator (presumably a Chicana “chingona” like Cisneros due to the nature of autohistorias) who expresses sexual desire for the reader (referred to only as “you” or “we”), who (in my case) is female. A lesbian reading is also supported by the use of the feminine “tuya” in reference to the reader. Similarly, a lesbian reading is enabled by the

narrator's recognition of the reader as her "twin" – which implies that the reader is identical to herself.

Given the reader's and the narrator's sexes being identified as female, the title of the poem ("You Bring out the Mexican in Me") is understood as a reference to the concept of "being brought out of the closet," which is similar to "coming out" or "being outed," wherein a heterosexual individual is seduced by a homosexual individual in order to encourage the realization of the heterosexual individual's repressed homosexual desire. Throughout the account of the narrator's being brought out of the closet, she parallels herself with Tlazolteotl, Itzpapalotl and Chantico in representing her lesbian sexual desire. As such, Cisneros reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddesses' mythologies in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, through the description of lesbian sexual desire, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The narrator first parallels herself to Chantico by confessing that the reader brings out "[t]he pre-Columbian death and destruction in [her]" (4). Chantico is the goddess of death. As goddess of fire, war and death, Chantico is associated with destruction. This is reinforced through the narrator's indication that the reader brings out the "[c]opal" (a resin used for fire starting) and "[t]he Aztec love of war in [her]" (4). Additionally, the parallel with Chantico is reinforced by the narrator's comment that the reader brings out the "Red ocher. Yellow ocher. Indigo. Cochineal. / *Piñón*. Copal. Sweetgrass. Myrrh." in her (6). Within hegemonic depictions of Chantico, her face is depicted with stripes of red, yellow and black paint, wherein Cochineal is a species of insect whose crushed exoskeletons were historically used to create red dyes, Indigo is a species of flower whose pulverized petals are used to create black dyes, and Myrrh is a resin whose extracted oils are used to create yellow dyes.

However, the line “[t]he pre-Columbian death and destruction in [her]” also parallels the narrator with Itzpapalotl, who is the goddess of death (4). The parallel is reinforced when the narrator explains that the reader brings out “[t]he fierce obsidian of the tongue in [her]” – which refers to the obsidian blade that protrudes from the goddess’s face in hegemonic depictions within various Aztec codices (4). In being paralleled with Itzpapalotl, a parallel with Tlazolteotl is also implied – the goddesses often depicted side-by-side in various codices.

Unlike the parallels established between the narrator and other Aztec goddesses, the narrator parallels herself with Tlazolteotl explicitly. The narrator states: “I am the filth goddess Tlazolteotl. / I am the swallower of sins” (6). These lines allude to Tlazolteotl’s status as the “embodiment of sexual excess, perversion and illicit love” within Aztec culture. Moreover, they allude to the purification rituals in which Tlazolteotl played a central role for individuals who were believed to have been lured into sexually transgressive acts under her influence.

Having paralleled herself with these goddesses, the narrator then explains that the reader brings out “[t]he corporal and venial sin in [her]. / [t]he original transgression in [her]” (6). Collectively, the three lines allude to a shared aspect of each of the goddesses: transgression. Within her hegemonic narrative, Chantico was cursed by the gods, who transformed her into a dog as punishment for breaking a ritual fast. Similarly, Itzpapalotl was stabbed through the heart and burned on a pyre as punishment for committing adultery. And, Tlazolteotl is associated with sexual transgression, identified as a seductress who lured individuals into committing perverse sexual acts. Moreover, Itzpapalotl and Tlazolteotl’s sexual transgressions are possibly connected to lesbianism, which is implied through depictions of the goddesses standing side-by-side in various codices.

Yet, the narrator diverges from these representations of the goddesses in describing herself by stating that she is “[t]he lust goddess without guilt” (6). This line suggests that, rather than the narrator’s lesbian sexual desires being identified as a perverse transgression of compulsory heterosexuality that must be punished within a heteropatriarchal society, the narrator embraces her sexuality without fear or shame. The divergence from the goddesses that occurs as a result of the narrator’s embrace of her sexuality, as prompted by being “brought out” by the reader, allows her to achieve a self-love. This self-love is then redirected outward and returned unto the reader through her lesbian sexual desire when she requests: “[*q*]uiero amarte. Atarte. Amarrate. / Love the way a Mexican woman loves. / Let me show you. Love the only way I know how” (6).

By paralleling Itzpapalotl, Chantico and Tlazolteotl with herself, the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the figures’ hegemonic narratives, wherein their mythologies are renarrativized and reclaimed. In diverging from their hegemonic narratives, the narrator’s renarrativization of the figures’ narratives through the description of her lesbian sexual desire that is “brought out” by the reader re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Rather than lesbianism being punished by the heteropatriarchal Chicano community through social stigmatization, the narrator’s embrace of her lesbianism transports her to Aztlán as indicated when she expresses that the reader brings out “[t]he eagle and the serpent in [her]” (4). The imagery of the eagle and the serpent serves as an allusion to the narrative of Huitzilopochtli and the Aztecs’ arrival to Aztlán, which was signaled by an eagle perched on a nopal cactus with a rattlesnake in its beak. Subsequently, the utopic emotional state that is achieved through the narrator’s lesbianism being “brought out” by the reader reflects Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas”

– which delineates Queer Aztlán as relationships outside heteropatriarchal dominance that are “without prejudice or punishment,” which consist of “deep emotional ties...within our sex” and “sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the narrator with Chantico, Itzpapalotl and Tlazolteotl throughout “You Bring out the Mexican in Me,” Cisneros imagines Queer Aztlán.

