



“Nobody’s Mother and Nobody’s Wife”
**Reconstructing Archetypes and Sexuality in Sandra
Cisneros’ “Never Marry a Mexican”**

Laura Paz

University of Massachusetts Boston

laura.paz-rodrigu001@umb.edu

Abstract: Female archetypes of both mythical and historical figures are central to Mexican culture in that they not only reflect this society’s ideals and history, but also serve to classify and socialize women. Traditional Mexican society is characterized by rigid gender roles in which women are expected to be faithful wives who are subservient to their husbands, as well as take care of the children and home. Men, on the other hand, can be promiscuous and enjoy sexual relations outside the marriage. For this reason, archetypes exist that function to categorize women as either the “good mother” represented by La Virgen de Guadalupe, the “bad mother” represented by La Llorona, or the “traitress woman” represented by La Malinche, among others. Mexican authors continue to incorporate these figures in their work, which is why it is essential for readers—particularly non-*Mexicanas*—to research the social, cultural, and historical implications of such archetypes. Such an investigation was the objective upon analyzing Sandra Cisneros’ “Never Marry a Mexican,” so as to bridge the cultural gap between the reader and the text. Much of this particular story involves the historical figure of La Malinche but also references La Llorona as well as Santa Lucia, the patron saint for the blind. For this reason, a great deal of focus will be placed on the former. Thus, the journey to understanding this unique and dynamic story will proceed as follows: (1) a discussion of gender roles in traditional Mexican society, (2) a presentation of female archetypes that have served to socialize *Mexicanas*, (3) a brief in the history of La Malinche, (4) a glimpse into the transformation of La Malinche through literature over the centuries, (5) and finally, a look at archetypes and sexuality in “Never Marry a Mexican.” Ultimately, an understanding of the historical and societal connotations of the archetypes will provide a clearer lens with which to look at Cisneros’ story, and thus, the reader will be able to see how she presents a struggle that at once questions, alters, and submits to the greater purpose of these prototypes: to define the *Mexicana* and her sexuality.

Laura Paz was born in Honduras to a Honduran mother and American father. She moved to the U.S. at age 4 and was raised in the Boston area. Living in white suburbia, her interest in Latin American culture and history did not surface until being introduced to Sandra Cisneros’ *Women Hollering Creek* in college by a professor in a women’s literature class. Since then, she has been actively trying to understand the weight of her own heritage. She is a recent graduate of the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Master of Arts program in Applied Linguistics, with a concentration in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). At the time that this paper was written in the 2005-2006 academic year, she was a graduating senior from the English department and Honors Program of the same university. This piece was actually her Senior Honors Thesis, which was advised by Susan Tomlinson, PhD, and won recognition from the Kingston-Mann Awards. She is also honored as a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the Golden Key International Honour Society, the National Dean’s List, and the National Scholars Honor Society. Along with working as copy editor for the University’s school newspaper and assistant editor for the Honors Program Newsletter, she also interned as a publishing assistant for Arrowsmith Press while a senior at UMB. She graduated *summa cum laude* with a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Minor in Professional Writing Certificate in 2006. Currently, she lives in Athens, Greece, where she teaches, writes fiction, and enjoys photography.

INTRODUCTION

Mythical and historical archetypes of women are engrained in Mexican culture and thus have become a part of Mexican fiction, poetry, music, and art. These archetypes prominently include La Malinche (“the traitorous woman”), La Llorona (“the bad mother”), and La Virgen de Guadalupe (“the good mother”). These figures are used as educational tools to teach *Mexicanas* how they should or should not behave.¹ The traditionally “proper” role of a Mexican woman is to be submissive to the male figures in her life, to be sexually inactive, and to take care of the home and children. A woman who breaks out of these constraints is someone who is considered a whore—a woman whom men will use for sex but will never marry.

In Sandra Cisneros’ collection, *Women Hollering Creek*, she employs such archetypes not to instruct girls on how to behave properly, but rather to question society’s construction of them, and in turn, a *Mexicana*’s sexuality. In “Never Marry a Mexican,” Cisneros uses the figures of La Malinche, Santa Lucia, and more subtly La Llorona in parallel with the narrator to complicate the reader’s view of these archetypes. She does not allow the narrator to become a mold of them, but rather reshuffles the reader’s conception of the myths themselves. The use of these mythical characters, however, may in fact alienate the non-*Mexicana* reader for the fact that she does not understand the cultural and social implications of the figures. Also, as Harryette Mullen has noted, the Spanish language entwined in the piece gives Spanish power by barricading the English-speaking reader (3). Therefore, by not understanding the

¹ I will use the term *Mexicanas/os* to refer to people of Mexican origin born in both Mexico and the United States, rather than complicating the text with references to *Chicanas/os* and/or Mexican-Americans.

Spanish in the text as well as the references to Mexican archetypes, the story segregates the non-*Mexicana* and she becomes part of the out-group, while the *Mexicana* becomes the in-group; a reversal of roles in our Westernized world. Likewise, Cisneros may be distancing some of her *Mexicana* readers because the narrator she uses goes against the grain of what the Mexican culture says a woman should be. This narrator is a woman who is strong-willed, sexual, and not satisfied playing the traditional role of a Mexican woman. She does, however, struggle to find her place and identity between the virgin and the whore.

Because a non-*Mexicana* reader cannot fully comprehend the cultural and social connotations of Cisneros’ story, I will explicate them in the subsequent pages to bridge the literary gap between cultures. I will first look at gender roles in Mexican society, provide an overview of archetypes in Mexican literature, and then specifically discuss the La Malinche archetype by focusing on her biography and the ways in which she has been transformed by authors over the centuries. Finally, the latter half of the article will focus on Cisneros’ story, “Never Marry a Mexican” and how the narrator defines and complicates not only female archetypes and their sexuality, but also the heavy burden that a *Mexicana* carries for being a woman; a five-hundred-year-old burden Cisneros is acutely—and perhaps personally—aware of.

