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# Myth, History, and Fiction: An Interpretive Essay of the Works of Ana Castillo

Pauline Chavez

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Myth, History, and Fiction:  
An Interpretive Essay of the Works of  
Ana Castillo

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**Pauline Chavez**  
Sous la direction de  
Claire Maniez



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I dedicate this mémoire to all of my family: past, present, and future

To my lovely fiancé, Olivier, who has helped me immensely throughout my  
graduate studies

and

To my director, Claire Maniez, who has guided me through the loops and  
hurdles of academic writing

I am Joaquín,  
Who bleeds in many ways.  
The altars of Moctezuma  
I stained a bloody red.  
My back of Indian slavery  
Was stripped crimson  
From the whips of masters  
Who would lose their blood so pure  
When revolution made them pay,

[. . .]

My knees are caked with mud.  
My hands calloused from the hoe. I have made the Anglo rich,  
Yet  
Equality is but a word—

[. . .]

La raza!  
Méjicano!  
Español!  
Latino!  
Chicano!  
Or whatever I call myself,  
I look the same  
I feel the same  
I cry  
And  
Sing the same.

[. . .]

I am the masses of my people and  
I refuse to be absorbed.

-Rodolfo Gonzáles, "I Am Joaquín"

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# Introduction

Some anthropologists claim that language has been invented for the purpose of telling stories<sup>1</sup>. This concept demonstrates the importance of story-telling to human culture. In Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he maintains the specific importance mythic stories have to the human world: "Throughout the [human] inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind" (Campbell 1). Thus mythic story-telling has paved the way for historic and literary tales. In fact, until the nineteenth century, history and literature were considered "branches of the same tree of learning" and were later separated into distinct disciplines (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 105). Today this line is being challenged by both disciplines. Many historians use the techniques of fictional representation to create imaginative versions of their historical worlds (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 106), and many literary texts use historiographic metafiction to explore how the past is "semiotically transmitted" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 122). Within *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon raises ontological and epistemological questions about history which highlight the similarities rather than the differences between literature and history: how can/do we know the past? What can/do we know of the past? Can an event be objectively related? Does interpretation inevitably enter with narrativization (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 122)? Hutcheon reminds us that we are both spectators of and actors in the historical process (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 122), and many literary

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<sup>1</sup> Information taken from "Metafiction in the Contemporary American Short Story," (Maniez).

texts dealing with history “install and then blur the line between fiction and history” (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* 113) in order to explore our relationship with historiographic and literary texts. This thesis will examine similar notions. Through an exploration of Ana Castillo’s contributions to Chicano literature, we will analyze how, to what effect, and to what purpose Castillo’s literary work creates connections as well as blurs the line between, myth, history, and fiction.

The Chicano community is not homogenous nor is its literature. Although there is a basic shared ideology between those who call themselves ‘Chicano,’ there are also many discrepancies. However, Mexican-American literature within America is growing rapidly, and its diffusion is in part thanks to the Chicano Movement during the 1960s which sought to gain equal opportunity for Mexican-Americans within the U.S. and to promote Mexican-American culture. As a result of this, Chicano Studies<sup>2</sup> became a new area of study within universities in the U.S., leading to a broader understanding of the Mexican-American population—their culture, history, and literature.

For some time now, writers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border “have been chronicling their changing, often fractured realities in a literature that is as rich and varied as any in contemporary world letters” (C. García xvi). There is constant movement back and forth across these borders creating what Christina García calls “cross-pollination, and hybridization” (C. García xvi) between cultures and therefore reflected in literature. It is becoming increasingly rare to find a family in Mexico without relatives “en el otro

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<sup>2</sup> Chicano Studies involve several aspects and tend to collaborate with other departments within the university, such as the Departments of Theatre and Dance, Ethnic Studies, Communication, History, and Literature.



lado,”<sup>3</sup> and the growing Mexican-American population is penetrating the English language as “the U.S. is acquiring a Spanish accent” (C. García xvi).

My intrigue in studying Chicano literature is due to the fact that it is an evolving tradition as its canon is not yet established. New works are currently being discovered through the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, and the inclusion of Chicano literature is changing the American literary canon. My filtration of the Chicano literary pieces I chose to work with was based on a scarcity of scholarship on these pieces. Within Chicano literary scholarship, particular authors continue to be the focus of critique: Gloria Anzaldúa, Rudolfo Anaya, Sandra Cisneros, etc. My decision to study and analyze the works of Ana Castillo is precisely due to the fact that, at the moment, she is not a prominent figure in Chicano literary studies, but this certainly does not mean that her work is unworthy of examination. I am in accordance with Chicano scholar Marissa López when she says, “Scholars and casual readers of Chicana/o literature tend to impose a set of aesthetic and political values rooted in the same civil right milieu [. . .] and [. . .] this imposition polices the borders of lo chicano, unwittingly shutting down fruitful debate, discovery, and analysis of Chicana/o literature today” (“On Chicana/o Literary Form” 125). It is difficult at present to find Chicano literary scholarship which does not simply read Chicano literature as a manifestation of the Chicano’s social, cultural, and political strife within the U.S. I am interested in exploring beyond this saturated topic. My approach of analysis, within parts one and two, emphasizes the text rather than the content of Chicano literature in order to investigate how the text comments upon other texts. Within this thesis, I highlight and explore the different ways in which Castillo’s

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<sup>3</sup> ‘El otro lado’ translates to ‘the other side’ and is used as a term to refer specifically to the U.S.

work addresses the relationship and intertextuality between myth, history, and fiction. This is to serve as a stepping stone for further inquiry and criticism.

Within the second-half of this thesis, we will explore Castillo's contributions to Chicano literature without reference to the author's life. However, a basic understanding of Castillo's academic and professional background is necessary as an appreciation of the artist's craft. In 1953, Ana Castillo was born in Chicago, Illinois to Raymond and Raquel Castillo who were Mexican immigrants. She spoke Spanish at home and began speaking English at school in Chicago. As a teenager, Castillo was active in the Chicano Movement. Such cultural and ethnic awareness fueled her educational pursuits. After high school, she attended Chicago City College for two years, and transferred to Northeastern Illinois University where she graduated in 1975 with a Bachelor's in Art and a minor in Secondary Education. She then moved to California and taught Ethnic Studies at Santa Rosa Junior College. Castillo then decided to pursue a career in writing by becoming a writer-in-residence for the Illinois Art Council during 1977 to 1979. In 1977, her first chapbook<sup>4</sup>, *Otro Canto*, was published. Castillo then continued her academic interests at the University of Chicago where she obtained a Master of Arts in Latin American and Caribbean Studies in 1979. Castillo had her only child, Marcel Ramón Herrera, in 1983, and during this period, she continued to teach, write, and work as an activist. Castillo was granted a Dissertation Fellowship by the Chicano Studies department of the University of California Santa Barbara from 1989 to 1990<sup>5</sup>. Castillo received her Ph. D. in American Studies from the University of Bremen in Germany as a

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<sup>4</sup> A small book or pamphlet, often of poetry (dictionary.com).