### ***Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories***

Just as with Cisneros’s poetry, most literary scholars have interpreted the works in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* as expressions of cisgender heterosexual identity. For instance, in “Cisneros’s ‘Terrible’ Women: Recuperating the Erotic as a Feminist Source in ‘Never Marry a Mexican’ and ‘Eyes of Zapata,’” Maythee G. Rojas examines the manner in which the protagonists of “Never Marry a Mexican” and “Eyes of Zapata” attempt to reclaim their bodies from the sexual objectification and exploitation of their cisgender male sexual partners (136). Further, the few works of criticism that have analyzed representations of queer sexuality and gender have done so from a standpoint of desexualized political commentary within a historical context. For example, in “‘A Silence between Us like a Language’: The Untranslatability of Experience in Sandra Cisneros’s *Woman Hollering Creek*,” Harryette Mullen dissects the manner in which “Remember the Alamo” acts as a eulogy for Chicano queers who died during the AIDS epidemic (6). However, I argue that *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* features female protagonists that express their queer gender and sexual identities.

### **“Little Miracles, Kept Promises”**

“Little Miracles, Kept Promises” is a collection of brief messages that are left on scraps of paper alongside various offerings at an altar dedicated to La Virgen de Guadalupe along Interstate Highway 35 in Texas (the only highway that runs through San Antonio, Austin,

Laredo, Dallas, Alice, Rockport, Hondo, Cotulla, Harlingen, etc. – all of which are specifically mentioned in the messages). In the most lengthy of the messages, a young asexual transgender man named Chayo (birth name: Rosario) describes his experience of coming out and embracing his gender and sexual identity. This gender and sexual identity is represented through narrative plot structures and characteristics that parallel Chayo to Coyolxauhqui, Coatlicue, La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe – who are all specifically named by the narrator. In paralleling Chayo to Coatlicue, La Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Cisneros reclaims and renarrativizes the mythologies of Coyolxauhqui and Coatlicue – as well as the hagiography of La Virgen de Guadalupe and the historical account of La Malinche – in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Simultaneously, this reclamation and renarrativization acts as the map by which Chayo is able to fail queerly and opt out of the oppressive heteropatriarchal culture by which his mother abides in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Chayo is first paralleled with Coatlicue when he cuts off his braid, “[w]hich [he’d] never cut since the day [he] was born” (125). Upon cutting his hair, Chayo refers to himself as a snake, describing the braid as “[s]omething shed like a snakeskin” (125). Chayo further describes himself as a snake, stating: “I’m a snake swallowing its tail. I’m my history and my future....All my futures and all my pasts” (126). By identifying himself as a snake, Chayo parallels himself with Coatlicue – the goddess whose head consists of two serpents. Further, by describing himself as an embodiment of the oppositional binaries of the future and the past, Chayo reinforced the parallel with Coatlicue – who embodies oppositional binaries such as past & future. This parallel to Coatlicue is strengthened when Chayo describes his transgender identity by iterating: “I didn’t choose being female....I don’t want to be a mother. I wouldn’t mind being a father” (127).

Chayo expounds upon this description by stating: “I’m a bell without a clapper....This thing between my legs, this unmentionable” (125).

Yet, in cutting off his braid, Chayo is also paralleled with La Malinche, when his mother calls him a “*Malinchista*” (127). After seeing Chayo’s newly boyishly shortened hair, his mother states: “*Is this what they teach you at the university?....Acting like a bolilla, a white girl. Malinche*” (127). Chayo then expresses: “[d]on’t think it didn’t hurt being called a traitor” (128). Accordingly, Chayo’s decision to cut his hair is identified as a defiant betrayal of his mother, similar to Malinche – who is labeled a traitor to her people due to her sexual involvement with Hernán Cortés. In this same manner, Chayo’s haircut parallels him to Coyolxauhqui – who rebelled against her mother within her hegemonic narrative.

Chayo is then paralleled with La Virgen de Guadalupe in his description of his asexual identity. Notably, La Virgen de Guadalupe is portrayed within the Roman Catholic Church is completely desexualized due to the veneration of her immaculate virginal chastity. Subsequently, Chayo speaks to the statue of the figure as he expresses: “thank you for believing what I do is important....no other woman, neither friend nor relative, no one I know,....no woman wants to live alone. I do” (127). While speaking to the statue, Chayo also relates his desire to “love *something* instead of *someone*” without being called selfish (127).

Further, Chayo’s snipping of his braid parallels him with La Virgen de Guadalupe, Chayo comparing it as a transformation wherein he was “[n]o longer Mary the mild” (128). This parallel is strengthened when Chayo describes the manner in which he would silently listen to the criticisms and expectations of his relatives, who asked: “*Chayito, when you getting married?....How many kids you want when you grow up?*” (126). In silently passively receiving

their criticisms and expectations, Chayito is paralleled with La Virgen de Guadalupe – who is characterized within her hagiography by “[a]ll that self-sacrifice, all that silent suffering” (127).