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN MEXICAN SOCIETY

Historically, Mexican and Chicano societies are said by social scientists to have rigid gender roles that form the basis of their culture. Although contemporary Mexican society and populations in metropolitan areas may not adhere to societal roles of the past, traditional communities still exist where women are expected to be confined

to their household duties of cleaning, cooking, and raising children. On the other hand, men are supposed to be the financial providers and therefore rule the family and home. They are regarded with both fear and respect since they will use physical force against both wives and children if they deviate from "proper" behavior (Mirande and Enriquez 110). Men are free to live the life of a bachelor even if they are married, and are thus expected to drink, fight, and have sex with other women.² As Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enriquez point out:³

Women are divided into two categories. The good, one's mother, wife, and daughters, are saintly, virginal figures to be protected, idealized, revered, and held on a pedestal so that they are kept out of the reach of male predators. They are virtuous creatures who do not enjoy sex. Sexual enjoyment is to be had with bad women: less respectable females that one can take as mistresses, girlfriends, or playmates. (110)

² There has been debate over the years as to the cultural perspective of social scientists making such observations and conclusions. It has been argued that these negative stereotypes of Mexican societal roles have been exaggerated by Anglo-Saxon academics. However, even Mexican social critics and observers have confirmed the existence of these strictly defined roles that they say still exist today in some shape or form in contemporary society, particularly in more traditional areas.

³ Although Mirande and Enriquez were writing in 1979, their observation and analysis are relevant here. Cisneros was 25 at the time they published their work and therefore may have been raised in a Chicano environment that enforced these roles to a degree. Certainly her understanding of her society and culture parallels sociological work done from the time these academics were writing and is evident in much of her work. Hence, it would be more appropriate to provide information on studies that are seen as outdated now than to provide details of a more contemporary Mexican society.

Because of this inflexible role women are expected to assume, they are easily categorized by society if they deviate. Men who do not exhibit this exaggerated masculinity, or *machismo*, are also criticized by society for failing to fulfill their role as men. There are, however, different views on *machismo*: some believe it is deeply fixed in Mexican culture and defines it; others believe it is a myth created by the colonizers to stigmatize the rebellion of *Mexicanos*; others believe it has lost its importance over the years. More recently, however, social scientists argue that the Mexican culture is in fact matriarchal because it is actually "orientated to respect for and love of the mother, who raises the children, cares for the household, and passes down family history" (qtd. in Casas et al 236). Even so, the construction of *machismo* has caused men to treat women in one of two ways: regard her as the virgin and "good mother" or as a whore. Thus, the pressure society places on the male's gender role directly correlates with how he in turn relates to women, forming a vicious circle of expectations and categorizations.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF *MEXICANAS* THROUGH FEMALE ARCHETYPES

Both mythical and historical figures have served as female archetypes in Mexican literature and art to provide examples of "good" and "bad" *Mexicanas* to young women. As Alfredo Mirande and Evangelina Enriquez point out, "Myths, after all, are mechanisms employed by people to structure and order a complex world...Myths are not random, however; they are selective and frequently fulfill vital functions for the group that generates them" (115). These archetypes are thus used to train women and are "socializing agents designed to instruct, coerce, and frighten rebellious and unruly young women into 'proper' behavior...they are

literally *ejemplos*, or example, designed to instill conformity in young maidens who might be foolish enough to transgress the social norms instituted by the patriarchal order" (Herrera-Sobek 72). Maria Herrera-Sobek argues that the fact such archetypes are even used, reveals that *Mexicanas* are not as naturally submissive as society has indicated; otherwise, there would be no need for them (72).

Hence, Mexican archetypes have generally followed the "good," represented by Virgen de Guadalupe and the "bad," represented by La Malinche. While Malinche is the betrayer of her people for having sex with Cortés, Guadalupe is seen as the untainted protector of all that is Mexican, including both the native and the *mestizo* (Leal 229). Other archetypes include the terrible mother and the lover, either as seductress or seduced. La Llorona, whose name literally means "the weeping woman," represents the terrible mother archetype for which there are several versions of her legend. Typically, she is a woman of a lower rank who falls in love with someone outside her social class. She sleeps with her inamorato and when he refuses to acknowledge her or her children, she goes mad and drowns her children and herself in a lake or river. God punishes her deed by forcing her to find the children she murdered, and so she is said to roam the earth full of regret and sorrow, wailing as she searches for their bodies (Figueredo 233).

The seduced lover archetype is represented by Ixtacihuatl, the Aztec Princess who is sexual and submissive, located somewhere in between La Malinche and the Virgen de Guadalupe. She is the symbol of virginity and motherhood for the Aztecs because her lover is a fellow native, which makes her and her offspring "pure" (Rueda Esquibel 267). However, once she has sex she dies, serving as a lesson for young women to keep their virginity. This is in contrast of course to La Malinche who is attributed to forever tainting the Aztec blood

with that of the Spanish, as I will explain shortly. Finally, there is another version of the virgin archetype with the legend of Santa Lucia.⁴ She is said to have been a wealthy maiden who wanted to devote her life to God. She denied the affections of her suitor and refused to give him her virginity. Instead, she sent him her eyes on a plate as a sign of affection; which is the most she would give of her body. In anger, her infatuate reported her to the Romans who executed anyone practicing Christianity. She was imprisoned and when the guards tried to bring her to be executed, they could not move her so they killed her by slitting her throat. Thus, she is revered as a martyr and her voluntary blindness has made her the patron saint for the blind.⁵

The most recurring female archetype in Mexican culture and central to "Never Marry a Mexican" is La Malinche, who for many Mexicans represents the culmination of what is evil or bad in women. As an interpreter for Cortés, she is attributed with the fall of the Aztec empire and subsequent colonization of Mexico. Also, she is deemed as the mother of the "bastard" race of *mestizos* and is criticized for being sexually submissive to the Spaniards. A more detailed account of her biography and the evolution of the way in which this archetype has been perceived will be discussed in the subsequent pages.

⁴ There is no indication that Santa Lucia was or is an important figure in Mexico since there is no accessible literature in reference to her. It is clear, however, that she was significant to Cisneros since she is used in both "Never Marry a Mexican" and "The Eyes of Zapata." Interestingly this saint who lived in the Roman Empire is a celebrated figure in Scandinavian countries, where she is called Saint Lucy, and an annual festival is attributed to her.