<sup>5</sup> Castillo says that "Although I had no interest in pursuing a doctorate after receiving my Master's Degree in Social Science (Latin American and Caribbean Studies), my informal investigations as a creative writer and my own analyses with regard to being Chicana continued to feed the search for my Mexic-Amerindian woman sense of self" (Massacre 9).

result of her unorthodox manuscript, *Massacre of the Dreamers*, which “crossed boundaries of cultural criticism, social sciences and creative literature” (*Massacre* ix). Castillo has authored numerous works of fiction and non-fiction and has made major intellectual contributions to organizations such as The Association for the Study of Women and Mythology.

Within part one, we will contextualize the historical, cultural, social, and political climate of the Chicano Movement which heavily influenced Chicano literature. Mexican-American communities throughout the Southwest from the nineteenth century onward will be the focus within the section titled “Historical, Cultural, Social, and Political Climate.” Through the use of interviews, references, and images provided by the appendix, it is my hope that an adequate understanding of such a large subject will be provided. With Chicano literature in mind, I have chosen elements of the Chicano Movement most relevant to our topic. A definition of the terms ‘Chicano’ and ‘Xicanisma,’ a term coined by Castillo which has a direct relation to the term ‘Chicano’ and to Chicano literature, are provided and contextualized in the section titled “Chicano and Xicanisma.” The section “Return to Aztlán” explores one of the most important premises of the Chicano Movement: the appropriation of the Aztec mythical homeland, Aztlán, by Chicanos in order to reclaim their ancestral rights to the Southwest. The section, “Chicano Literature: Life in Search of Form,” briefly explores Chicano literature as a distinct literary category in American literature today which stems from the specific mixture of historical, cultural, social, and political elements of Mexican and American relations in the past two centuries.

The literary analysis within the second-half of this thesis highlights and explores the intertextuality of Castillo's texts as they are in dialogue with mythological, historiographic, and literary discourses. Part two delves into the specific work of Ana Castillo and her contributions to Chicano literature. In the section "Reshaping Historiography and Myth through Historiographic Metafiction," we enter into a short exploration of the intimate relationship between myth, history, and literature in order to establish a foundational understanding of the subject. This will allow us to explore and analyze Castillo's literary techniques which work to blur the line between myth, history, and fiction. Hereafter, we explore Castillo's literary work in-depth. In the section "Mythic Place in Sapogonia," we explore the resemblance between the mythical Aztlán and the fictionalized country of Sapogonia as well as the association of mythical figures to the protagonists of the novel. These associations between myth, history, and literature are further complicated in the section "Shifting Narration within Castillo's Work," which focuses on frequent shifts in narrative perspective as a way to challenge notions of individual subjectivity within a text. This is both a challenge to traditional historiography and a return to a "more primordial, unified whole" (López, "Chicana/o Literature: Theoretically Speaking, Formally Reading Ana Castillo's Sapogonia" 153) which counters the fragmented self.

Part three of this thesis is devoted to Castillo's novel *So Far from God*. This section explores Castillo's literary technique of magical realism within the novel. This technique is used to blur the lines between reality and fiction and arises from a demand for myth "to explain the beginnings which escape history's narrative" (Levinson 26). Castillo re-appropriates the myth of La Llorona, a prominent figure in Mexican and

Mexican-American culture, in order to propose a new mythology of “the forsaken female” (Massacre 12). Both mythical and historical narratives become subjected to re-examination and re-interpretation, highlighting the fact that such narratives are constantly being written and rewritten.

# Part I

## The Chicano Movement and Chicano Literature

### Historical, Cultural, Social and Political Climate

Literary theory, in the forms in which we know it,  
is a child of the social and political  
convulsions of the sixties.

-Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*

Thousands of years before European contact with the Americas, the indigenous populations within the Americas flourished. Most recognized when discussing Mesoamerica<sup>6</sup> are the Maya and Aztecs. However, there were several distinct groups co-existing within the region, such as the Zapotec, the Teotihuacan, the Tlaxcalteca, the El Tajin, and the Toltec, but few left such an archeological mark on the landscape as the Maya and Aztecs. The height of the Mayan empire was succeeded by the blooming of the Aztec nation. Aztec knowledge and beliefs were inherited from the Maya, who in turn, inherited their beliefs and knowledge from an even earlier people, the Olmecs<sup>7</sup>. Presently, little is known about the Olmecs; in fact the name 'Olmecs' was given to this Mesoamerican civilization by archeologists. Contrary to this, the abundance of Mayan and Aztec artifacts discovered thus far have given archeologists a window into the complexities and advances within their civilizations which continue to shape existing cultures that descend from these people.

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<sup>6</sup>According to the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies website, "The term 'Mesoamerica' refers to a geographical area occupied by a variety of ancient cultures that shared religious beliefs, art, architecture, and technology that made them unique in the Americas for three thousand years – from about 1500 B.C. to A.D. 1519 – the time of European contact."

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix [Fig 1]

The tendency today is to idealize the Mayan and Aztec civilizations, in part because of the astonishing understanding they had of astronomy and mathematics, and in part because of their mystical ceremonies and religious practices. Presently, much work continues to be done to recover the histories of these people as pre-Columbian documentation of the Americas is extremely rare but existent—the Maya and Aztecs, among others, had complex writing systems in which they documented their histories. What scientists have discovered thus far creates a less idealized fantasy of the Maya and the Aztecs. Hierarchical societies and dynasties signify a less paradisiac understanding of these civilizations in which some held privileged positions and others did not, demonstrating quite a resemblance to European civilizations at the time of European contact with the Americas. The historical records of Mesoamerican civilizations, specifically within the Mayan and Aztec records, indicate internal conflict and external conflict with surrounding indigenous populations. Many groups remained independent of the Mayan and Aztec empire and were consequently victimized by their expanding empire. At their height, the Aztecs were composed of several group alliances—the collective population was referred to as the Mexica—within southern Mexico and the surrounding region. If it were not for the conflict between the Aztec people and the surrounding indigenous populations who chose to remain independent of the Aztec Empire, the Spanish conquest would not have been possible<sup>8</sup>.