Consequently, during his correspondence with the statue of La Virgen de Guadalupe, Chayo recounts:

Virgencita de Guadalupe. For a long time I wouldn't let you in my house. I couldn't see you without seeing my ma each time my father came home drunk and yelling, blaming everything that ever went wrong in his life on her....Couldn't look at you without blaming you for all the pain my mother and her mother and all our mothers' mothers have put up with in the name of God. I wanted you bare-breasted, snakes in your hands....I wanted you swallowing raw hearts. (127)

Accordingly, Chayo draws parallels between himself and La Virgen de Guadalupe, whose true sexual and gender identity as Coatlicue was suppressed by the Roman Catholic Church of the Spanish colonizers, just as Chayo's gender and sexual identity were suppressed by his family's heteropatriarchal values. However, after cutting off his braid, Chayo states:

When I learned your real name is Coatloxopeuh, She Who Has Dominion over Serpents, when I recognized you as...Xochiquetzal, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue, Chalchiuhtlicue, Coyolxauhqui...Cihuacoatl...I wasn't ashamed, then....When I could see you in all your facets...I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me. (128)

By paralleling Chayo with Coatlicue, La Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and La Virgen de Guadalupe, Cisneros re-members the figures' hegemonic narratives, renarrativizing and reclaiming their mythologies, historical accounts and hagiographies. Cisneros's renarrativization of the figures' narratives through Chayo's experience of coming out and embracing his gender and sexual identity re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Rather than being closeted

through his family's compulsory heterosexuality or vilified as selfish and traitorous within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, Chayo embraces his gender and sexual identity openly by coming out of the closet through his haircut – vicariously bringing La Virgen de Guadalupe and Coatlicue out of the closet alongside him, as well as exonerating La Malinche and Coyolxauhqui. In recognizing the role of La Virgen de Guadalupe (the Christian Mother of God, who is also identified as Coatlicue [the Aztec mother goddess] and La Malinche [the Mexican Eve, mother of the mestiza race]) in his journey to self-love, Chayo discovers a new family in the maternal figure – one who shares the pain of being closeted and therefore embraces this queer gender and sexual identity without fear of social stigma (188). Subsequently, Chayo's new family epitomizes Moraga's descriptions of Queer Aztlán in "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe" and "A Long Line of Vendidas," which imagines Queer Aztlán as a place wherein all genders and sexualities are embraced "without prejudice or punishment" that consists of selective bonds between friends and family – outside heteropatriarchal dominance – "formed through suffering and celebration shared" (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Chayo to La Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, La Virgen de Guadalupe and Coatlicue throughout his message at the altar in "Little Miracles, Kept Promises," Cisneros imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **Lorna Dee Cervantes**

#### ***Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems***

Due to Cervantes's identification as a heterosexual cisgender woman, many literary critics have analyzed her poetry as counterhegemonic feminist expressions of female heterosexual desire and non-heteronormative gender expression. For example, in "Staging Darker Desires: BDSM and the Coloniality of Affect in Latina Feminisms and Lorna Dee Cervantes's *Ciento*," Cathryn J. Merla-Watson examines the manner in which desire associated

with sexual practices of bondage, degradation, discipline, dominance, sadism, submission, and masochism is expressed through the imagery within Cervantes's "100 Words for Compass" acts as critical social commentary about the influence of colonialism upon the sexuality of Chicanas (200-209).

However, I argue that various poems published within Cervantes's *Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems* instead express gender queer lesbian sexual identity and desire. Foremost, I suggest that a lesbian reading is made possible through Cervantes' use of first person narrators – presumably cisgender Chicanas like the poet herself due to the nature of autohistorias – who express sexual desire for their lovers (the reader), an anonymous individual referred to only as “you” or “we” who is potentially female (such as in the case of myself). Yet, in several poems, rather than the use of an anonymous potentially female “you” or “we,” Cervantes specifically expresses sexual desire for an anonymous female “she” or “her,” which further supports my interpretation of lesbian sexual desire. Moreover, a reading of lesbian sexual desire is particularly supported for *Ciento: 100 100-Word Love Poems*, which is specifically dedicated as follows: “*For you and you and you and you and even you, and always for You, Dear Reader*” – indicating that each poem is addressed to each individual reader, who may belong to any gender or sex. And, a lesbian interpretation is further supported by Cervantes's use of yonic imagery that parallels symbolism associated with the various mythological feminine figures who have been previously discussed throughout my thesis. Finally, since lesbianism within itself is considered a transgression against the hegemonic role and characteristics of women as defined by the Roman Catholic Church within the Chicano community (or as the influential French feminist theorist Monique Wittig notoriously suggested in “The Straight Mind”: “[l]esbians are not women”), the narrator is therefore inherently identified as gender queer.

### **“100 Words for Love’s Restraint”**

This poem is narrated by an unidentified person referred to only as “I.” The first person narrator describes a lesbian romantic and sexual relationship with a lover – the reader (myself) – by paralleling her to Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue, although no explicit references to the goddesses’ names are ever made. In paralleling the reader with Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue, the narrator uses symbolism and metaphor between the reader and the narrator. Accordingly, the poem uses parallels with Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue to represent the reader and the narrator’s queer gender and sexual identity. In so doing, Cervantes reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddesses’ mythologies in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, through the description of lesbian romantic and sexual relationship, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Throughout the poem, the parallel between Chantico and the reader is made by the narrator through the use of canine imagery. For instance, the narrator states: “I wouldn’t / want to be your leash / and call, your eater bowl, / your long time left in / the sun” (22). The first set of imagery, the leash and call, is a symbol for the narrator’s aversion to possessiveness, wherein an individual commands a lover’s actions and behaviors in order to force faithfulness. The second set of imagery, the eater bowl, is a symbol for the narrator’s aversion to emotional dependency, wherein an individual insinuates the necessity for the relationship in order to ensure reliance for psychological well-being. The third set of imagery, the long time left in the sun, is a symbol for punishment, wherein an individual neglects a lover in order to cause desperation that results in submission. These symbols therefore parallel the reader to Chantico, the goddess who was transformed into a dog as punishment for disobeying the gods in breaking her ritual fast. The metaphor then is that the narrator wants the romantic and sexual desire of the reader to stem from

genuine love and loyalty rather than fear, compulsion or manipulation. This metaphor is reinforced when the narrator uses similar canine imagery to parallel *ziesself* to Chantico, explaining: “Loving you takes / some restraint, some straining, panting / in the missing you part” (22). By equating *ziesself* to a dog, just as *zie* had done the reader, the narrator recognizes that neither party is dominant within the relationship; instead it is a relationship based on empathy and egalitarianism.