⁵ In Catholicism she is called Saint Anne, and it is said that the guards took out her eyes in punishment for being a Christian.

THE HISTORY OF LA MALINCHE

Most of what is known about La Malinche comes from the accounts of who is now called Cortés's "official biographer," Francisco López de Gómara⁶, and Spanish colonial writer, Bernal Díaz del Castillo.⁷ Her real name was Malinalli Tenpal, which was probably given to her because of the calendar day she was born on.⁸ After Cortés baptized her Doña Marina, the native Mayans called her Malintzin, which is an alteration of "Marina" to "Malin," with the suffix "tzin" added to it. This is important to note because "tzin" was a "reverential ending," and shows she was respected by them. Likewise, the Spaniards added the title "Doña" to "Marina," which also denotes respect (Mirande and Enriquez 26). The Hispanicized version of her Mayan name, La Malinche, is now more commonly used to refer to her.

La Malinche was born in present-day Mexico, in the area called Coatzacoahuacan, to a wealthy aristocratic family in 1505. Her father died when she was quite young and her mother remarried, bearing a son. Due to Mayan law at the time, La Malinche would have been entitled to her father's property and title (Mirande and Enriquez 25). Because of this, it is said that La Malinche's mother sold her when she was eight years old to Tabascan slave traders to guarantee her son as the sole inheritor. Her mother and stepfather took the body of a child slave who had recently died and

passed it off as the body of Mallinali to the village.

La Malinche was ultimately given to the Spaniards with a dozen other women in April of 1519, when she was only fourteen years old. It was at this time that she was introduced to Cortés because of her physical beauty and competence in the native languages of Nahuatl and Chontal Maya, the latter of which she acquired while a slave in Tabasco.⁹ Jeronimo de Aguilar, a Spanish priest that had been stranded in Mexico several years before Cortés arrived, knew Mayan but did not know Nahuatl, the language spoken by the Aztecs. Thus, a triangle of interpretation was established, Nahuatl to Mayan, Mayan to Spanish, until less than a year later when La Malinche learned Spanish and could translate directly (Phillips 103).

La Malinche accompanied Cortés on many expeditions and served as interpreter for the Spaniards. She bore a son to Cortés in 1522, named Don Martin Cortés, who is symbolically the first *mestizo*.¹⁰ In 1525-1526, Cortés gave her to a fellow Spaniard by the name of Juan Jaramillo, whom La Malinche married.¹¹ They also had a child together in 1527, naming her Marina. It is at this time that Bernal Díaz claims that La Malinche revisited her mother and stepfather and forgave them for their deeds, actually showing gratitude because she had, as a result, become Christian and married a Spaniard (86).¹² At the end of the conquest, in approximately 1528, Cortés went back to Spain to his second wife, Doña Juana de

⁶ Gomara's account of Dona Marina is not that extensive and does not give her enough credit for her role in the helping the Spaniards; Cortés barely mentions her in his own writings.

⁷ Bernal gives the most information about Dona Marina in his account of the Conquest: *Verdadera Historia de la Conquista de Nueva España*, or the translated version: *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*.

⁸ I will use the name "La Malinche" because it is the name most commonly referred to her. Also, it signifies her myth and not necessarily her true story, which will probably never be known.

⁹ Her name does not appear in accounts after 1521 until the Honduran expedition of 1524, during which she was reunited with Cortés and used as an interpreter, suggesting that she knew several Mayan dialects.

¹⁰ Díaz indicates that Gonzalo Guerrero was actually the first Spaniard to have children with an *Indiana*, being shipwrecked in Mexico for some time (60-61).

¹¹ Gomara criticizes Cortés for giving Dona Marina to Jaramillo because he had a son with her, and notes that Jaramillo married her while drunk.

Zuniga whom he had three children with, leaving behind five bastard children in Mexico: a son with La Malinche, a son with a Spanish woman, and three daughters mothered by three different Indian women (Cypess 32).¹³ Nothing more is known of La Malinche's life after this point, not even of her death, which is speculated to be in 1529 or 1551.

LA MALINCHE'S TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LITERATURE

To the Spaniards, La Malinche was a symbol of the primitive new world to be conquered and civilized. She was the body that connected the Spanish to the Amerindian, linguistically through interpretation and physically through bearing *mestizo* children. As Sandra Messinger Cypess highlights, the Mexican people rejected the Spanish symbol of La Malinche and reinterpreted it "as a way of declaring their political independence...[and thus] required a construction of the signs that would serve as a signal of the new sociopolitical agenda" (9). In using her for social and political purposes, La Malinche's image has been altered and abused to suit the needs of the Mexican schema; thus, her archetype "functions as a continually enlarging palimpsest of Mexican cultural identity whose layers of meaning have accrued through the years" (Cypess 5). As Cypess points out, the Malinche that is known today has been created mostly through literature, which is a social institution "that has provided role models and set patterns of acceptable behavior" (4). And so, it is through literary tradition that the development of

¹² Diaz states that her parents were afraid because they thought she came back to kill them for what they have done. In her dialogue she tells them that she would not trade anything in the world for serving Cortes and her husband.

¹³ Cortes' list of children is cited in Gomara's account, and interestingly only the two male children's names are listed.

the present-day La Malinche can be seen.

Her earliest presence appears in the first-hand accounts of Spanish colonizers in Central America, the most detailed being from Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In his report, he refers to Doña Marina affectionately, commenting that, "although a native woman, [she] possessed such manly valor that...she betrayed no weakness but a courage greater than that of a woman" (Díaz 153). It is through him that the story of her life is given, a story that may have been fictional from the beginning because of its clear parallel to the biblical story of Joseph (Cypess 30).¹⁴ La Malinche exhibited pure Christian ideals in the encounter with her parents, indicating that perhaps she was originally used as a model for behavior, primarily as a positive example for other Amerindians to follow. As Rachel Phillips points out, "For [Díaz], the Conquest of Mexico was a living chivalric novel, and he and each of his companions could play out his fantasy role of hero...But adventures of chivalry require a heroine, and there were few likely candidates other than Doña Marina" (104).¹⁵ Díaz believed history was made not by great men, but by the "work of many small men and the sum of insignificant events," and thus focused on the actions of people around Cortés, devoting a relatively large amount of attention to La Malinche (Phillips 104). And so it is possi-

¹⁴ Díaz specifically states that the story sounds like tale of Joseph and his brothers (86). The story of Dona Marina is also aligned with that of the fictional character of Amadis de Gaula who was a Christian knight in a story at the time of the Conquest. He too is denied of his birthright, and when reunited with his parents, exemplified Christian ideals by showing them forgiveness for their deeds.

