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Recreating the Macho: Erlinda Gonzales-Berry's Paletitas de Guayaba (1991)

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Latino literature authored by women in recent decades has opened new representations for gender and subjectivity in narrative by resisting traditional plots and conventional authority. This narrative fiction is breaking new ground from earlier literature by Latinas. Latin American women writers, such as Chilean María Luisa Bombal as early as the 1930s, found ways to represent alternate gender by using silence, despair, and madness to resist and subvert traditional plots—a type of madwoman-in-the-attic characterization. Women writers in the early Chicano awareness era of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Estela Portillo-Trambley, developed characters who escaped temporarily from traditional paths in order to realize their dreams. In other words, twentieth-century female characters have tended to turn inward toward a search for identity and self-discovery.

Now, a recent boom of Mexican women writers and several U.S. Latinas are drawing attention to women's characteristics and functions as an alternate authoritative voice in narrative. Their characters are projecting outwards, examining their society and their lack-of-place in it to reveal a search for identity. U.S. Latinas such as Julia Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros, and Helena María Viramontes have highlighted a centrality of gender struggle toward establishing identity. In the 1990s, novels by Latinas have become more innovative in engaging and establishing the female character's subjectivity.

This new female character is altering the traditional interpretation of the "Latina" as a submissive, pious, victim, subject to the actions of the male in her culture. In Mexican writer Brianda Domecq's novel, La Insólita Historia de la Santa de Cabora (1990), the principal character, a woman, takes charge of not only her own but also the destiny of the men in her life. Rosa Nissán's sephardic Jewish-Mexican character in Novia Que le Veá (1992) examines her culture's sexism even as she strikes out on her own as a divorced woman. Dominican-American Julia Alvarez recreates the pages of history with "her"

story: the story of martyred, intelligent women heroines during the struggle against the dictator Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, with In the Time of the Butterflies (1994). And Chicana Helena María Viramontes' character openly defies religion and patriarchal rules in Under the Feet of Jesus (1995).

Chicana writers have revealed some of the strongest women characters and representations of subjectivities, but none has evaluated male gender as reflected in the female gaze as she establishes her subjectivity, as Chicana Erlinda Gonzáles-Berry does in her novel, Paletitas de Guayaba (1991). Written in Spanish, this novel examines the essential attributes of the cultural macho—signifying power and control, and almost always revealing a capacity for wounding, humiliating, and annihilating those weaker and lesser in importance to the male gender (“male” is the English translation of the word “macho”, but in Spanish the word carries a negative cultural connotation). Now, if the cultural rendition of the male half of Latino and especially Chicano culture is negative and strong, how does the culturally weak hembra (female) make her place in contemporary society? She could invert the roles, as some writers have done, silence the character or highlight the inequality, but the paradox for most authors is to find a new way to represent a character's subjectivity without the separation of designated, traditional gender.

In Laura Esquivel's (Mexican writer) recent novel, La Ley del Amor (1995), her characters occasionally change gender as they pass through reincarnations and new bodies. This is an interesting way to have both the macho and hembra of a culture feel what the other has experienced. For example, one who has been a rapist is then raped in another reincarnation (in Esquivel's novel), while another male who killed a woman and newborn in a previous life is then a pregnant woman in a new life. Thus, Esquivel's innovative subjectivity shows human nature is uniform regardless of gender.

On this side of the border, albeit in Spanish-language, Gonzáles-Berry examines gender through conversation, essentially with the reader, and empowers both her male and female characters by her evaluation. Paletitas de Guayaba seeks an understanding of Mexican and Chicano culture for the principal character, who happens to be una hembra. Therefore, her assessments of her culture include her

observations on the nature of the macho, and why culture has constructed these connotations. Gender is treated not as a biological fact, but rather, as a social product. Eroticism and sexual desire function to help create the character's subjectivity and are instincts demonstrated to be without gender. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991) has noted that the force of sexual desire is a political and ideological polemic in modern fiction:

What counts as the sexual is . . . variable and itself political. The exact, contingent space of indeterminacy . . . of the mutual boundaries between the political and the sexual is, in fact, the most fertile space of ideological formation. This is true because ideological formation, like sexuality, depends on retroactive change in the naming or labeling of the subject (473).

This is what Gonzáles-Berry achieves; her character names her desire, examines her lover (and other men) as objects, and in that process, establishes true subjectivity in her search for identity.