In 1519, Hernán Cortés and his men were greeted by the Amerindians of the Yucatán peninsula. It had been foretold within the Aztec texts that one day the god of war, Huitzilopchtli, would return to reclaim his throne. Having received several bad omens prior to the arrival of Cortés<sup>9</sup>, the Aztec people grew wary of Cortés' presence and believed that Cortés would take the throne of the emperor, Montezuma II. However, when presented to Montezuma II, the Spaniards were given many gifts as a gesture of good faith. Among the

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<sup>8</sup> Later, much of the conquest of Mexico would be attributed to disease carried by European explorers and settlers, for which the indigenous population did not possess immunities.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix [Fig 2]; “For the Aztecs, nothing happened by chance” (Wood).

gifts were twenty slave girls—the most famous was Malintzin, later given the Christian name Doña Marina, and known today in Mexican culture as La Malinche. Malintzin became the sole translator for Cortés, translating between the Aztec language Nahuatl and Spanish. She was an essential asset to Cortés and greatly assisted in the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Later the two became lovers and produced a son, Martín, and today she is seen as the symbolic mother of the new Mexican people—the blending of European and indigenous roots. Some indigenous cultures praised the Spanish for ending Aztec oppression, but others did not. Presently, the image of La Malinche is quite negative, and she is rather understood to be a traitor to her people. To call someone a ‘malinchista’ would be an insult, indicating that this person puts a foreign interest before a national one; in other words, it is someone who is willing to betray his or her own people. Her image within Mexican and Chicano literature blends history with myth, for as the symbolic mother of the new Mexican people and their descendents, it is her sin—her betrayal—like Eve, which leads to the creation of a new people.

However, Malintzin was not alone in her assistance to the Spaniards. As mentioned above, thousands of Amerindians fought with Cortés against the Aztecs. According to the research of John Pohl, “In nearly all their battles, the Spaniards fought together with indigenous armies numbering in the tens of thousands, especially the Tlaxcalteca who had already become bitter enemies of the Aztec empire” (Pohl). In 1521, with this help, the Spanish captured Tenochtitlán, the capital of the Aztecs, which still remains the capital of Mexico today, demonstrating the impact of this history on the present. The assistance of indigenous groups in the Spanish conquest is not often acknowledged. Rather than understanding the populations of Mesoamerica as actively taking part in shaping their history, the story is often communicated in a very one-sided manner wherein the indigenous populations as a whole were victims of the Spanish blade. Nevertheless, many indigenous



groups took part in the fall of Montezuma II, allowing Spanish colonization of Mexico to begin.

For three-hundred years, the Spanish ruled over the new Mexican population, calling the area New Spain<sup>10</sup>, which included more than half of what is today the United States, in addition to Mexico, Central America, several islands in the Caribbean, and the Philippines. By the end of the eighteenth century in Mexico, Spanish rule began to weaken and the Spanish colonial subjects became increasingly nationalistic and began making steps toward Mexican independence—eventually gained in 1821 after the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty. This treaty was an agreement between Spain and the United States as to the establishment of U.S. and Spanish territory boundaries, making Florida a U.S. territory and making most of the western portion of United States Mexico. As the U.S. pushed forward in its ideology of Manifest Destiny<sup>11</sup>, increasing migration to the Southwest sparked warfare between the Mexican population and the encroaching U.S. citizens. In 1848, the end of the Mexican-American War—or the North American Invasion, depending on the perspective—forced Mexico to surrender one-third of its territory to the United States<sup>12</sup>. Overnight, more than one-hundred thousand Mexican citizens became foreigners in their own land. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised land grants to these Mexican families living in the Southwest after the territory came under U.S. power. Unfortunately, these land grants were given under Mexican legislation which the United States refused to recognize. The loss of land, the sacredness of land, and the displacement of an entire population are motifs within Chicano literature which reflect this trauma.

These moving borders and sudden creation of nations caused a cultural break and a sense of discontinuity (Augenbraum and Olmos 64). Having gained their independence less

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<sup>10</sup> This time period will be discussed further in the section Return to Aztlán.

<sup>11</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was the belief or doctrine that the U.S. was a chosen land that had been allotted the entire North American Continent by God and that it was the destiny of the U.S. to expand its territory to extend and enhance its political, social, and economic influences (dictionary.com).

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix [Fig 3]

than thirty years prior, Mexicans found themselves facing a new oppressive power. In *The Latino Reader: Five Centuries of an American Literary Tradition*, scholars Harold Augenbraum and Margarite Fernández Olmos say, “To residents of former Spanish colonies, which had over the years become either nationalistic or regionalistic, the United States was an occupying power” (Augenbraum and Olmos 64). Now Mexican culture would come under the pressure and interference of Anglo hegemony, creating a need to retain and rebuild Mexican and new Mexican-American culture (Augenbraum and Olmos 64).

Throughout the nineteenth century, native-born Mexican-Americans were treated like outsiders in their own land. A majority of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers, particularly farm workers<sup>13</sup>, were the target of discrimination despite their immense contribution to the land. Sissy Farenthold, former candidate for governor of Texas in 1972, comments upon this. She exclaims, “This part of the country was built on the backs of Mexican-Americans” (Galán). In addition, the preamble<sup>14</sup> of the 1969 Chicano Liberation Youth Conference also remarks upon this relationship by saying that the land of the Southwest “belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the land and gather the crops, and not to foreign Europeans” (Heredia).