The narrator then uses water imagery to parallel *ziesself* to Chalchiuhtlicue by stating: “Loving you ought not be / heavy rain in the arroyo / or a flood of nightmares” (22). The first set of imagery, the heavy rain in the arroyo (river), is a reference to Chalchiuhtlicue’s identity as the goddess of rivers and her husband’s identity as the god of rain (Tlaloc). This symbol serves as a metaphor for the narrator’s desire for the romantic and sexual relationship to reject heteronormative gender roles. The second set of imagery, the flood of nightmares, is a reference to Chalchiuhtlicue’s hegemonic narrative, wherein she drowned all life on earth by causing a great flood from a waterfall that gushed between her legs. This symbol acts as a metaphor for the narrator’s desire for the romantic and sexual relationship to reject hegemonic conceptualizations of lesbian relationships as disastrous failures that represent catastrophic damage to the values and culture of the Chicano community.

Through the parallel of Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue with the reader and *ziesself*, the narrator offers a modern re-membering of the figures’ hegemonic narratives, which renarrativizes and reclaims their mythologies. Specifically, the narrator’s renarrativization of the figure’s narrative (through the description of a lesbian sexual and romantic relationship with the reader) re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Accordingly, the narrator rejects the perpetuation the fear, compulsion and manipulation that are caused by practices of emotional

dependency, possessiveness and punishment within the heteronormative relationships of the heteropatriarchal Chicano community. Moreover, the narrator rejects hegemonic conceptualizations of lesbian relationships as disastrous failures that represent catastrophic damage to the values and culture of the Chicano community. In doing so, Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue vicariously reject the punishment and destruction to which they are condemned within their hegemonic narratives. Instead, the narrator offers *ziesself* and the reader – as well as Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue – a relationship that is based on genuine empathy, egalitarianism, loyalty and love. This relationship aligns with Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which conveys Queer Aztlán as a community outside heteropatriarchal dominance that is without prejudice or punishment,” which consists of “deep emotional ties...within our sex” and “sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the reader and *ziesself* to Chantico and Chalchiuhtlicue throughout the description of a lesbian sexual and romantic relationship in “100 Words for Love’s Restraint,” Cervantes imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **“100 Words for Fire”**

Throughout the poem, an unidentified first person narrator describes their sexual desire for a lover, who is identified as the reader (*myself*). Although the narrator’s description does not explicitly name any specific religious, mythological or historical feminine figure with which to parallel the reader, it does share characteristics with Chantico. In paralleling the reader with Chantico, the narrator uses sexually suggestive language that conjures highly erotic imagery between the reader and the narrator. Accordingly, the poem uses parallels with Chantico to represent the reader and the narrator’s queer gender and sexual identity. In so doing, Cervantes

reclaims and renarrativizes the Aztec goddesses' mythologies in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, through the description of lesbian sexual desire, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The parallel between Chantico and the reader that is made by the narrator in expressing zier lesbian sexual desire is the use of fire imagery. For example, the narrator states, "I want your fire" – as well as, "I want the fire of / you" (49). Fire is again referenced when zie explains that zie wants "what burns fine to / touch, what blazes in your / gaze" (49). Additionally, the narrator uses fire symbolically when stating: "what cauterizes" – which describes an action for which fire is often utilized to heat tools (49). Likewise, fire imagery is used when the narrator mentions: "the ashes of your mea culpas" – wherein ashes are the byproduct of fire (49).

This "fire" is then indirectly associated with lesbian sexual desire when zie expounds "I want / the molten core, the dynamo / between your thighs" – which serves as yonic imagery (49). Similarly, the fire is specified as "St. Elmo's Fire" – which is a type of fire that is caused by a coronal discharge from a bolt of lightning or a volcanic eruption that generates superheated plasma (49). This indirect reference to discharge that results from a volcanic eruption is a euphemism for ejaculation that sometimes occurs during female orgasm. Accordingly, the fire acts a symbol of the reader's sexual pleasure that results from lesbian intercourse with the narrator. The use of fire imagery parallels the reader with Chantico, goddess of fire, hearth and volcanoes. Moreover, in using fire imagery to specifically describe lesbian sexual desire, yet another parallel with Chantico is made – since lesbians are inherently considered gender queer and Chantico is gender queer (often depicted wearing both the masculine loincloth and the feminine skirt simultaneously).

Notably, in associating the lesbian sexual desire with actions that are related to fire, the narrator describes actions that are creative rather than destructive. For example, zie states “I want your fire, not / your flame, what cauterizes, what / heals, what enriches the soil” (49). Moreover, the narrator states: “I / want what evaporates hot tears, / what transforms doubt into must.” As such, the narrator rejects hegemonic descriptions of fire as a destructive force, instead focusing on its creative and regenerative powers. This represents a major divergence from Chantico, whose association with fire is also associated with violence, war and death.