In this short novel, a young Chicana travels from southwestern U.S. to Mexico, seeking her Chicana/Mexicana identity. Like a traditional coming-of-age novel, she embarks on a journey of self discovery and travels by train—a symbol representing the thinking process—to Mexico City, where she remains to do university study. She travels alone, as a spiritual journey requires, but as a woman this makes her prey to gawking and even propositioning by Mexican males. These actions cause her to analyze the inherent macho nature of men in her culture, as in part, a way of identifying her heritage. Traditional macho practice consists of cultural mistrust and suspicion as well as general uncooperativeness (Limón, 1994) and a regular display of prowling sexual behavior and suggestive remarks toward females.

The Chicana character in Paletitas de Guayaba believes what she had been taught—that Mexican men will accost her. The conditioning she has received from her parents and her society, and her own expectations are to receive this behavior from the men she encounters. Eventually, she will begin to question this conditioning. Since she is undertaking a journey of maturation and growth, she

wants to discover and form her own cultural identity. In the process of her journey, the character feels attracted to one Mexican male, Lencho, and forges an intimate relationship with another, Sergio. She also observes the actions of Mexican men in general. Then she begins a cultural reevaluation, leaving the reader to identify possible reasons for macho behavior, and exposes other sides of men as well as women in her culture. As a result, this novel remakes the male or macho nature of the Mexican, while strengthening the voice of the female. As a Jungian psychologist has noted, our stereotypes about the opposite sex trace the shadow of "otherness" back to its owner. "In contrast to Freud's more narrowly focused biological theories of gender, Jung's theory [helps us] recognize that our own subjectivity may color much of what we perceive as outside ourselves" (Young-Eisendrath, 1997). Rather than be the product of the male's gaze—as the female in the traditional novel have been—González-Berry's character examines men to establish who she is.

The protagonist's, Mari, only stated objective is to smoke strong Mexican cigarettes and spend her time thinking, as the frequently-stopping train progresses. She tells the reader that her parents warned her about Mexican men, but that only leads her to evaluate whether there is a difference between the Mexican and the Chicano (in New Mexico referred to as "Spanish"):

Papi y mamá me contaron no sé cuántas cosas horripilantes de cómo son los mexicanos. Como si fueran distintos a nosotros. Creo que lo que pasa es que allá nos han inculcado la idea que somos superiores a ellos. Especialmente en Nuevo México, a la raza no le gusta que le llamen Mexican. "I'm not Mexican, I'm Spanish te dicen de una vez" (González-Berry, 1991, 29).

Although Mari fears the porters' attempts to get her alone in her cabin, she also knows that she has received racist and erroneous information in the States. She evaluates the conditioning of the Chicano in U.S. society:

Spanish es cosa del inglés—para caerle bien al AMERICANO

[sic]. Hasta maromas le hacemos si creemos agradarle. Qué pendejos, mano. Porque la verdad es que nada de lo que hacemos les agrada. El gran mito de allá es que quieren aceptarnos, que quieren brindarnos la preciosa igualdad democrática norteamericana. "Jes sir", con tal de que nos transformemos en su misma imagen, que olvidemos el español, que nos rindamos a su modo de ser (30).

Mari is U.S. born and raised and Mexican by heritage. She wants to overcome the racist interpretations of her society and recover the roots of her culture, but she finds she is identified by labels even in Mexico. She is considered an outsider, identified as representing the U.S., and light-skinned, called "güera," then "pocha" or "pochita" by the Mexican men she encounters: the vendors, a military inspector, other riders, and the porters.

—Señorita, Aguascalientes. Si quiere puede bajar un rato. Pero no se vaya lejos. No la queremos dejar, güerita. — Por favor no me llame güerita. ¿No ve que no soy gringa? ¿No ve que soy como Ud., más prieta que noche sin luna? —Pochita, entonces. ¿Le puedo llamar pochita?— (47).

She relents to the Mexican term for Chicana (i.e., pochita) and to her identification as "other" than Mexican. But as a woman in Mexican culture, her subconscious, her thinking process moves to examine cultural inconsistencies as she stares out the window while the train travels:

Me doy cuenta que no somos ni Anglos ni Mexicanos. Ocupamos un espacio particular en el continuo que corre entre esos dos polos. . . .llegará un momento en que ya no nos sintamos obligados a ofrecer nuestra Mexicanidad, sino nuestra Chicanidad como respuesta a nuestras circunstancias (37).