¹⁵ Phillips notes that even in the conquest of the United States, Lewis and Clark had a native female guide named Sacajewa whose story is similar to La Malinche, perhaps providing further evidence that her story is fictional. She also comments on the fact that the legend of this Native American does not exist today, unlike the figure of La Malinche who continues to be an important figure.

ble that the true story of La Malinche died with her, because from the beginning her image may have been manipulated to serve the needs of the writer.

The symbol of La Malinche changed during the push for independence from Spain, which was officially established in 1810. At this time, "Doña Marina was reincarnated as Desirable Whore/Terrible Mother, and the biblical image used to describe her at this stage is the serpent of Eden (Cypess 9). The land of Mexico represented Eve, and as the serpent, she tempted her fellow Amerindians to eat the fruit of the European colonial tree. The problem with this metaphor is that it ignores the role of the Spaniards in bringing forth the fruit and of the Amerindians in tasting it, placing all responsibility on La Malinche. Later, during post independence, she is "both the snake and the Mexican Eve, the traitor and the temptress, the rationalization for the Amerindian failure to overcome the Europeans. From great lady to Terrible Mother, La Malinche serves the particular historical needs of a complex society of change" (Cypess 9).¹⁶

In the mid-twentieth century her image altered once again, beginning with prominent Mexican writer, poet, and diplomat Octavio Paz who redefined La Malinche as a desecrated mother and a victim, revealing the two perspectives by which Mexican woman are viewed: the mother and the whore (Cypess 11).¹⁷ Paz does not, however, eliminate her from responsibility. Instead of being the seductress, he believes she was worse: she was *La Chignada*, a victim but a willing one (Mirande and Enriquez 24). Emma Perez criticizes Paz for

his reinterpretation stating:

For Paz, *la India* personifies the passive whore who acquiesced to the Spaniard, the conqueror, his symbolic father—the father he despises for choosing an inferior woman who begat an inferior race and the father he fears for his powerful phallus...Paz exhibits his own internalized racial inferiority. (61-62)

Perez believes that Mexican men like Paz are suffering from the Oedipus complex: Freud's term for the desire of a child to sleep with his mother and kill his father. Mexican men are in fact propagating the "bastard" race by sleeping with the daughters of La Malinche, yet continue to project their hatred toward the white father by stigmatizing the symbolic first mother.

In viewing La Malinche as the desecrated mother and victim, she has become aligned with the legend of La Llorona. In *La Chicana*, the authors tell the La Malinche version of the terrible mother legend in which she went mad because Cortés returned to Spain, leaving her and their son in Mexico. The legend claims she stabbed her son, threw him off the balcony, and then killed herself. Ever since, she can be heard lamenting the death of her child and the loss of Cortés. In another version she laments the destruction of the Aztec empire and her liability in its fall (Mirande and Enriquez 32-33). After the Aztec capital became the New Spain capital, people reported seeing the figure of a woman in white weeping along the river; the ghost of the weeping mother of the Mexican nation who killed her children because of a lover (Figueredo 235). In Diaz's account he reveals that a rumor was spread by two fellow conquistadors who claimed that La Malinche and Cortés had been killed and that they saw the ghosts of the two lovers weeping in a graveyard (264-265). This is evidence that La Malinche was spiritual-

¹⁶ Ireneo Paz, Octavio Paz's grandfather, contributed to this post-independence alteration of La Malinche in the late 19th century by using her figure in his novels as a adulterous woman who cheated on her own culture with a foreign one.

¹⁷ Octavio Paz discusses this in his chapter "Los Hijos de la Malinche" in his book *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1950).

ized even before her death and that her image was doomed to be forever altered by those who spoke of her.

After Paz's reinterpretation of La Malinche, many other authors followed and her image has perpetually evolved into what is perhaps the greatest reconstruction of her by feminist writers who find the negative images of her "a defamation of themselves" (Cypess 12). For feminist writers she is the victim from all standpoints: she was sold as a slave by her own mother; she was a slave then lover to Cortés who used and dumped her; and finally she was used as a scapegoat by her own children, the *mestizos*. Cypess points out the irony of the situation: a woman who is deemed inferior by both her own culture and the foreign is attributed to having that much power and force that she is blamed for bringing down a civilization as powerful and complex as the Aztecs (14). Cypess believes that by placing the blame on Malinche, males have sustained their power by showing, through such myths, that women are sexual objects and that they are intrinsically immoral (13). Thus, Malinche can be used to show the way in which men and women relate in Mexican culture and the perspective of women by a stereotypically patriarchal society.

The most recent information in English I found on La Malinche and the general public's (not scholars') conception of her was in a *New York Times* article from 1997 that told of Mexico's not-so-main attractions.¹⁸ It is the house in which La Malinche and Cortés lived in the 16th century, and is also where their son, the "first" *mestizo*, is said to have been born. A couple of artists bought the house and renovated it, using it for their home and gallery. There is no sign or plaque indicating that this is the home of the "parents" of the Mexican nation and

people do not visit it let alone look at it because it is branded as the traitor's house and is believed to be inhabited by La Malinche's ghost. In the 1987 the Mexican government attempted to erect a statue and fountain of Cortés, La Malinche, and their son near the home, but protesters swarmed the streets and destroyed the monument. This reveals how dominant and how negative her image is nearly 470 years after her death. The term *malinchista* was even added to the Spanish dictionary and denotes someone who acts like La Malinche: a person who is a traitor and is corrupted by foreign influences (Figueredo 234).

IS LA MALINCHE REALLY TO BLAME?