By paralleling Chantico with the reader, the narrator provides a modern re-membering of the figure’s hegemonic narrative, wherein her mythology is renarrativized and reclaimed. However, by altering the nature of her characteristics, the narrator’s renarrativization of the figure’s narrative (through the description of lesbian sexual desire for the reader) re-visions an alternative future for the figures. Rather than social death within the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, the narrator is healed and transformed by orgasmic lesbian sexual pleasure that triggers a utopic state of mind wherein fear (or doubt) is transformed and tears of sorrow are evaporated due to the release of endorphins - Chantico vicariously transformed alongside her. Although the narrator does not compare the utopic state triggered by lesbian sexual pleasure with any a familial structure or home, it is implied that the narrator’s sexual desire for the reader exists within a social setting wherein the expression of queer gender and sexual identity through written poetry may be embraced without the fear or emotional pain caused by social stigma. As such, this setting fulfills Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which describes Queer Aztlán as a community outside the heteropatriarchy that is “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment,” which

consists of relationships of “deep emotional ties...within our sex” and “sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm” (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the reader to Chantico throughout the description of lesbian sexual desire for the reader in “100 Words for Fire,” Cervantes imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **“100 Words of Fantasy”**

Spoken by an unidentified “I,” the poem describes a sexual encounter between the narrator and her lover - the reader (myself). Although the narrator’s description does not explicitly name any specific religious, mythological or historical feminine figure with which to parallel the reader, it does incorporate symbolism associated with La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl), Itzpapalotl and Tlazolteotl. In paralleling the reader with the goddesses through the symbolism, the narrator uses sexually euphemisms that conjure yonic imagery. Accordingly, the poem uses parallels with La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl), Itzpapalotl and Tlazolteotl to represent the lesbian sexual desire expressed between the reader and the narrator. In so doing, Cervantes reclaims and renarrativizes the goddesses’ mythologies in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Moreover, through the description of lesbian sexual desire, this reclamation and renarrativization allows the narrator to fail queerly and opt out in order to arrive at Queer Aztlán.

The narrator first parallels the reader to Tlazolteotl in the first line of the poem: “I couldn’t see the moon / last night as it approached / perigree, but I heard it” (76). The reference to the moon as a personified entity serves as an allusion to Tlazolteotl, the moon goddess who wears a skirt that features the symbol of the moon. However, Tlazolteotl is also the goddess of “sexual excess, perversion and illicit love” who is often depicted alongside the goddess Itzpapalotl. The depiction of Tlazolteotl with Itzpapalotl suggests that the sexual transgressions

notoriously committed by both goddesses within their hegemonic narratives was perhaps lesbianism. Accordingly, paralleled with Tlazolteotl, the narrator may be paralleling herself is Itzpapalotl. Subsequently, the line may be a metaphor for the narrator and the reader laying side-by-side in the darkness of the night as a lesbian couple, like the two goddesses.

In the following lines of the poem, the narrator compares the reader to La Diosa Hambrienta (and Huixtocihuatl) through the symbolism of the sea. Significantly, La Diosa Hambrienta is the ocean goddess, who is said to have created the great bodies of salt water with her tears. These aspects of the goddess are paralleled when the narrator elucidates that, although she could not see the moon (the reader) in the dark, she “heard it / all night in the sea’s / lustful cries” (76). Maintaining this parallel, the narrator then describes the sexual encounter that unfolds between the reader and herself, stating that she “felt / it throw itself at the land: a fantasy of loose / spray, an act of passion” (76). This reference to the sea’s loose spray as an act of passion is yonic imagery, which acts as a euphemism for ejaculation that sometimes occurs during female orgasm. Yet, whereas the sexually transgressive lesbianism with which Itzpapalotl and Tlazolteotl are associated is punishable according to their hegemonic narratives, the narrator’s lesbian encounter with the reader is celebrated and embraced. This is indicated in the lines: “What I couldn’t see filled / me, a kind of feathered / hope” (76).

Thereby, the parallel of the reader and the narrator with Tlazolteotl, Itzpapalotl and La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl) with the reader, the narrator provides a modern remembering of the figures’ hegemonic narratives, wherein their mythologies are renarrativized and reclaimed. However, by altering the negative associations with their transgressive lesbianism, the narrator’s renarrativization of the figures’ narratives (through the description of her lesbian encounter with the reader) re-vision an alternative future for the figures. Rather than

being punished for lesbianism that is viewed as a transgression against the values of the heteropatriarchal Chicano community, the narrator is filled with hope by the orgasmic lesbian sexual pleasure that creates a utopic state induced by the release of endorphins – Tlazolteotl and Itzpapalotl also vicariously given hope. Although the narrator does not compare the utopic state triggered by the lesbian orgasm with any a familial structure or home, the relationship between the narrator and the reader exists within a social setting wherein they may openly embrace and celebrate queer gender and sexual identity through poetry written about their lesbian intercourse without fear of social stigmatization. Therefore, this setting mirrors Moraga’s description of Queer Aztlán in “Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe” and “A Long Line of Vendidas,” which describes Queer Aztlán as a society “strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment” that consists of relationships of “deep emotional ties...within our sex” and “sexuality, which involves, but is not limited to, intercourse or orgasm” outside heteropatriarchal dominance (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling the reader and herself to Tlazolteotl, Itzpapalotl and La Diosa Hambrienta (or Huixtocihuatl) in “100 Words for Fire,” Cervantes imagines Queer Aztlán.

### **Felicia Luna Lemus**

#### ***Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties: A Novel***

Throughout the novel, the narrator (Leti) recounts various sexual and romantic relationships with females in Los Angeles, California during the 2000s. Although her gender and sexuality are never explicitly stated in the text, there is ample evidence to suggest that Leti is a gender fluid lesbian. This gender and sexual identity is represented through parallel between Leti and La Llorona. While she is not directly identified as such within the text, La Llorona is directly referred to by another name that is widely used in reference to her: “Weeping Woman.” This

identification of Weeping Woman as La Llorona is supported by a description which explains the manner in which she “traveled by wind in the night, . . . howling deep and mournful wails because she was bad and wanted to take bad children to be her own. She was the weeping because she birthed a little girl whose father was a Spaniard. . . . That is why she threw her little girl into the river that storming night” (18). As such, Weeping Woman is delineated as a version of La Llorona, similar to the hegemonic narratives that identify La Llorona as the young mother and La Malinche. Like Weeping Woman, the young mother is cursed to haunt the earth in perpetual grief for drowning her children, wailing as she seduces men and lures children into nearby rivers and lakes so that she might drown them in order to make them her eternal companions. Similarly, La Malinche drowns her mestizo son in a river after she is rejected by Cortés, who refuses to legitimize his relationship with her through marriage due to her “Indian blood.” In paralleling herself to La Llorona, Leti represents her sexual and gender identity as a gender fluid lesbian. Simultaneously, the parallel between the two females reclaims and renarrativizes the figure’s folklore in order to re-member the past and re-vision the future. Further, this reclamation and renarrativization acts as the map by which Leti is able to fail queerly and opt out of the oppressive heteropatriarchy of compulsory heterosexuality so that she can arrive at Queer Aztlán.