Once she establishes that she has left American racist ways behind, Mari begins to evaluate her place within the Mexican culture. She

evaluates her "circumstance," conjuring the famous José Ortega y Gasset statement: "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia". Perhaps as a woman she does not wish to fit into traditional Mexican cultural ways, which leave her in the gaze of the Mexican male. Mari finds the stares by Mexican men offensive. Sitting in the dining car smoking, she criticizes the Mexican male in her mind:

Y Ud. viejo verde, ¿qué mira? A poco su señora no tiene piernas. Uj, ni senos tampoco. Pobrecita. Y de este lado otro. Por lo menos este se limpia la baba con la servilleta. Y su señora quizá está ciega. Si yo fuera ella, le daría una bofetada: Toma cochino, bobo descarado, deja de empelotar a esa muchacha y cómete tu desayuno (28).

Annoyed by the stares she receives and the sexual insinuations of the porters who insist on calling her *pochita*, Mari mutters the following as she leaves the train during a stop.

Cabron, llámame lo que te dé la gana porque ya me imagino lo que me llamas en tu mente. Tetona, culito lindo. Esas palabritas, mano, las llevas impresas en los ojos. ¿De veras crees que me desvistes con los ojos a la vez que te acaricias instintivamente los cuates? Verdad que tenía razón mi amiga con su diálogo imaginario que inventó cuando viajó por México en camión: —¿Todo bien señor? ¿Negativo el autoexamen de cáncer de los testículos?—¿Verdaderamente crees que me gusta? Hijo, que retrasado mental; qué poco sabes de las mujeres. Qué mitos se han inventado ustedes los Latin Lobers para mantener sujetas a sus mujeres (47).

Early in her journey, Mari discovers that the Mexican male is crude and vulgar—what she had heard from others may be true. But her journey has only begun. In reaction to her learning, Mari is using language that traditionally only men would use and only around other men. Her words are crude for a young woman and would be considered unfit for mixed company. While the author appropriates male language, her character is reacting against macho sexual prowess, cal-

ling the behavior a myth men have invented. The author's stated intent in this novel is to be "irreverent" (Hernández, 1993-1998), here seemingly to shock the reader into considering cultural interpretations, and later to usurp male language.

The function of this novel is the Chicana's journey of self-discovery, but there are many lessons for the reader in gender evaluation. There are also cultural lessons. Mari interprets herself as Mexicana in the first half of the novel but Chicana later, especially after the climactic point of the novel: she has a dream that the train embarks in Mexico City, and as she leaves she finds herself instead in Tenochtitlán. She is taken to meet the city's princess, La Malinche, who sees Mari as the resulting heritage of the Aztecs. Malinche tells Mari, the Chicana, that she is proud that her actions produced such a "beautiful" race, and tells of her decision to couple with Hernán Cortés in order to prevent the extinction of the indigenous race—an idea that goes against traditional lore, but shows Malinche's strength as a woman. This rewriting of cultural history has the woman rather than the man (Cortés) making the decision about their union. Rather than being the victim of his prowess and conquest, this novel suggests Malinche controlled her own destiny. This idea inverts conventional gender, making the woman the powerful, acting protagonist. If Cortés was used by her in order to save her race from extinction, then he is the object and she the subject. Throughout the novel, González-Berry plays with this interchange of subjectivities, constantly reversing men's and women's traditional behaviors.

Sharon Magnarelli (1985) points out in her analysis of female characters in Latin American novels that such characters have been "simultaneously despised and adored . . . Just as the Malinche is viewed as the 'Mother' of the Mexican mestizo and as a traitor to her people (thus, instrument of the death of her race), the female characters in these novels are intricately linked to the death the male protagonists cannot negate. . . . La chingada, is blamed for all that is evil in man and stands as a reflection of that same evil" (100). Traditionally, la Malinche is representative of Mexican submission to the Spanish conquest and is seen as a traitor to the native race. But González-Berry changes that representation and in fact empowers and affirms her role as the initiator of the mestizo or mixed race today represented by the

Mexican and Chicano people. In this novel, myth is reevaluated and changed. According to French feminist Monique Wittig (1992), this is the first step in disassociating "women" from "woman the myth . . . We have to destroy the myth inside and outside ourselves" (15). What is at stake is individual definition. One needs to know that one can "constitute oneself as a subject . . . that one has one's own identity" (Wittig, 1992, 16).