Despite this tension, the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century would see three major waves of Mexican immigration. These three waves were the effect of economic and political influence on both sides of the border. The first occurred during the gold rush in the mid-1800s, the second occurred after the Mexican Revolution of 1909-1910 in which many Mexicans were employed as railroad workers, and the third occurred during and after WWII through the assistance of the Bracero Program<sup>15</sup>. Due to

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<sup>13</sup> In 1962, The United Farm Workers labor union formed, and the now iconic Cesar Chávez was its leading member.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix [Fig 4]

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘bracero’ is derived from the word ‘brazos,’ which is Spanish for ‘arms,’ and refers to manual laborers. This program was instituted as a short-term solution for the agricultural labor shortage in the U.S. during WWII (Mariscal).

these push-and-pull factors, the United States experienced an influx of Mexican citizens, creating pressure for Mexican-Americans to express their patriotism via U.S. military enrollment. However, when Mexican-American soldiers were not granted the same burial rights as their white counterparts, the Mexican-American community sought recourse through other communities affected by similar discrimination (Galán).

Scholars Augenbraum and Olmos paint a historical and social landscape for us. They say:

The first decades of the twentieth century can be considered a period of ethnic consolidation, a steady process of validation and redefinition of U.S. Latino culture [. . .] creating economic, educational, and political organizations to defend their communities against racial and ethnic oppression. As these groups became more settled, a type of invisible, Spanish-language parallel universe began to evolve that encompassed community organizations as well as the ongoing traditions of Spanish-language newspapers, local radio and television programming, cinema, and theater. This hidden culture met the needs of a people whose lives and experiences were not reflected in U.S. mainstream media (Augenbraum and Olmos 138).

This statement is also reflective of other communities, such as the African American community, who also faced discrimination and sought comfort and change via ethnic consolidation. Mexican-Americans sought to expose their daily struggles to the larger U.S. society who rendered them invisible. Along with Mexican-Americans, many individuals from a Latino background joined African Americans, Native Americans, and other minority groups during the Civil Rights Movement by participating in marches, protests, and various types of demonstrations to make their voices heard concerning the social injustice of which these groups were most affected.

Reies Lopez Tijerina emerged as a leading figure during the 1960s Chicano Movement. He sought to recover the land grants of Mexican descendants living in the Southwest, in particular for those living in New Mexico, which were formed during the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty. In the documentary, CHICANO! Quest for a Homeland, activist,

author, and educator Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, describes a “growing sense of a people and a collective history of struggle” which was sparked during this struggle to reclaim the land of those living in the region of the Southwest—land which used to be Mexico nearly one-hundred years prior. She describes it as a “struggle against an occupation” by the United States (Galán). This struggle for land inspired urban Chicanos to organize and voice their grief regarding being treated like second-class citizens due to the United States’ conquest of the Southwest. In this spirit of reclamation, the myth of Aztlán, the ancient home of the Aztecs, would be adopted as a major symbol and premise of the Chicano Movement which is discussed in the section Return to Aztlán.

Education was an important concern for Mexican-Americans. Despite the 1946 ruling in the case of *Mendez v. the Westminster School District of Orange County*, which declared segregation of Mexican-American students within and between schools to be unlawful, segregation of Mexican-American students persisted. Even within integrated schools, Mexican-American students were neglected and given an inferior education compared to their Anglo counterparts<sup>16</sup>. Specifically in East Los Angeles, the largest barrio throughout the United States, and therefore considered a segregated population not particularly by choice, the drop-out rate became seen as a “push-out” rate for a population of students whose needs and culture were not addressed within the classroom (Galán). Mexican-American students were made to feel ashamed of their ethnicity and culture. Educator Gilbert Gonzalez comments upon the East Los Angeles schools by saying that, “Young children were taught that the culture of their community and of their parents was really a hindrance to success. If a child learned these kinds of things, he began then to look upon his cultural background, upon his parents, upon his community, in a negative way” (Galán). Adding to this, students were

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<sup>16</sup> In the documentary *Chicano! Taking Back the Schools*, during the 1960s in East Los Angeles, only one in four Mexican-Americans graduated from high school. Low-levels of education affected employment among Mexican-Americans. Unemployment within East Los Angeles was almost double the national average and those who worked only received two-thirds the amount of money of other employees throughout Los Angeles.

severely punished for speaking Spanish in schools, the language which many Mexican-American students spoke at home<sup>17</sup> and the language of which many parents of Mexican-American students were monolingual. Students often had to translate for their parents, and many students say this added to their feelings of embarrassment as their classmates would make fun of them and their teachers expressed a lack of patience with such circumstances (Galán). Pejoratives such as “lazy” and “dirty” extended beyond the classroom walls and became associated with Mexican-American identity in popular culture (Galán).

In 1968, many students and parents in East Los Angeles participated in walkouts and sit-ins to voice their disapproval of the education system and to make proposals for educational reform. The Mexican-American experience within East Los Angeles schools was one that forced those of Mexican descent out the door and into the labor force as early as possible with many high school seniors performing far below the average reading and writing skill levels. The discrimination against Mexican-Americans was clear, and the lack of concern for student success within school walls was shocking. Among the pleading voices for educational reform was college student Luis Carillo who, during a demonstration, exclaimed:

The administrators are saying that we're disrupting the educational process, but that's not so. The educational process of Mexican-Americans for over twenty years in East Los Angeles and throughout the Southwest has been disrupted by its failure to communicate with the Mexican-American! That is the disruption: when fifty-seven percent of the students of Garfield drop out year after year, there has to be a problem. We're not operating within a vacuum. There's social injustice (Galán).

Carillo's voice exemplifies the thoughts and concerns of many students, parents, and members of the Mexican-American community felt at the time. It was no secret that students in East Los Angeles disproportionately performed lower within their academics than the rest

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<sup>17</sup> Educator Reynaldo F. Macias notes that “the Spanish language for many Mexicans is almost a characteristic of being Mexican. It's a defining characteristic not an incidental characteristic” (Galán).

of the schools operating throughout Los Angeles. It was also no secret that the majority of students in East Los Angeles schools were of Mexican descent. Segregation by neighborhood incidentally led to segregated schools with unequal education which led to unspecialized, low-paid labor jobs, and which in turn led to designated neighborhoods wherein one with such a low salary could reside: a vicious circle which sadly repeats itself today within the United States. However, education was seen as a way to break down these barriers of segregation, and the unmasking of this social injustice within Los Angeles ignited many movements throughout the Southwest which advocated educational reform and equal treatment and opportunity for Mexican-Americans.