If thought of logically, it is unrealistic that one woman, or person for that matter, could possibly be the cause of such an extraordinary event as the Conquest of Mexico. Many factors have been ignored. For one, the Aztecs themselves were conquerors and routinely raided other tribes to obtain slaves that would be later sacrificed to their Gods, all the while gaining riches. These raidings caused much resentment amongst Amerindian tribes towards the Aztecs and allowed Cortés to gain allies among their enemies. Secondly, battles between the tribes were carried out by first warning the other that they were about to be attacked. Because of this, the Aztecs had no notion of surprise attacks and were therefore crippled by the Spanish ambushes. The final and arguably most important factor is the diseases brought by the Europeans to the Americas, which the Amerindians had no protection against. La Malinche's interpretations helped the Spaniards communicate with tribes and form alliances, but she could not have been responsible for their fall with so many other factors contributing to the outcome of events.¹⁹ In fact, many scholars argue that

¹⁸ This article appeared in *The New York Times* Travel section on March 26, 1997 and was written by Clifford Krauss.

she actually saved the lives of many Amerindians since she allowed for communication between the tribes and the Spaniards, thus preventing much unnecessary bloodshed that would result from misunderstanding each other.²⁰

The Spaniard and Amerindian worlds collided in the 16th century, but their societies were not as different as they would have liked to believe.²¹ In the Amerindian world, "war was legitimized on religious grounds, while at the same time serving economic and political goals" (Cypess 18). This sounds much like the motive for colonization, in which the mother country set out to spread Christianity around the world. Meanwhile, they were stuffing their pockets with gold and gaining the political power that comes with acquiring lands and people. Society in the Aztec kingdom was also stratified like the Spaniards' in which slaves made up the bottom and nobles, religious figures, and rulers at the top. Women also had similar roles in both cultures as mothers and nurturers while men dealt with business and politics. Even in Aztec society virginity and fidelity were elevated qualities long before the influences of Christianity and the introduction of female models like the Virgin Mary (Cypess 25). Men were able to have sex outside the marriage and usually did so with slaves (like Cortés did) because they were thought of as objects and not people. Women who did the same were lashed out against by society, much like contemporary Mexican society.

There were of course many differences

¹⁹ An in-depth discussion of the factors that contributed to the fall of the Aztecs can be found in Cypess' book on pages 19-24.

²⁰ This of course is not to say that there wasn't a great deal of violence during the Conquest, particularly to many innocent people. But it is argued that there could have been much more slaughter had she not been involved.

²¹ This paragraph summarizes chapter two of Cypess' book, "Aztec Society before the Conquest," which depicts the society, religion, and politics of the Aztec empire before the Spanish invasion.

between the Spaniards and the natives, but the numerous parallels cannot be ignored. It is not clear as to whether those similarities outweighed the differences or whether either are to blame for the collapse of the empire. What is evident is that there were numerous factors that contributed to the fall of the Aztecs and the relatively swift integration of the Spanish and the Amerindian to form a new hybrid: the Mexican culture. Thus, La Malinche played a hand in the Conquest, but her role cannot equal that of thousands of men. Her life must not be questioned, but rather the conception of her socially constructed myth that has mutated over nearly five hundred years—a conception that Cisneros is once again altering as a challenge to the male constructions of femininity.

ARCHETYPES AND SEXUALITY IN "NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN"

In "Never Marry a Mexican," Sandra Cisneros introduces the reader to the narrator, Clemencia, whose unscrupulous actions would pit her against most of society. Cisneros primarily parallels her with two mythical women: one generally perceived as a negative figure and the other a positive one. The negative mythical figure is of course the traitress La Malinche. Interestingly, and as will be explained shortly, Cisneros also uses the narrator's mother in parallel with La Malinche's mother to further link the two stories together. The positively recognized character is Santa Lucia, or Saint Anne in Western culture, the patron for the blind who gives her infatuate her eyes as a token of love before she devotes her life to God. Cisneros carefully creates a dynamic narrator that plays with the religious archetype but does not allow Clemencia to become as elevated as that saint so that the reader maintains a connection with her mortality. The narrator does not become either prototype but rather

transforms the way the reader views these mythical women. Cisneros forces us to look at these mythical figures in a different light, and hence, forces us to not judge the narrator for what she appears to be. She is the first one to acknowledge her own negative qualities without being apologetic for them, which disallows anyone else from criticizing her. Furthermore, the reader is not compelled to hate her despite her immoral actions, because as we see, she is a victim of the hierarchy of cultures and gender society creates, resulting in her lack of self-worth.

The narrator's harshest critic is herself, which is revealed in her discourse at the beginning of the story, and sounds like a confessional without asking for repentance. This prevents the reader from passing judgment on her because she has already said the worst for herself. She does not ask for forgiveness or redemption, but rather makes her confession in a matter-of-fact tone:

I'll *never* marry. Not any man. I've known men too intimately. I've witnessed their infidelities, and I've helped them to it. Unzipped and unhooked and agreed to clandestine maneuvers. I've been accomplice, committed premeditated crimes. I'm guilty of having caused deliberate pain to other women. I'm vindictive and cruel, and I'm capable of anything. (68)

Clemencia is much like a man since she uses sex as power (Thomson 418). This is an image that has been linked to Cisneros herself, who has been quoted saying, "I'm not kept by a university, I'm not kept by a man" (qtd. In Thomson 418). Furthermore, the biographical clip in the back of her books states: "She is nobody's mother and nobody's wife," as if it is something she is proud to say.

The narrator is the generic "other

woman" who married women are afraid will engage with their husbands in infidelity. This is especially true in Mexico and other Latin American countries where the emphasis of *machismo* makes infidelity (by the man, of course) socially acceptable. Hence, Latin American women are often insecure and suspicious in their relationships and believe in the popular stereotypes of the cheating Latino and the loyal white American. Ironically, Cisneros portrays a *white* man that falls short of her audience's expectations because he cheats on his wife at the time he should support her the most: during the pregnancy and delivery of his child. Her mother's advice to "never marry a Mexican" transforms in the narrator's perspective to "never marry...any man" (Cisneros 68). Through her experience she has seen that both Spanish and white men are capable of cheating and thus believes that it is "better not to marry than to live a lie" (Cisneros 69). As a mistress she gets "the sweetest part of the fruit" because the men only come to see her when they want her (Cisneros 69). Concurrently, the men only get the "sweetest" part of her because they do not see her day to day, and thus I believe she is living a lie as a mistress because neither person in the relationship knows the other. For a few hours in a night she may have the man in her bed, but he always has to go home to his wife, which is why she calls her men "borrowed" (Cisneros 69).