If la Malinche's role is going to be different from history's record, then the male of the mestizo culture must be different also. He cannot continue to be the opposite of la chingada or the chingón causing harm to the female. What we think we see is not what we get. Despite the leering and comments from the porters on the train, Mari, in her subconscious, is attracted to one of them, Lencho. In her dream, the train comes to a sudden stop, and as she steps out of her cabin, Lencho is there in the narrow passageway. He extends his arms and traps her, as she turns the opposite direction, he kisses her ear and asks her to remain on the train until the other passengers leave:

Su aliento es una llama encendida que la envuelve en un trance hipnótico. Sus manos ya se mueven hábilmente debajo del suéter rojo de ella y su sexo erecto le acosa las nalgas como un bastón de ciego buscando la puerta de un edificio desconocido (González-Berry, 1991, 71).

This passage continues with her erotic response to him, until she glides out of his arms and runs through the train—"con los pechos erectos apuntando el camino hacia la puerta del vagón" (71). This account is very different from the earlier incident in the train dining car, where Mari is offended by the sexual inclinations of two male passengers. According to Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), the erotic basis for pleasure lies in looking at another person as object. Traditionally, the male character develops as he sees his desires and his expectations in the female of his interest. In this novel, the female character finds/establishes her subjectivity by desiring the male.

From this scene Mari goes to meet la Malinche in her dream. However, when she awakens and is roughed-up by a military guard inspecting every cabin, and then ready to leave as the train pulls into

Mexico City, she asks for Lencho. She is told by other porters it would be best not to ever mention his name again nor look for him (González-Berry, 1991). Lencho had asked to leave a small box in her cabin a few hours earlier, but seemed to have changed his mind and took it back. Now Mari knows the soldier's inspection is for that box.

Lencho does not commit the erotic act she describes; it is in Mari's imagination or subconscious. This passage is significant in that Mari the subject feels and generates the sexual desire or drive, she has the dream. Lencho never did the things of which her parents' warned her, nor did he behave as lewdly as her culture and society told her he would. Her own erotic feelings and her use of sexual terminology, demonstrate a woman committing the stereotypical actions of the macho male. And Lencho, at the moment Mari is awakened from her dream by the police inspector, is actually hiding from the military police searching the train. He is neither a brute nor lascivious, in fact, his own thoughts display sharp sensitivity. Lencho's thinking at that moment is revealed in a separate chapter:

...El temor que sentía de ser descubierto lo forzó a permanecer inmóvil, paralizado, la cara pegada al acero frío. Desgraciados puercos, cómo se están tardando. Ya los veo buscando hasta en el escusado. Gracias a Dios que la sacamos de la alcoba de la pochita. No sé cómo se me ocurrió ponerla en tanto peligro. Qué chistosa chava. Se las hace de muy matona pero en realidad se esconde detrás de una gruesa máscara porque no sabe quién es. Pero quién lo fuera a saber viviendo atrapado entre dos mundos, en un limbo, como lo hacen los pochos. Cuánto hace que los olvidó México y allí siguen, siempre marginados (81).

Lencho analyzes Mari's probable reasons for traveling to Mexico and assesses her need to come to terms with her own cultural roots. He also demonstrates an acute sensitivity and concern for her well-being and safety. This is his mental state, which belies cultural behavior. He analyzes the marginalized status of Chicanos in the U.S., their non-acceptance in Mexico, and compares this marginalization to the subjugated role of the Mexican male, who must

always show himself not to be under the thumb of a more powerful male:

Mejor me mordí la lengua e hice el papelón de machón pendejo, igual que lo hacemos ante las gueras, queriendo así vengarnos de no sé qué, quizás del amo extranjero que nos chupa la sangre y nos deja tirados y encuerados para que después nos capen como a pinches animales nuestros mismitos jefes—soy tu padre, cabrón y por eso te dejo sin más testículos que los que tú mismo puedes inventar, y entre mas grandes mejor . . .

Así que nos enmascaramos para embestir contra la impotencia que no nos permite otra salida de este pinche laberinto de padrotes. . . . Y a esa pochita—a quien me vi forzado a usar porque en esta vida, ya nos lo dijo Fuentes, los que no son chingones, pendejos son—como me gustaría envolverla de caricias aterciopeladas para protegerla de las bofetadas y el escupo que la madre patria de sus abuelos le proporcionará nomás por ser fruto de un vil acto histórico . . . (82-83).