To demonstrate the specific educational reforms proposed by several schools during this time, I refer us to Crystal City High School of Texas<sup>18</sup>, which in 1969 experienced more than 700 students walk out in solidarity of a more inclusive educational experience. Mexican-American students felt excluded from the educational experience as well as extra-curricular activities, and several parent-teacher conferences were held to discuss this. Ultimately, Mexican-American students and parents delved deeper into the educational system itself and decreed that this institution promotes discrimination due to its one-sided account of Anglo-American history and literature. Crystal City High School student Severita Lara remarked that the small amount of education given to students regarding Mexicans and Mexican-Americans during this time was always negative, and she says “it was very hard to escape these images” (Galán). As a result, the parents and students demanded equal representation of Mexican-American history and experience, Mexican-American faculty members, and the right to speak Spanish without punishment (Galán). Due to the success of the walk out, the school board was obliged to comply with the demands of the parents and students. This particular instance exemplifies walkouts that were occurring throughout the

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<sup>18</sup> The dispute grew from an incident in which a Mexican-American student was denied entry to the cheerleading squad. At Crystal City High School, Mexican-Americans out-numbered “Anglos” eight to one, however school officials would only allow one Mexican-American on the squad at a time (Galán).

Southwest, especially in East Los Angeles, where many schools pushed for bilingual education and Mexican history courses.

This concern to have one's history and experience represented within education prior to college continues today. Within San Diego, California, which is the second largest school district in California and of which the majority of inhabitants are Mexican-American, high schools such as Crawford High School and Lincoln High School have recently begun a new program which teaches Chicano History and Chicano Literature as part of their curriculum. Dr. Emma Martinez speaks for the program by saying, "Chicano history has virtually been ignored in our education system in the sense that our text books are filled with history from a very European perspective [ . . . ] We study about history from people that came west, but that's not our history. Our history is that we came from the south, so our history should say, 'Go north young man,' not 'Go west,' as the textbooks would have you believe" (Uribe). In fact, she continues by saying that Chicano literature "does a better job of telling our story than the history textbooks do" (Uribe).

During the Chicano Movement, recovering the history of one's ancestors became a powerful and awakening experience for many Mexican-Americans which continues to be a recurring theme within Chicano literature. Students became aware that the social system within the U.S. purposefully promoted a specific historical and cultural understanding while suppressing others and that this would not change unless with direct action. Through the immense efforts made by many Mexican-American student organizers, the voice of the Mexican-American community was made loud. Unfortunately, it was made a little too loud for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and several organizers within the Chicano Movement

were classified as “subversives” and arrested, facing sixty-six years in prison on charges of conspiracy<sup>19</sup> (Galán).

One of the suspects facing conviction was Los Angeles high school teacher Sal Castro who was forced to discontinue teaching. He commented:

In reality, it is not us who are indicted. It is not us who are up for conspiracy. Because in the long run, the indictment will be on the Board of Education. The convictions will be on the individual members of the Board of Education: the principals, vice principals, and counselors who have been completely negligent of their jobs for years and years and years. And it's not only an indictment of the Los Angeles schools but of all the schools in the Southwest, where Chicanos have gone to for years, and where schools have failed miserably at teaching them (Galán).

Sal Castro was a proponent of educational reform, and as a teacher, he experienced first-hand the discrimination Mexican-American students were facing. Specifically as a history teacher, Castro made extra efforts to inform his students of Mexican-U.S. history, which helped student leaders to gain momentum in regards to their organizing efforts within the Chicano Movement. Students and parents fought hard to have Castro reinstated to his teaching position. After several sit-ins at the Board of Education meetings, Castro was able to teach again. However, this did not stop the enormous efforts made to counter the Chicano Movement, and peaceful demonstrations often ended in police brutality and sometimes death. These occurrences were huge deterrents for protestors.

In the late 1960s, there was a new spirit reverberating throughout the world. Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated their disapproval with the current U.S. social system in addition to their opposition of the war in Vietnam<sup>20</sup>. Mexican-Americans in

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<sup>19</sup> According to attorney Michael Hannon, the prosecution of these organizers violates the United States constitution. He affirms, “The entire conduct of these proceedings has been a political harassment. It’s an outright political attack on the entire Mexican-American community, directly and indirectly on all of the rest of us because our civil rights are involved too. The demonstration is the poor man’s printing press, and his right to use it has got to be as inviolate as the rich man’s right to print his newspaper or else our talk about free speech is just a mockery” (Galán).

<sup>20</sup> The Chicano Moratorium was a movement of anti-war activists in coalition with other Mexican-American organizations, and their efforts were widely noticed on August 29th, 1970 when more than 30,000 people marched in East Los Angeles to oppose the war in Vietnam.



particular were disproportionately affected by the war as Mexican-American casualties were higher in proportion to the rest of the U.S. soldiers (Galán)<sup>21</sup>. In response to the mounting anger and frustration experienced by many Mexican-Americans over several decades, a militant social movement began to form. Several individuals within the Chicano community expressed a need to gain and maintain political voice and power. In areas such as Texas, eighty-five percent of the population was of Mexican descent, yet they had no political representation within the local or state government. This is due to the fact that techniques were implemented to disenfranchise Mexican-Americans<sup>22</sup>. Similar to the experience of African Americans, literacy tests were required to vote. These tests were in English thereby impeding the Spanish-speaking population's right to vote. A poll tax was also put in place to discourage voters because many Mexican-Americans could not afford it. In other instances, a land owner, or patrón, would pay this fee and force their worker or tenant to vote for a particular candidate (Galán). This pushed particular political agendas to the forefront which continually disregarded Mexican-American rights.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican-Americans fought to gain political power and to receive a voice on local governments and school boards. Particularly noted is the formation of La Raza Unida Party<sup>23</sup>. This political party sought to create a third major party—an alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties—and to distinguish itself as a party which promoted the interests and rights of Mexican-Americans. Those who would later form La Raza Unida Party, particularly José Ángel Gutiérrez<sup>24</sup>, made immense efforts to

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<sup>21</sup> According to the documentary Chicano Moratorium: A Question of Freedom, twenty-two percent of the casualties in Vietnam were Mexican-American, yet they were only five percent of the U.S. population (Myrdahl).

<sup>22</sup> In addition to 'legal' techniques, unlawful techniques were often practiced, such as harassment and physical violence: a group of men known as The Texas Rangers used law enforcement for private purposes, lynching several Mexican-Americans without just cause (Galán).