Leti is first paralleled with La Llorona when she begins the narrative by stating: “I might as well tell you right now that this is really about my girl Weeping Woman, Nana, and me” (3). She then expounds upon this by recounting the origin of her relationship with La Llorona, stating:

[F]rom the first time she cried at my window during my childhood sleeps, scratching my name upon the windowpane, she was the center of all that I became. She knew I was something different. She told me I was her favorite child to visit. She came late, late, late

when Nana was sound asleep. Weeping Woman knew me. She knew where to come for visits each night of the week. (17)

Accordingly, Leti indicates that La Llorona is a monstrous ghoul from zir childhood, who has black mailed zir since zir childhood. Throughout the remainder of the novel, Leti explains the manner in which La Llorona uses zir secret difference in order to black mail zir into performing various actions. For example, when Leti visits the local gay bar, The Crystal Room, zie states:

I was alone, surrounded by girls, Weeping's insistent coarse whisper tease just behind the top layer of the bar's loud. I didn't want meaningless chat, and flirting was more than I could manage. I just needed to be around voices and racket to dilute some of Weeping's scratching at my ear. (13)

Yet, more than just an external force that coerces Leti to visit the gay bar, La Llorona is described as an internal aspect of zieself when zie explains: "[h]er presence settled into the crevices of my body. The joints between the segments of my toes swelled and needed to be cracked. My ears hummed a high pitched moan. My throat burned" (11). However, it is not until Leti begins a lesbian affair with K that La Llorona's significance is revealed. One night, as Leti lies beside K in their bed, zie recounts:

Thinking of K's eyes. Damn, help me, those dark green eyes looking up at me with the city lights outside the window making shadows down on her. Our bodies lit ice fires together, but even at our highest mutual peaks of emotion, we shared grounding calm....There were no thunderbolt charges in the sky and the mist was barely heavy enough to be seen on the light coming from outside, but the air was in motion and I felt a shot go through me. Weeping Woman, she kissed me slow and steady and all of a sudden. My lips stung pleasant, her the countless times she had visited before, but I knew

what to expect. Her copper grin was mine to taste sweet chocolate with each breath in. She firefly-sparked me and set my skin tingling. My girl Weeping's metal whisper echoed in the layered shadows of the room. (118-119)

As such, La Llorona is acknowledged to be a spectral embodiment of Leti's lesbian sexual desires. Likewise, Weeping Woman's presence is noted when Leti shares a former lover's description of zir gender expression, who stated: "[o]ne night she's a femme prowling pretty for a butch, next night she's a tom cruising for a lady. Never know which you'll get, not when she dresses in the morning, not with the way she talks, tells a story, acts. She's trouble, that one" (169-170). Hence, in addition to her association with Leti's lesbian sexual desire, La Llorona is also associated with a gender fluid identity that Leti possesses.

As an embodiment of Leti's gender fluid lesbian identity, La Llorona's description as a monstrous ghoul who blackmails zir into frequenting the Crystal Room acts as a metaphor for Leti's repression of zir gender and sexuality due to subconscious fear and shame. Yet, initially, this understanding of La Llorona seems unsupported due to Leti's detailed open confessions about zir various sexual and romantic relationships with females, as well as zir membership in a community of supportive friends. Nonetheless, Leti's fear and shame in zir gender and sexual identity are confirmed when zie explains the frustration with which zie has faced criticism and intolerance from others – even within zir own LGBTQ+ community. For example, when recalling zir interactions with a former lover, zie begrudges:

Rob would have accused me of bringing the communal growl down for saying I'm part boy. And pre-Stonewall dykes would have wanted me to call my game. What kind of dyke was I anyway? Good question. Simple and complicated all at once, I wasn't a

pigeon to be tucked away neatly into a hole. I didn't wear a fixed category without feeling pain. I was more, or less, or something different entirely. (170)

Similarly, Leti refuses to come out to zir grandmother (Nana), who also criticizes Leti based on her observations of zir gender expression. Leti laments that "Nana made it perfectly clear, she did not appreciate [zir] carefully honed boyness" (168-169). For example, Leti enumerates several of the comments that Nana routinely makes in regard to zir gender and sexual identity, such as: "'Why don't you grow your hair out like when you were younger?... Braid it pretty and sit like a lady once in a while. Just a little rose lipstick would really bring sunshine to your smile. Maybe tweeze those stray strands of eyebrow, the ones bridging your nose'" (236-237).