It is history that has rendered the union of native and European races vile and sexist. Subsequent generations act-out the colonial mentality that some races are superior to others. If men act brutal and macho, it is to mask their impotence, or lack of power. And, as in Lencho's case, it works as a cover or disguise. González-Berry provides his mental state, which is sensitive and caring, in fact, portrays traditionally stereotypical female traits. Lencho says he would like to protect Mari, perceiving that the Chicano/a in Mexico will be slapped and spit upon. But it is Mari who is able to protect herself and find the answers to her cultural questions.

Recent studies have provided many interpretations of macho-sexist formation by forces outside ethnicity. In her book of essays *Massacre of the Dreamers*, Ana Castillo (1994) notes: "It is of utmost importance to understand the damage that machismo has done and continues to do to humankind in the name of tradition and in the name of much that we hold sacred through institutionalized religion. We must recognize that certain behavior that has been accepted by our culture and sanctified by the church is not innate. Men are not

born macho they are made macho" (82).

Lencho, in *Paletitas de Guayaba* has explained that his heritage and conditioning accounts for his lewd, aggressive actions. He then shows himself to be sensitive-natured and understanding of Chicano culture, something not traditionally espoused by the Mexican male. A few chapters later, the narrator explains that she has created this premise of a man who does not hold to the cultural stereotype of macho. Here, she addresses the reader directly (as she had done earlier to explain Sergio's existence):

¿Cómo, se habrán preguntado, sabe lo que en aquel momento pensó Lencho? La verdad es que este pasaje . . . lo tuve que imaginar, o sea inventar. [And the narrator takes the premise further]. . . Permítanme asegurarles que jamás dudé que sus inclinaciones machistas fueran irremediables, . . . sin embargo, siempre sentí una inexplicable necesidad de recordarlo de otra manera (González-Berry, 1991, 84).

Lencho could be the prototype of a new Mexican male, or a new way of viewing the macho. González-Berry revises the Mexican male through the use of more than one man, just as the traditional story with a male hero uses more than one woman for inspiration and realization. While Mari erotically desires Lencho, she enjoys sexual relations with Sergio. She describes her orgasms to him, and at one point discusses the male sexual organ by telling him how silly it is that men tend to name it:

Andale, no te hagas la delicada; no me andes con eufemismos; dale nombre a ese instrumento sagrado, vehículo y portador del ego masculino, el verbo hecho carne, extensión obscena, motivo de nuestro pavor, objeto de nuestro deseo, la cosa del hombre, la picha, la chorra, la verga, la manguera, la tripa, la estaca, la pinga, moronga, la herramienta, la cara de papa, la trompeta, la menina, el pájaro, el pollo, el palo, el chichote, el chile, el chorizo, el bicho, el pepino, el pipote, el pitito. ¿No ves lo mejor que se siente una al haberla-lo llamado por sus nombre? ¿Verdad que el nombrar las cosas es encontrarle

un hilito a la libertad? (Gonzales-Berry, 1991, 52)

This character has just used every vulgar nickname for the male sexual organ in the Mexican-Spanish lexicon, in other words, seizing traditional male language, undermining and overturning it, and thus demythifying masculine power (Rebolledo, 1995, 177). Mari first desired Lencho, a train porter; later, in Mexico City, she has a sexual relationship with a student leader named Sergio. In each case, she controls the relationship and the gaze, both mentally and verbally.

The protagonist and sometime-narrator pulls together the lives of two men, important members of her student circle in Mexico City, showing their sensitivities to life and its injustices. Sergio, her lover (who never speaks or interferes with Mari's chatter or thoughts and ideas, in fact, by evidence of her comments, seems to encourage her) is a central character in the novel. But is he real? The narrator reveals early on and directly to the reader, that he also may have been invented by her:

Se habrán preguntado más de una vez porqué no le di voz ni corporeidad a él. De eso no estoy totalmente segura. No obstante, les ofrezco algunas posibilidades que se me ocurren a medida que voy poniendo los dedos en las teclas: 1) la técnica la vi en la novela de un escritor Mexicano y me dejó muy impresionada; 2) no lo recuerdo bien, o lo recuerdo muy bien pero es tan dulce el dolor de ese recuerdo que no quiero compartirlo; 3) él realmente es el/la lector/a con quien desea Mari entrar en una íntima relación; 4) habrá entre ustedes quienes dirán que él nunca existió, que no es otra cosa que la proyección de su/mi/nuestra visión particular del varón ideal, o sea, el Segundo Sexo inventando el Primero tal como quisiera que fuera (González-Berry, 1991, 39).