<sup>23</sup> The term 'la raza' is used to mean the Earth's people although it often refers to the indigenous roots of the Mexican people (López, "Chicana/o Literature: Theoretically Speaking, Formally Reading Ana Castillo's Sapogonia" 154).

<sup>24</sup> Gutiérrez says, "We were convinced that we were the generation that was going to recover the land in the Southwest, not by taking the land, but by taking political control of the institutions in the land" (Galán).

register Mexican-American voters during the 1960s. Through organizing and solidarity, Mexican-Americans in Texas were able to nominate and elect their own candidates in 1963. This was the first time in more than one-hundred years that those of Mexican descent could demonstrate their political agency within the region, and this challenged “Anglo” politicians for control of city governments (Galán).

As demonstrated in the preceding, this tradition of oppression already had a long-standing history. As we continue our exploration of the Chicano Movement and its mutually influential relationship with Chicano literature, we will examine further how this dislocation from land loss, disenfranchisement, unequal education, and suppression of history through deliberate efforts to exclude Mexican-American history from textbooks and classrooms has affected Chicano literature and how Chicano discourse interacts with and challenges hegemonic notions of American history and literature.

### **Chicano and Xicanisma**

A crucial distinction between labels we have been given by officials of the state and our own self-naming process is that only doing the latter serves us. The very act of self-definition is a rejection of colonization [. . .] I am inclined to object to the claim that we are simply in search of identity but rather asserting it. The polemic as I see it, has to do with terminology and semantics not with the facts of our existence.

-Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers*

The etymology of the word ‘Chicano,’ sometimes spelled ‘Xicano,’ comes from the Nahuatl ‘Mexica,’ which was later changed in occidental historiography to ‘Aztec.’

According to the “Texas State Historical Association” website, Arnoldo De León offers his insights concerning the etymology of the term ‘Chicano’:

Although the etymology of Chicano is uncertain, linguists and folklorists offer several theories for the origins of the word. According to one explanation, the pre-Columbian tribes in Mexico called themselves Meshicas, and the Spaniards, employing the letter x (which at that time represented a sh and ch sound), spelled it Mexicas. The Indians later referred to themselves as Meshicanos and even as Shicanos, thus giving birth to the term Chicano. Another theory about the word's derivation holds that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have historically transferred certain consonants into ch sounds when expressing kinship affection or community fellowship. In this manner, Mexicanos becomes Chicanos. The term has been part of the Mexican-American vocabulary since the early twentieth century, and has conveyed at least two connotations. Mexican Americans of some social standing applied it disparagingly to lower-class Mexicans, but as time passed, adolescents and young adults (usually males) used Chicano as an affirmative label expressing camaraderie and commonality of experience (De León).

Here we see that the term is understood to be rooted in the historical intermingling of the ancestors of the Mexican people—both the indigenous inhabitants of America and the European explorers<sup>25</sup>. However, it is more than simply an ethnic marker. De León mentions its ties to socio-economic class, and Chicano scholar Marissa López also highlights this term’s association with the working class. López says, “‘Chicana/o’ indicates a person of Mexican origin living in the United States. More a political than an ethnic marker, Chicana/o identity also indicates a range of positions including anti-imperialism, an affiliation with the working class, and an embrace of indigenous roots” (López 140). We will discuss this term’s association with the political below.

Prior to the Chicano Movement, De León suggests that ‘Chicano’ was already used as a term of endearment and of sympathetic solidarity. Charles Tatum, in *Chicano and Chicana Literature: Otra voz del pueblo*, complicates this by saying that the term was considered derogatory during the late nineteenth century until the mid-1960s (Tatum 4). According to Tatum, Mexican-Americans labeled recently arrived Mexican immigrants as ‘Chicanos’ in

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<sup>25</sup> The Spanish term ‘mestizo/a’ is used to describe this mixing of indigenous and foreign blood.

order to “disassociate” themselves from Mexican immigrants in an effort to demonstrate their assimilation into U.S. society (Tatum 4)<sup>26</sup>. However, in the 1960s, the connotation of the term changed. Several cultural and political activists during the Chicano Movement adopted the term. ‘Chicano’ took a specific social, cultural, and political meaning which was used to emphasize, celebrate, and “affirm” the indigenous ancestral roots of the Chicano people rather than their European heritage. The term is still used today, most prevalently among the student population, and it is the preferred term used when referring to cultural practices such as literature and art (Tatum 5).

When Mexico lost half of its territory in 1848, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Texas, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming became part of the United States. Approximately one-hundred thousand Mexicans were given the choice to move south, across the newly receded Mexican border, or to become American citizens (González). Many Mexicans stayed on the land that their families had owned and been raised on for generations. According to writer, poet, and critic Sabine Ulibarri, “The land was sacred because some of your parents and grandparents were buried there. Some of your children were buried there, and you would be buried there. The sweat, blood, and tears of generations filtered into the land, so it is holy, it is sacred, sacrosanct” (Galán). Despite the sacred quality of the land, this territorial change created specific socio-economic conditions which were discriminatory to Mexican-Americans living in these regions. The Chicano Movement of the 1960s demonstrated the peak frustration of Mexican-Americans who had long-suffered mistreatment at the hand of U.S. hegemony. A growing social consciousness lead many Mexican-Americans to create a politicized term for themselves: ‘Chicano.’ Scholars Rosa

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<sup>26</sup> “From the late nineteenth century until about the mid-1960s, some Mexican Americans used the term as a derogatory label for Mexican Indian or mestiza/o immigrants who had recently arrived from Mexico and were thought to be socially and culturally deficient, less educated, and even racially inferior. Mexican Americans who had been the victims of Anglo racism and discrimination for the mid-nineteenth century forward and who had begun to assimilate into U.S. society used the term in order to disassociate themselves from recently arrived immigrants as a way of maintaining their status as equals or near equals to Anglos in the larger society. This practice of racism and exclusivity among assimilated ethnic groups has been a common phenomenon throughout U.S. history. For example, the Irish who had begun assimilating into the dominant U.S. society by the late nineteenth century referred to more recent immigrants from Ireland as ‘shanty Irish’” (Tatum 4).

Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram note this particular meaning of ‘Chicano’: “Chicano signified the affirmation of working-class and indigenous origins, and the rejection of assimilation, acculturation, and the myth of the American melting pot. Implicit in the term Chicano was a strategic relation and a strategy of struggle that thematized the Chicano community and called for social struggle and reform” (Chabram and Fregoso 28). This term demonstrated pride for Mexican-Americans which was used to combat the ashamedness cultivated within schools and society. Author and activist Ana Castillo adds to this point. She says, “It is understandable, even inevitable, that a people that has been subordinated by white supremacy would seek at some point retribution. It has been crucial for Chicano/as to reassert positive attitudes about our skin color, our indigenous background, our languages, and other aspects of our culture” (Massacre 82).

However, through such representations of Chicano/as, Chicano<sup>27</sup> identity became seen as “static, fixed, and one-dimensional,” not only externally but within the movement as well (Chabram and Fregoso 28). According to Angie Chabram and Rosa Linda Fregoso, the representations of a collective Chicano experience “failed to acknowledge our historical differences in addition to the multiplicity of our social and cultural identities as a people”<sup>28</sup> (Chabram and Fregoso 28). Even simpler, the very issue of gender challenged the notion of a collective experience (Saragoza 7). In the 1970s, Chicanas began to voice their concerns about the nature of the Chicano Movement. Ana Castillo describes the spirit of the moment as follows, “Many Chicana/Latina activists, disenchanted, if not simply worn down, by male dominated Chicano/Latino politics, began to develop our own theories of oppression”

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<sup>27</sup> I use the term ‘Chicano’ to include both male and female, unless elsewhere indicated. However, the term ‘Chicana’ will be used to refer explicitly to females.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, scholar and professor Alex M. Saragoza points out that several facets of Chicano identity are not addressed when assigned a “bloc” identity (Sánchez and Pita). He says, “the conceptualization of Chicano history for the most part has failed to take into account the diversity of the Chicano experience ‘from its beginnings,’ and instead has emphasized a collective Chicano experience that minimizes class, gender and regional differences while romanticizing the past [. . .] for too long the notion of a collective experience has dominated Chicano studies, fueled by the residue of the Chicano nationalist movement, a concept that requires rethinking, particularly in regard to class and gender and, I would add, such other important cultural differences as sexuality, language use, and political and religious affiliation” (Alarcón 35-36).

(Massacre 10). However, Chicanas did not identify with the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Castillo adds, "For the brown woman the term feminism was and continues to be inseparably linked with white women of middle- and upper-class background" (Massacre 10). Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez concurs with this opinion and adds, "The Women's Liberation Movement at the time [ . . . ] did not understand racist oppression, did not understand the oppression of a whole people, half of whom are male" (Galán). Chicanas were not looking to create a separate movement from their male counterparts as they were united in their fight against racial oppression. However, the Chicana is aware of her position as a victim of double oppression; being both female and of indigenous ancestry, she "has inherited the sexism instituted by dominant Mexican and U.S. society compounded by the sexism within certain oppressed indigenous cultures" (Massacre 7). This brings us to Castillo's use of the term 'Xicanisma' which is used to refer to the concept of Chicana feminism.

Castillo chose the term 'Xicanisma' in order to include the political and social ideology of the term 'Chicano.' The deliberate spelling alludes to the alternative spelling of 'Chicano' as 'Xicano,' paying homage to her indigenous roots. The feminine 'a' ending refers to the female's position regarding the political, cultural, and social ideologies behind the term 'Chicano,' which brings us to our next term: 'machismo.' Concerning the above, the male expression of superiority felt by their female counterparts is reified by the term 'machismo,' which Castillo defines as "an exaggerated demonstration of male virility that is inherent in most cultures," (Massacre 14). When we use this term, we are speaking specifically of a division of power between male and female<sup>29</sup> (Massacre 82). Castillo says that "Men are not born macho, they are made machos," and this machismo has created considerable damage to "humankind in the name of tradition and in the name of much that we

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<sup>29</sup> Castillo extends this concept to not only a division of power between male and female but also "between a world power and colonized nations [ . . . ] It divides the world into the haves and have-nots" (Massacre 82).

hold sacred through institutionalized religion” (Massacre 82). Castillo elaborates upon this within *Massacre of the Dreamers*, under the chapter titled, “The Ancient Roots of Machismo.” Here, Castillo seeks to investigate the anthropological and mythical roots of machismo inherited by some of today’s Western cultures. Her findings led her to the Arabic<sup>30</sup>, Spanish Catholic, and Aztec heritage of Mexican, and by extension, Mexican-American Culture. Castillo says that mythical narratives and figures concerning these cultures have changed throughout time in accordance with male-dominated societies<sup>31</sup>. She notes that Islam and Catholicism have an obsession with female virginity which is in accordance with centuries of cultural practices which subjugated women as male property. Castillo is interested in examining the connections between Mesoamerican, Islamic, and Christian myths, ultimately focusing on Christian narratives and figures which continue to influence Mexican and American culture and by extension its literature.

Within Mesoamerican, Islamic, and Christian mythology, the feminine figure has become associated with the profane<sup>32</sup> and the masculine figure has become associated with the power of creation—removing the figure of woman as creatrix—by erecting a Father God in her place. To demonstrate this in more depth, I first turn our attention to Mesoamerican mythological figures. In her chapter titled, “In the Beginning There Was Eva,” Castillo emphasizes the reduction of woman’s role as creatrix. Castillo says:

Tonantzin, Mother Earth, was worshipped on hills and mountains. Iztachihuatle, the volcano near Pueblo, was another version of Her. But by the time we get to the sixteenth

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<sup>30</sup> Castillo remarks, “a historical overview informs us that the conquistadors who brought their faith to the Americas were freeing themselves from eight hundred years of Islamic domination” (Massacre 69).

<sup>31</sup> “Before the writing of the scriptures, real women had for some time been subject to male authority. Woman was almost unexceptionally viewed as man’s property, a tool by which to produce an heir, to provide him with her servitude, and to give sexual pleasure. Her representation, therefore, in his doctrines, literature, and art was by and large depicted to illustrate his ideas and to promote his continued power” (Massacre 106).