Subsequently, when Leti and K move into an apartment together after a near fatal accident that forces zir to recognize the seriousness of their relationship, zie begins to avoid communicating with zir grandmother (129-142). Particularly, as Thanksgiving approaches, Leti notes that "a chilled whisper from outside pushed in through the gaps in the old windowsill....Weeping came by to pay a visit" (173). Leti then receives several phone calls from zir grandmother, who complains: "'Here it is Thanksgiving coming up and who knows if you even remember me, let alone if you plan to give thanks for family....What if I had died, Leticia?....I'd be buried before you even called home'" (93-94). However, as Mother's Day approaches, Leti is forced to confront zir fear and shame when Nana arrives at zir doorstep for a visit (155-167). It is at this time that Leti comes out to zir grandmother (166). As such, Leti explains: "My change should have been simple, but it wasn't. Preparing the new version of myself for presentation to Nana was like I had lost the notes for a chemistry lab but was going ahead with the experiment anyway" (166). Through zir choice of masculine clothing, Leti

reveals zir gender and sexual identity to zir grandmother – which is indicated by Nana’s perception of a tattoo of La Llorona on zir arm (166).

Immediately following the visit, Leti receives no communication from Nana for several weeks (173). However, rather than the lack of communication reflecting Nana’s rejection of Leti due to zir gender and sexual identity, it is soon revealed that Nana has failed to contact zir due to illness (192-195). Leti then rushes to the hospital in order to be by Nana’s side as she takes her last breaths, blaming attributing zir grandmother’s illness to zir coming out (207-208, 213-215). In “Imagining Queer Chican@s in the Post-Borderlands,” T. Jackie Cuevas argues that, due to Nana’s sudden death after disavowing Leti, “[i]t is as though Leti’s gender ambiguity – her unreadability – has killed her Mexican grandmother” (par. 24). In contrast, I argue that Nana’s death is purely coincidental. Additionally, I insist that Nana ultimately accepted Leti’s gender and sexual identity. This is supported in the text, as Leti holds Nana’s hand while she await death, expressing: “that morning I touched Nana’s hand and she told me. It’s not something I can explain, I just know I heard Nana talking to me as clear as when her voice was still hers to use. I kissed her forehead, her skin unfamiliar with a sour scent. ‘Nana, I love you too’” (215). Moreover, it is implied that Nana not only accepts Leti’s gender and sexual identity on her death bed, but it is also implied that Nana posthumously embraces and celebrates Leti’s identity. Poignantly, soon after Nana’s funeral, Leti is visited by zir grandmother in a dream wherein Nana tells zir a parable:

‘The pigeons from that pueblo, they weren’t anything fancy in their feathers, not even special in how they flew from one spot to another. No, in those ways they were just pigeons, plain and simple. But those birds, those incredible birds, they would come flying into the pueblo and, whoosh, dip their beaks into rough piles of mined rock, swallow

sparkling diamond pebbles whole, and fly away proud....It might not have been what some thought was proper, for those pigeons to have the diamonds, but that was the way it was supposed to be. And no one should have messed with that. The diamonds those birds were taking weren't even stolen. They knew nothing in the world was too great to be theirs. They knew they wanted that mined glisten glow. No matter what, those pigeons, they claimed their diamond birthright.' (246-247)

Therefore, through the parallel established between Leti and La Llorona, the novel acts as a modern re-membering of the figure, renarrativizing and reclaiming her narrative from hegemonic renderings. Additionally, established as an embodiment of La Llorona, Leti's divergence from the hegemonic La Llorona folklore results in a renarrativization that re-visions an alternative future for the young mother and La Malinche. Rather than wandering the earth in perpetual sorrow in search of affection and belonging, Leti finds acceptance and love in the arms of zir grandmother, K and zir friends – La Llorona also vicariously finding love. Therefore, Leti is able to form an egalitarian familial structure outside of heteropatriarchal models, wherein queer gender and sexual identity may be expressed and embraced without fear of social stigmatization and rejection. As such, this utopia fits Moraga's description of Queer Aztlán in "Queer Aztlán: The Re-Formation of Chicano Tribe" and "A Long Line of Vendidas," which portray Queer Aztlán as a homeland "strong enough to embrace a full range of...human sexualities, and expressions of gender....without prejudice or punishment" that consists of families outside heteropatriarchal dominance, which are composed of selective bonds between friends and family "formed through suffering and celebration shared" (264, 265-266; 111). Thus, by paralleling Leti with La Llorona in *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, Lemus imagines Queer Aztlán.

## Chapter 5: Conclusión/What the Future Holds

### Are We There Yet?

By renarrativizing and reclaiming the hegemonic narratives of various mythological, religious and historical feminine figures from Mexican culture through parallels with various characters who possess queer gender and sexual identities throughout their autohistorias, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Helena María Viramontes, Ana Castillo, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Sandra Cisneros, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Carla Trujillo and Felicia Luna Lemus re-member the past and re-vision the future according to the Coyolxauhqui imperative in order to imagine Queer Aztlán. However, contrary to the statements made by numerous literary scholars, Queer Aztlán is not an imaginary fantasy that is intangible and unattainable within the real lives of the authors or the readers. Although it is an internal psychological state rather than a physical geographic location, its implications can have quantifiable influences upon the realities that are perceived and therefore acted upon by the readers and the authors. Or, as Anzaldúa urges, “[n]othing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become. . . . I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world” (*Borderlands* 70, 71). They are more than mere stories, they are autohistoria – our history in the (re)making.

Accordingly, as representations of real world people, settings and conflicts in parallel to the readers’ own lives, each of the autohistorias offers an alternative course of action taken by the characters which the readers may emulate in order to arrive at the Queer Aztlán that the authors imagine. But, the successful emulation of the character’s actions that lead to Queer Aztlán is not free of physical and psychological suffering, pain and isolation. The readers, like the characters and the authors, must suffer through the Coatlicue State, allowing themselves to

fail queerly and opt out in order to escape the oppressive dominance of the heteropatriarchy. Moreover, once escaping the heteropatriarchy, the readers and the authors (like the characters) must continually make and remake Queer Aztlán as Moraga suggests – by creating family structures of friends and relatives across generations, sexes, genders and sexualities based on shared suffering and celebration in order to redefine their culture and their communities so as to form an egalitarian nation without prejudice and punishment for being true to themselves (“Queer Aztlán” 264-266; “A Long Line” 111). So, while imagining utopia is the first step to the destination of arriving to Queer Aztlán, arriving at Queer Aztlán is only the first step to the destination of maintaining that utopia for the future. It’s up to them to decide what the future holds.