As in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* ("Hopscotch" in English translation), there are many ways of reading this novel, depending on the reader's perspective and open-mindedness. Here we might decide that she, the narrator, is attempting to re-invent the Mexican male. But

González-Berry is only opening the possibilities for wholeness. Perhaps, as José E. Limón has pulled from several sources in his study on society and cultural poetics in Mexican-American society, the true origins of the Mexican culture are in those who seek to heal and care for their community, be they male or female. In the traditional male folk-healer or female curandera, this role becomes an androgynous combination of nurturing, compassion, and openness along with a willingness to exercise the power, authority, and decisiveness necessary to confront and conquer spiritual and existential dangers (Limón, 1994).

This type of healer or mentor (along the spiritual journey) would not fear women's growth, in fact, would encourage her as Sergio does Mari. Sergio is not only supportive of Mari, as she comes and goes and tells him of her adventures, he also seems to be working underground to help his people. Toward the end of the novel he displays a very moving, and traditionally feminine side, by crying.

Mari is telling him of her experience earlier that day, visiting the Plaza de las Tres Culturas for the first time, together with her Chicano friend, Luis. Luis, an activist and passionate youth leader in the Aztlán Center where Mari confers with friends, is extremely moved by the visit to this historical site. Mari narrates:

Entramos a la capilla . . . y después de un rato vi a Luis frente al altar. Tú sabes como están esas piedras que forman el altar. Pues Luis empezó a tocarlas y a caminar de una a otra. Luego me di cuenta que las estaba frotando como si fueran piedras preciosas. . . Fue entonces que empezó a restregarse contra las piedras y a llorar. Claro, yo me asusté y fui a donde estaba. Qué te pasa, y él que no me contestaba. Fue como si no me viera, y siguió así caminando de una piedra a otra como un loco, tratando de exprimirles no sé qué, y todo el tiempo llorando (González-Berry, 1991, 85).

Once Mari gets Luis out of the chapel, he is sobbing heavily; they walk for a while and go to a bar, where he finally recovers, and says he does not know what came over him. It is obvious that he is feeling the voices and lives of those who died in the Plaza de las Tres

Culturas during either or both, the 1968 student and demonstrators massacre by the Mexican government, and the massacre of the indigenous people in that very area by Spaniards during the conquest of Tenochtitlán.

Later, as Mari tells this story to Sergio, he begins sobbing, as though he understands what happened (in fact, the novel seems to take place shortly after the 1968 massacre):

Sergio, ¿qué te pasa? ¿Por qué me has vuelto la espalda?
Ay no, ahora tú. ¿Qué es esto? ¿Día de los niños chiflados?
¿Qué te pasa, Sergio? Dime. ¿Qué te pasa querido? Por
favor, Sergio, dime, ¿qué te pasa? ¿Por qué estás llorando?
(Gonzales-Berry, 1991, 86)

While in the early part of the novel, Mari is accosted by lewd comments and crude machismo, by the end, cultural stereotypes have been inverted, and we see the Mexican male as an intelligent, caring member of a society whose rulers do not take care of their own people. Mari talks about arriving in the "motherland" and is interrupted by an unknown voice that says, "I thought Spain was the motherland" (Gonzales-Berry, 1991, 89). "No, querida," she replies, "España is my fatherland" (Gonzales-Berry, 1991, 89), here revising the idea that Spain is Latin America's mother civilization. With la Malinche as the "mother" of Mexican culture and decisive creator of a mixed, Chicano/Mexicano race, there is no need to be chingado by the conquerors or the government in power; Spain is now only an absent father. Nor is there a reason to chingar, to put it in the Octavio Paz sense, or act aggressively to others. The male need no longer be the aggressor. He can embrace the feminine side of his nature that has been so devalued by society, according to Ana Castillo (1994):

The feminine principle is not the opposite of machismo. "The feminine" may be generally termed as the absence of machismo—all the qualities that have been negated, denied, denigrated, and made to be essentially valueless by our society. Machismo has served to distort our perceptions of humanity, which includes the feminine (82).