No one belongs to her and she belongs to no one, which at first may seem like she is taking a feminist stance, but there are subtle hints of sadness and loneliness in her tone. For instance, when she states, "The bed so big because he never stayed the whole night. Of course not," she reveals that she *does* feel lonely at night. The *of course not* appears to be sarcastic and indirectly exposes her feelings of inadequacy in keeping a man even though she can certainly lure him for a few hours. Even if the reader wants to hate this woman who

sleeps with married men, it is difficult to do because she already degrades herself by admitting to be "vindictive and cruel." In the short term she is satisfied, but in the long term she is disconnected and disenchanted by her role as the whore; a role, it seems, she can never circumvent.

Cisneros uses the infamous traitor La Malinche in parallel with the narrator to complicate the negative myth by revealing man and woman actively participate in a sexual relationship, and therefore the woman should not be the only one to blame. Ironically, the narrator's lover Drew calls her "La Malinche," creating a link between Drew and Cortes. The way he refers to Clemencia may surprise a Mexican readership because of the negative connotations associated with this name since it is said that she betrayed her people by helping Cortés conquer Mexico. In actuality, she was a slave and was therefore obligated to help her master if she wanted to keep her own life. Her work as a translator for the Spanish prevented a great deal of violence, thus saving many lives. As was discussed earlier, the negative image of La Malinche was constructed in the nineteenth century when Mexico was creating a national identity, "a nationalism that is consolidated through the creation and circulation of Mexican mythology" (Rueda Esquibel 295).

This relatively recent myth of La Malinche has become a fixed image in Mexican culture and it is the rigidity and endurance of it that Cisneros questions. She compares Clemencia with La Malinche because both were seduced by men who were their "teachers" and once they submitted sexually, they could never gain the respect or hand in marriage of those men they loved. Therefore, their lovers, along with society, will always consider La Malinche and Clemencia as whores. When women and men engage in infidelity, it is typically the woman that gets the label of promiscuity, and Cisneros criticizes her society for that. Also, Cisneros questions what is wrong

with a woman who enjoys her sexuality, and why does she have to be stigmatized for embracing it. Both La Malinche and the narrator are hurt in the end because the men return to their wives and are left alone. Cisneros separates her narrator from the archetype of La Malinche because she makes her *worse* than Mexicans perceive the traitress to be by having Clemencia become the seducer of her lover's son for revenge. She has committed the greatest offense to another woman by not only sleeping with her husband but also her son.

The reference to La Malinche is put strategically after the segment about the narrator's parents to show another link to the myth. The narrator is deeply resentful of her mother because she cheated on her father while he was dying in the hospital and later married the man she was having an affair with. (This is of course ironic since the narrator feels no guilt in doing the same thing when Drew's wife is in the hospital.) Once her mother's attention moved out of her household, the narrator claims "she stopped being [her] mother" (Cisneros 73). She goes on to state: "Ma always sick and too busy worrying about her own life, she would have sold us to the Devil if she could" (Cisneros 73). This is directly relevant to La Malinche because she was sold by her own mother into slavery so that her new husband's son could take the throne. After the narrator's mother died, her new husband and sons got the house she grew up in which the narrator believed was rightfully her and her sister's. Clearly, this is correlative to La Malinche's throne that she was unrightfully denied (Cisneros 73). Suzanne Chavez-Silverman writes:

Cisneros subtly conjures up the role of [La Malinche] in a role seldom explored in traditional and masculinist Chicano representations: as betrayed daughter, sold into slavery by her own mother. Are we to infer, then, that Clemencia

cia's mother has somehow *given her* to Drew? In the mother's betrayal of her Mexican husband with the gringo lover Owen Lambert, in her admonition to Clemencia to "never marry a Mexican," has she doomed her daughter to repeat her story, to be the lover only of white men?" (220)

Clemencia's mother has in fact had a psychological effect on her notion of Mexican men, and hence the Mexican culture. This advice to "never marry a Mexican" becomes complicated because it causes Clemencia to loathe Mexicans, white women for not being Mexican, and ultimately herself for the Mexican blood that runs through her.

In the opening paragraph of the story, Cisneros pulls in the reader by saying, "Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always. She said this because of my father. She said this though she was Mexican too. But she was born here in the U.S., and he was born there, and it's not the same, you know" (qtd. in Wyatt 244). Living in the United States, Clemencia is torn apart between the Mexican culture and the American, both of which she does not belong to. Essentially, the question is what does "Mexican" in this quote mean? "Does Mexican mean a Mexican national or a U.S. citizen who identifies as Mexican?" (Wyatt 244). Jean Wyatt points out that Clemencia, and Cisneros for that matter, are "entitled" because her "birth position gives her a vision that perceives things from both sides of the border at once" (Wyatt 244). So can not belonging to one place be a positive thing? It can because you are given an alternate perspective than mainstream society; however, there is also a feeling of isolation that comes with "living in a void." This notion of being a hybrid and the beginning of a Mexican-American race can be linked to the idea of La Malinche being the mother of the Aztec-Spanish race that we today call

Mexicans (Rueda Esquibel 297). However, Cisneros focuses on the "confusion [and] downside of being a mestiza, the discursive bewilderment that can result from living in a space where two cultural systems meet and conflict" (Wyatt 244). This "confusion" results in Clemencia's animosity towards both the Mexican and the white side of the divide.