### **What about No One Left Behind?**

The Queer Aztlán that the authors imagine requires Chicanas to opt out of heteropatriarchal social structures. Still, many aspects of the Chicano community may be decolonized and reclaimed, and others may be excavated and reconstituted from the past. For example, the authors are able to reclaim and renarrativize a multitude of feminine figures, including La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche and La Llorona – whose narratives have been directly used as mechanisms of female oppression. Accordingly, conventional altars dedicated to La Virgen de Guadalupe may continue to be maintained within homes and holy spaces. Likewise, stories of La Llorona may continue to be told in versions such as Chalchiuhtlicue – the goddess who created fish by flooding the earth during the period of the fifth sun – or La Diosa Hambrienta – who created the oceans of the world from her tears.

However, other aspects may have to be abandoned altogether; particularly, some of the religious traditions of the Roman Catholic Church may have to be left behind. For example,

Chicanas may no longer be able to celebrate la quinceañera – an unofficial sacramental ceremony specifically celebrating the virginity of pubescent girls in order to coerce adherence to hegemonic gender roles, which restrict women’s significance to their ability to fulfill the biological imperative of reproduction as mothers and their ability to sacrificially subjugate themselves selflessly to the will of male authority figures.

Most disparagingly, Chicanas will have to leave some of their loved ones behind, too. As demonstrated in the narratives of several characters within the authors’ autohistorias, they may need to cut ties with loved ones who perpetuate oppressive sexism and homophobia by actively participating in practices of compulsory heterosexuality – such as physical punitive violence, social stigmatization and psychological repression. Yet, the abusers may not be the only one who must be abandoned; sometimes relationships with fellow victims of sexism and homophobia must be left behind, too. For example, in *What Night Brings* and *Their Dogs Came with Them*, the protagonists had to leave their mother’s behind due to their internalization of the abuses that they suffered from their husbands, which were then perpetuated against their daughters. Chicanas may therefore also be forced to leave their childhood homes and hometowns. Similarly, they may even be required to change the businesses that they patronize and the products that they purchase.

Leaving these things behind will undoubtedly cause a rift filled with resentment to disrupt the social system within the Chicano community. However, the rift does not have to be permanent. The wound may be healed. The cultural paradigm may be shifted. And, the Chicano community may eventually be reunited in harmony that is precipitated by mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. As Anzaldúa describes:

First you must recognize and acknowledge la herida. Second, you must ‘intend’ to heal. Then you must fall headlong into that wounding – attend to what the body is feeling, be its dismemberment and disintegrations. Rupture and psychic fragmentation lead to dialogue with the wound. This dialogue, in turn, opens imaginings, and images awaken an awareness of something greater than our individual wounds, enabling us to imagine ways...to achieve wholeness and interconnect to others on the planet. And finally, you have to plunge your hands into the mess...into embodied practical material spiritual political acts. (“Geographies of Selves” 89-90)

### **Where Do We Go from Here?**

In the future, this thesis may be used in Queer (LGBT+) Literature, Chican@ Literature, or Feminist Literature courses within the academy by: establishing a more specific definition of the theoretical concept of Queer Aztlán, providing an overview of the literary representation of queer Chicanas by Chicana feminists, offering an overview of the historical context and theoretical basis of the Queer Chicana Feminist movement in literature, and exemplifying the potential of literature as sociopolitical commentary and activism. However, it may also be used outside the academy by activists seeking to educate themselves about alternative forms of social protest and justice, which involve methods and theories that are practical for individuals who cannot participate in physical protests due to individual differences (such as economic resources, bodily mobility, age, incarceration, etc.) but who can nonetheless dare to dream.

Additionally, while this thesis is certainly expansive, it is by no means exhaustive. In the future, my work may be compounded upon by myself or others who may wish to explore additional works and figures that were not addressed. For instance, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a major feminist figure in Mexican history, is not addressed in this thesis. Moreover, there is a

plethora of that are listed in the Works Consulted section, which I did not analyze in this thesis. Moreover, a number of the works that are analyzed for female figures and protagonists may also be analyzed for male figures and protagonists – such as Uncle Tommy in *What Night Brings* or Luis Lil Lizard in *Their Dogs Came with Them*. Further, my work may be improved upon through analyses of sexualities and genders that are not herein discussed. And, my work may be expanded through application to other expressive forms of artistic works – such as paintings, music, dance or fashion.

Yet, I also invite the criticism of my fellow literary scholars for this thesis. Namely, I believe the works in thesis due not all present perfect examples of Queer Aztlán. Accordingly, several of the works should be analyzed for the way in which the utopia that they imagine fails to include specific genders and sexualities. For example, in “Transgender Chican@ Poetics: Contesting, Interrogating, and Transforming Chicana/o Studies,” Francisco J. Galarte criticizes Moraga’s micro-aggressive transphobia, which was expressed in “Still Loving in the (Still) War Years” through the insistence on “keeping queer queer” and the statement: “I do not want to keep losing my macha daughters to manhood through any cultural mandates that are not derived of our own making” (130).

As for myself, beyond the confines of the academy, I plan to continue my quest of seguir in their footsteps, first by exploring my own wounds within the Coatlicue state in order to assume the Coyolxauhqui imperative of imagining and actualizing a queer utopia through my creative writing.

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