If we take away the negative impressions from history, and a one-dimensional perspective of the male as a *cabrón chingando*, he may be seen in his total human dimension. Just as it is important for the Chicana to embark on her journey and discover her true identity, and own it, González-Berry seems to be seeking a broader meaning of the male—her "Other"—within her cultural identity. Thus, she brings greater understanding to her culture, and creates new subjectivity for the female character—a "universal" subjectivity, as Wittig (1992) notes:

... when one says 'I' and, ... with the tremendous power to use all language, it is then and there, according to linguists and philosophers, that the supreme act of subjectivity, the advent of subjectivity into consciousness, occurs. It is when starting to speak that one becomes 'I'. This act—the becoming of "the subject" through the exercise of language and through location—in order to be real, implies that the locutor be an absolute subject. ... [N]o woman can say 'I' without being for herself a total subject—that is, ungendered, universal, whole" (80).

In concluding this idea, Wittig notes:

Gender then must be destroyed. The possibility of its destruction is given through the very exercise of language. For each time I say 'I', I reorganize the world from my point of view and through abstraction I lay claim to universality. This fact holds true for every locutor (81).

González-Berry's character takes on traditionally male gender traits, sees female traits in the males she gazes upon, and finally becomes a full person without need for gender distinction. The use of gender as an analytical category must emerge as a coherency, which is being fed by a variety of currents, according to Susan Bordo (1990). Only highlighting one gender is not enough to affect the cultural formation. An examination of the role of the body and the metaphor of the body, she adds, helps reach a greater analysis. The body must be

reconceived and "seen instead as the vehicle of the human making and remaking of the world, constantly shifting location, capable of revealing endlessly new 'points of view' on things" (Bordo, 1990, 143-144). Mari tells us what is happening to her body as she gazes on the male characters in her novel; thus, committing an epistemological "jouissance" that furthers her subjectivity, so that we may examine her subconscious.

As the novel's protagonist and hero, Mari "travels" in order to evaluate her own life. Her physical journey to Mexico is not a rapid one like her departure by plane; she moves slowly south from the border, to the heart of the previous indigenous civilization. Her subconscious, however, travels further—delivering the protagonist to early sixteenth-century Mexico, a few years after Hernán Cortés' arrival, where she meets the infamous mother of Mexican or Chicano civilization. La Malinche re-tells history, and her personal vision in her own words, the climactic point of the novel. She tells of choosing her sexual partner. Her story has an influence on Mari; it helps her understand her own cultural identity. Then she, or the reader, must re-examine the Mexican male.

By using taboo language for a woman, Mari places herself in the same light of the macho, in order to then show another side of his nature (before conquest), and by this process encouraging an examination of the fact that male and female can be equally sensitive and sexual creatures.

The fragmented, short chapters in this novel consist of Mari's conversations with her Mexican boyfriend, Sergio, about her experiences with other Chicanos and some Anglos in her study program, and of her recollections of her family and upbringing in New Mexico. These are interspersed with chapters, which are accounts on the train in third person, or in Mari's and, finally, Lencho's voices. Thus, the subconscious is woven into the narration of Mari's actual travel experience, resulting in a maturation experience that leads to the formation of her subjectivity. Mari holds lengthy conversations with Sergio, but always controls the topic (we do not hear his words, only her responses to his words, and the observations she makes, even on their lovemaking). Lencho's voice leads one chapter, and the very last chapter is a letter from Sergio to Mari, declaring that he must flee the country;

his life is in danger. While the men the young narrator encounters have culturally macho, sexist attitudes, she "talks" the one (Sergio) out of it, and the other, Lencho (speaking to the reader, not Mari), reveals his actions as a front, a disguise, for his work. The conversations require the men to listen to the woman's history. They learn to see what they had not understood before, regarding women and regarding their culture. The men's understanding is paramount in this novel. But both men are in danger and hiding from the police, a higher authority. González-Berry wants the reader to examine the men and pass judgment on their lives; Mari is not ultimately bound to them, and the reader has knowledge she does not.