Emma Perez weighs in on the discussion brought up by Clemencia concerning marriage across the border:

Although Chicanos are usually incensed when Chicanas marry the "enemy," white men, they exercise male prerogative by marrying white women to both defy and collaborate with the white father. In having half-white children, they move their sons a step closer to the nexus of power—the white colonizer-father. The Chicana who marries a white male, by contrast, embraces the white Oedipal-colonizer ambivalently, because—although theoretically she gains access to power—realistically she is still perceived as *la India* by a white dominant culture that disapproves of miscegenation. (62-63)

She notes that although the Mexican is always perceived as such, the *Mexicano* has the advantage because he has inherent power granted to him by being male, while the *Mexicana* will be two steps down in white culture because she is both Hispanic and female. Clemencia is aware of this and realizes that if a Mexican man married her he would be marrying down because she is neither white nor a traditional *Mexicana*.

The narrator's abhorrence of herself and her lover's wife come from the realization that there is a hierarchy of cultures in society in which white women are at the top and brown women, like the narrator, are below. As Alexandra Fitts notes, "the

[*Mexicana*] is often the sexual property that links white men and Mexican men in a system of exchange" (11). In this case, however, Drew is the link between the Mexican and white woman, which only fuels Clemencia's loathing. Hence, the narrator states, "If she was a brown woman like me, I might've had a harder time living with myself, but since she's not, I don't care...I don't care what's right anymore. I don't care about his wife. She's not *my* sister" (Cisneros 76). She feels so strongly against the white woman because of her comment at the beginning of the story when she stated that if a Mexican marries a white woman he is marrying up, even if she is poor, while if he marries a Mexican-American he is marrying down (Cisneros 69). Clemencia is stringently bitter because she has personally fallen victim to this system since no man would gain from a union with her.

The realization of this hits Clemencia hard when Drew breaks up with her and she becomes conscious that, "he could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think...? *Never marry a Mexican. Never marry a Mexican...*No, of course not. I see. I see" (Cisneros 80). Once again we see the sarcastic "*of course not*" that is an indication of her disappointment at not being marriageable. It becomes evident that the title of the story does not refer to the advice her mother gives her about not marrying a Mexican man. Rather, the title reveals that by becoming a woman who will only sleep with men and not marry them, the men she sleeps with have come to see her in the same way. She originally had the power by withholding herself from marriage, but suddenly felt powerless when she realized men, especially the one she loved, did not think she was worth marrying because she was a sexual object but more importantly because she is a *Mexicana*. It is also interesting to note that her mother married a white man and therefore married "up" and if Drew had married her he would be marrying "down."

It appears that Clemencia is suffering psychological trauma in realizing the rigidity of female roles. Once she has become the whore, she can never become the virgin or the good mother. In *Hispanic Psychology*, psychologists explain the "gender schema theory" in which people are "sex-typed" at a young age; that is they:

acquire sex appropriate preferences, skills, personality attributes, behaviors, and self-concepts very early in life. According to Bem (1981b), the process of sex typing begins when the child is cognitively ready to encode and organize information, including information about the self, in accordance with the culture's definitions of masculinity and femininity (237).

This means that while children, Mexicans learn how to be society's definition of a *Mexicana* or *Mexicano* and later evaluate themselves and their adequacy by comparing themselves to "prototypes" (Casas et al 238). These prototypes are reflected in traditional archetypes thus showing what an effect these figures have on the development of children and their perception of gender roles. Although Clemencia is a strong-willed woman, she cannot escape the effect such rigid gender roles have on the psychology of a *Mexicana*, thus she does evaluate herself against the prototype all the while embracing it.

Writers have criticized Cisneros for the relationships established in "Never Marry a Mexican:"

[T]he borders between *gringas* and Chicanas, between men and women still stand, fundamentally unchallenged...I would have liked the prodigiously gifted Sandra Cisneros to give us something *other*, something more than the images of our selves—and our others—that

dominant society already gives.
(Chavez-Silverman, 221)

I don't think that Cisneros' goal in her story is to challenge the existence of these relationships because ultimately when you finish reading "Never Marry a Mexican" the reality is still out there; the dynamics between Chicanos and Chicanas and Mexicans and *gringas/os* still exist. What Cisneros is trying to challenge is how a woman in the Mexican culture measures herself by the standards her masculine society has created, and how no matter how hard she tries to escape it, she unconsciously measures herself against those ideals as well. Those standards are epitomized in the Mexican cultural archetypes, and thus, Clemencia at once rejects and embraces them.

Cisneros also uses the myth of the eyes of Santa Lucia, or Saint Anne, in stark contrast to the negative image of La Malinche in order to disarrange the reader's perception of those myths in association with the narrator. By choosing to put Santa Lucia alongside the shameless narrator, we are forced to reconsider the story behind the mythical figure. The narrator claims that at night she lights candles to the saints, "especially Santa Lucia, with her beautiful eyes on a plate" (Cisneros 75). Once again, Santa Lucia was a saint who broke off her engagement to a man because she decided not to marry, but to serve the Lord. Her fiancé had always loved her eyes and so she took them and sent them to him as a gift in place of giving herself to him. Santa Lucia became known as the patron saint of the blind even though the story of how she became blind is not generally known.

After mentioning the candles to Santa Lucia, the narrator writes: "Your eyes are beautiful, you said. You said they were the darkest eyes you'd ever seen and kissed each one as if they were capable of miracles. And after you left, I wanted to scoop them out with a spoon, place them on a plate un-

der these blue blue skies, food for the black-birds" (Cisneros 75). Ironically, she does not want to take out her eyes and give them to her lover like the saint did, she would rather have the birds eat them. This is an example of her reluctance to give a piece of herself beyond sex to her lover, partly because she is afraid to, and partly because she knows he will reject it. It resonates with the scene in which she is in bed sleeping and Clemencia knows he is watching her. When she asks him, "What is it?" with her eyes open, she scares him away (Cisneros 77-78). The eyes are often called "the window to the soul" and it appears that seeing her eyes is too much for Drew because he is seeing beyond her sexuality. That is why Clemencia does not want to give her eyes to him directly, because it will be exposing her spirit to him. If she did so, she knows it would deter him because he will see her as a person and not just a sexual playmate. However, she does feel passionately about him and yearns to surrender herself, but knows it is useless since he will abandon her anyway. Cisneros uses Santa Lucia to protect the narrator from criticism by paralleling her to a saint, since her manifestation of love cannot be dismissed because it was expressed in the same manner as the religious figure. Even so, Cisneros complicates this association by using a narrator who is highly promiscuous and comparing her to a saint who gouged her eyes out instead of relinquishing her virginity to a man. In the story, the narrator wants to take out her eyes as a semblance of her soul and passion but feels that they are too sacred to give away. What she does not hold so sanctified is her virginity, which is the only thing she *will* let him have, or at least convince herself that it is all she is consenting to give.