This Chicana author attempts to create a subjectivity in her female character that she herself could not identify in traditional Latino literature. In a critical description (written in 1985 although collected later for publication) of a character in a Latino novel, González-Berry describes the character as a bright young woman, good worker, and able to have a physical relationship with her lover. "And yet," she continues:

[W]e can't help but ask if she is merely a backdrop for the development of the male protagonist. Is it Margarita's role to function as a pool into which [the male character] can narcissistically gaze at his own reflection? Do we ever get close enough to Margarita to know what motivates her actions, what she wants from life? The truth is that Margarita is everything a man could dream of in a woman—but nothing more than that dream. She is posed as the "Other" of the male protagonist, transfixed as object rather than subject (González-Berry, 1991, 37).

Later in the essay, González-Berry points out that Sandra Cisneros' novel, *The House on Mango Street*, "makes women the central focus of the narrative and presents a firmly centered female protagonist who acts, not as the 'Other' of a male protagonist, but rather, as a subject who dares to confront lies and to deconstruct myths" (43).

González-Berry confronts the myth of the macho in her novel.

The protagonist of *Paletitas de Guayaba* establishes her subjectivity even as she assesses her culture and remakes the male, her counterpart, thus, demolishing stereotypical generalities of gender in her culture. While many contemporary Latina writers have created strong subjectivities, they are not always successful in overturning conventional gender distinctions, especially in eradicating stereotypes (McCracken, 1999). González-Berry is successful in both. By the end of the novel, Mari returns alone to the U.S. She is not with either of the men she desired and came to know nor does she remain in Mexico, where she sought her cultural roots. She has traveled alone in order to have time to think and learn to be herself. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) says, "a woman must temporarily leave the world and inhabit a state of aloneness" in order to be "wholly one" (292). Once the heroine of this novel enters her deeper consciousness (and meets with *la Malinche*), she can better evaluate her present culture. She begins to see there is more to the men in her culture than the traditional macho stereotypical portrayal and displays both traditional aspects of gender in her being. The contemplative ending suggests that learning has only begun. Like many contemporary novels, *Paletitas de Guayaba* does not provide a traditional ending or resolution.

Critic Trinh Minh-ha (1989) has pointed out that novelistic creation does not always follow a "Western" structure of plot, development, climax and conclusion, "in other words, . . . conformity with the ready-made idea some people—Western adults—have of reality" (142). González-Berry's innovative novel poses a model for gender examination in contemporary fiction. *Paletitas de Guayaba* cannot be a traditional story nor follow conventional form. It recovers and rewrites Chicana cultural history by examining both genders within a subjectivity and opening an opportunity for the remaking of men's roles as they should be, or really are. The Chicana not only finds her own identity in this novel, but also a new collective consciousness. If being female is not the absence of machismo, neither is machismo the absence of the feminine. By shifting the gaze from the female to the male, and having a woman examine men's nature, the collective is found to be the "presence" of both, and presence is "recognition". "[Presence] is more than simple visibility . . . it includes the reader's recognition of the text as a form of practice, connected to existing

ideological formations in a combination of resistance and complicity" (Kaminsky, 1993, 26).

That recognition in *Paletitas de Guayaba* opens new frontiers for the Chicano collective. In a study on the lack of "fully human" women characters in the Teatro Campesino, critics have noted that women were cast as:

'types,' because to describe women characters that are fully human would require that he also expand what it is to be a man. The gender liberation of Chicanas is intertwined with the gender liberation of men within Chicano culture. Therefore, it would require the restructuring of deeply held values about sexuality, family, and community (Hurtado, 1996, 74).

Male writers needed to be "willing to stretch their own images of themselves," to explore this idea (ibid). When the women left the Teatro and proceeded to write, produce, and act in their own plays, "the collective spirit suffered a collapse" because gender roles were questioned and an individual solution pursued for what was a collective problem (77-78). What was needed, according to this critic, was the development of "a truly inclusive political consciousness that embraces all who have been rejected and does not lead to the abandonment of hope . . ." (89). In addition, a redefinition of Chicana womanhood needed to include evaluation of the "Chicanos' own racism in rejecting their Indian heritage" (88). González-Berry takes her reader to this redefinition, suggesting that colonial- class and racial impositions may have contributed to creating the stereotypical cultural macho who is without power unless he usurps it.

Her novel is not just about the Chicana's journey, or the expression of a Chicana vision separate from the collective. It is an encouragement to reexamine history along with cultural tradition and stereotypes, to show that culture and identity do not have to be constructed by powers outside the Mexicano/a or Chicano/a's control. Instead, it should comprise both men and women, as complete beings with power of choice and voice. *O sea, presentes todos.*

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