More subtly, Clemencia draws a parallel to the "weeping mother" legend of La Llorona, which I did not notice until my fourth reading of the story. When Drew's wife is away, the two lovers have their last rendezvous before Drew breaks up with

Clemencia. He invites her over to his home for the weekend, and for the last time she has sex with him in his marital bed. While he cooks her their last meal together, she goes around the house and puts gummy bears in his wife's private possessions. She places one in her diaphragm case, in her cosmetics, and in her nail polish bottle in secret revenge. When Drew calls her down to dinner, she walks by his wife's bureau and sees a Babushka doll; identical to the one Drew had given her years before when he went on a business trip to Russia. She opens each doll inside the other until she finds what she calls the "the tiniest baby inside all the others," replacing it with a gummy bear (Cisneros 81). She abducts the "baby" and puts it into her bathrobe pocket, fondling it while they eat.

Clemencia divulges to the reader what she had done with the "baby" when she left Drew's house: "On the way home, on the bridge over the arroyo on Guadalupe street...[I] got out and dropped the wooden toy into that muddy creek where winos piss and rats swim....It gave me a feeling like nothing before and since. Then, I drove home and slept like the dead" (Cisneros 81). The drowning of the "baby" Babushka doll is clearly in parallel to the La Llorona myth in which the distraught mother drowns her children when rejected by her lover. After this last meeting, she drowns the "baby" of her swain's wife, which is a complication of the myth because Clemencia in a way drowns a piece of Drew's wife and herself. Like La Llorona, she appears to forever lament the loss of her inamorato, since years later, when Drew's son is in high school, she continues to take vengeance on Drew and his wife by sleeping with their child. In both the legend and the story it is the child who is the victim of the lovers' quarrel. It is no coincidence then, that Clemencia says she went home "and slept like the dead," because in a way she has died, like La Llorona, by letting her paramour's rejection consume her and destroy

her life.

By comparing a licentious woman to a saint, and a traitor to a victim of seduction, Cisneros is defamiliarizing her audience to their generic understanding of such mythical figures. Since Cisneros has control over the narrator, she does not allow her to become the stereotypes of Santa Lucia, La Malinche, or La Llorona, but rather adapts these figures to add another dimension to the narrator. We learn not to disdain La Malinche as we learn not to ostracize the narrator, while simultaneously grasping that we should be careful in revering Santa Lucia for her seemingly pointless act of affection. Cisneros creates a character who the reader would love to hate but can't. We may actually find ourselves in an internal struggle to despise her for her acts but pity her for her brutal self-honesty and resentment, and ultimately understand her to be a product of a society that blacklists women for their sexuality, gender, and cultural identity. This story is just one example among many in which Cisneros pits her characters against mythical figures to not only allow us to question the characters themselves in relation to the myths, but to also reshuffle the conception of the myth itself.²² In addition to questioning the myths, Cisneros unveils how these archetypes, who reflect gender roles and expectations, have a detrimental effect on a woman's identity. No matter how hard Clemencia tries to reject these symbols, she inevitably internalizes them and then unconsciously measures her self-worth against them.

It cannot be said for sure if Clemencia is just a fictional character or if she is a reflection of Cisneros herself, or perhaps a bit of both. It is clear, however, that the first-person narrative of "Never Marry a Mexican" allows Clemencia to become a *real* and *alive* because she chronicles her own story and

²² Mythical archetypes and figures prominent in Mexican society and culture, are recurrent themes in much of Cisneros' work.

thoughts, allowing the reader to get into her mind, as opposed to men writing stories in which the heroine is seen from a distance and fits the all-too-familiar archetype. As Marica L. Welles notes,

...the author and character are emerged in the persona of a female protagonist in a first-person narrative structure. This fusion prevents the static presentation of an objectified female character. The intensely personal point of view releases the female "I" from imprisonment in voiceless stereotyped characterizations of her being and allows her to reveal herself as a dynamic "becoming" creating a fictional world through her perceptions. [These kind of novels] offer a portrayal of woman's identity as distorted by societal expectations and rendered unnatural even to herself. (281)

It is apparent that Clemencia finds her own identity "unnatural" when measured against society's expectations. Can the same be said for Cisneros who boldly (or self-critically) states that she "is nobody's mother and nobody's wife"? The answer lies somewhere midway since Cisneros is lucidly aware of the conflict women endure in trying to break away from the mold society tries to put them in. However, parts of them have inevitably been sculpted and thus they are fixed to the cast, like a baby attached to its mother by an umbilical cord. Cisneros is at times trying to break that ligament, and at others, she succumbs by demonstrating that it is nearly impossible to break free since the connection is rooted to a *Mexicana's* subconscious.

CONCLUSION

By trying to fathom the social and cultural implications of these archetypes, I as a non-*Mexicana* have been able to cross the divide that was created by incorporating these female figures. The very act of naming La Malinche draws upon a five-hundred-year-old history, and it is only by rediscovering that history that one can cog- nize the full implications of this, and prob- ably any Mexican story. Cisneros gives us a short story that carries the weight of a peo- ple, a gender, and a woman. She takes the coded messages of a *Mexicana* childhood that tries to condition women through archetypes and not only questions, but redef- ines them in her own way; the irony being that she knows she can't break away from them entirely. Only by asking the questions can one ever realize the complexity of this story and of a history.

Thus, I have traveled on this expedition seeking the knowledge to comprehend what it is Cisneros is doing in "Never Marry a Mexican," and believe I have come closer to understanding her as a Mexican- American woman, and retrospectively my- self as a Latin-American female.

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