<sup>32</sup> Castillo says, “Spirituality and institutionalized religion are not the same thing. Spirituality is an acutely personalized experience inherent in our on-going existences. Throughout history, the further man moved away from his connection with woman as creatrix, the more spirituality was also disconnected from the human body [. . .] we have been forced into believing that we, as women, only existed to serve man under the guise of serving a Father God. Furthermore, our spirituality has been thoroughly subverted by institutionalized religious customs. The key to that spiritual oppression has been the repression of our sexuality, primarily through the control of our reproductive ability and bodies. Woman’s ability to give birth to a human being was acknowledged as sacred in the earliest traces of human history [. . .] As male dominated societies moved further away from woman as creatrix, the human body and all that pertained to it came to be thought of as profane” (Massacre 13).

century, the militant Mexica have transformed Coatlicue (another version of the Mother) into a ghastly, hostile deity. The death aspect of the dual power<sup>33</sup> of Mother—fertility and death—had taken over. Around her neck a necklace of men’s hearts and hands was symbolic of her insatiable thirst for human sacrifice<sup>34</sup>. Let’s keep in mind that that image of Coatlicue was created in the context of a war-oriented, conquest driven society, that of the Aztecs (Massacre 11).

Castillo claims that with the rise of patriarchy, the death aspect of Coatlicue, who takes on multiple versions throughout time, becomes more prevalent in her description (Massacre 106). Castillo attributes this to the change within Aztec society which became increasingly militant and patriarchal. As recent as the eleventh century, anthropologists have found traces of matriarchy in Mexico among the Toltec. However, by the sixteenth century, the Aztec Empire’s domination of central and southern Mexico re-ascribed woman’s role as subservient to man (Massacre 105).

Castillo’s focus on the changing image and understanding of the earth goddess, Coatlicue<sup>35</sup>, is compared to Christian mythological figures. Castillo remarks, “The Mexica earth goddess, Coatlicue, serves as a prime example of comparison to the mythology of the Near East from which Judeo-Christianity descends [ . . . ] We see the parallel of Coatlicue not only to that of the pre-Judeo-Christian concept of the Mother of All Living Things and as Mary for Christians, but also in the idea of Woman upheld by Christianity in the myth of Eva” (Massacre 106). Castillo asserts that the concept of Mother Goddess is universal, yet within late Mesoamerican mythology and Christian mythology, the instatement of a Father God becomes the prevailing image within each hierarchal pantheon.

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<sup>33</sup> Castillo mentions the “unified dual principle” philosophy of the Quiche-Maya—similar to the concept of yin-yang—which changed four to five thousand years ago, suffering a “deliberate omission of the feminine principle” (Massacre 11). Her point here, which parallels her claims regarding Aztec society, is “that at the time of the Spanish Conquest the Mayan civilization was militaristic and following similar patriarchal progression by diminishing female power” (Massacre 108).

<sup>34</sup> See Appendix [Fig 5]

<sup>35</sup> Castillo says, “we see the parallel of myths with others throughout the globe, with the rise of the sun god comes the fall and eventual subordination of the variable moon goddess/fertility goddess/goddess of carnal knowledge and all wisdom” (Massacre 110).



With this symbolic rising of the sun and setting of the moon, Castillo compares and contrasts Mesoamerican mythic narratives and figures with Islamic and Christian mythic narratives and figures. Castillo says, “For like the Christians, the Muslims also are told to believe in the origin of the first man and woman in the story of Adam and Eve. Woman is the embodiment of evil because of her pursuit for knowledge or more likely, because of her desire to retain her knowledge as the mother goddess. The version of the myth taught to Christians and Muslims alike for centuries, was that woman is the embodiment of evil as a result of her disobedience to God/Allah” (Massacre 71). In addition, the male figure has become the epitome of emulation, as with the figure of Jesus Christ. Although the figure of Mary, mother of Jesus, is also a virtuous one, her image proposes an impossible dichotomy between chastity and motherhood which cannot be imitated and which functions to emphasize woman’s passivity and role as producer of an heir. According to Castillo, Mary’s image remains “docile, submissive, [a] devout image that has received Father God’s grace” rather than “the earth goddess who has the ability to create and to destroy” (Massacre 117). These images are deeply enrooted within our culture, and because of this, a sacredness surrounds such mythic narratives and figures, having a profound effect on literary tropes and themes. However, Castillo seeks to debunk these prominent myths and legends in contemporary Chicano literature.

Castillo turns to two major mythic figures in Chicano literature: La Llorona and La Malinche. La Llorona is a well-known Mexican legend of a woman who drowns her children in order to be with her lover. She is cursed by God to search for her children throughout eternity. The legend has variations, but this is the common premise. Castillo says, “A nationalist version prefers to see her as an Indian woman who is lamenting over her lost race after the Conquest,” (Massacre 109). In this way, the legend becomes undoubtedly linked with the mythic and historical figure of La Malinche—who is often referred to more vulgarly

as “La Chingada,” the fucked woman—and who is also stigmatized by the Eve theme. Castillo says that these culturally iconic and mythic images put female sexuality at fault “since it is woman who conceives and who therefore gave birth to the new race” of a people (Massacre 109).

Unfortunately, we cannot go into great detail comparing and contrasting each pantheon with their various narratives and figures. However, what I would like us to keep in mind regarding Xicanisma are these three basic principles:

1. The mythology that has affected civilizations in the last four to five thousand years was created out of the imagination of men.
2. Its creation was dependent upon the needs of those men in power.
3. Patriarchal mythology can be argued to have been based on a direct attack against woman as creatrix.

Therefore it is the above that leads Castillo to say that, “It is our task as Xicanistas, to not only reclaim our indigenismo—but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness” (Massacre 12). This is why Castillo’s Xicanisma, which shares the political ideology behind Chicanismo, has a particular interest in Chicano literature as it seeks to re-examine and re-explore prominent mythological figures which manifest in present day storytelling<sup>36</sup>.

## **Return to Aztlán**

Every people have a place, and so to say  
you were Chicano without a place is  
impossible [. . .] the place was Aztlán.

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<sup>36</sup> Conclusion to the chapter, “In the Beginning There Was Eva”:

“it seems an insurmountable task to begin our own myth making from which to establish role models to guide us out of historical convolution and de-evolution. But Adam, after all, means ‘son of the red Mother Earth,’ and Eve means ‘Life.’ With this in mind, we can begin to write our own story: In the beginning, there was Eva” (Massacre 119).

In the preceding, I have briefly discussed the important role myth plays in constructing our past and present<sup>37</sup>. Within this section, I will discuss the significance of the myth of Aztlán to Chicano history and literature. Aztlán refers both to a mythical as well as a physical region within North America. Appropriated as one of the most important symbols of the 1960s Chicano Movement in the United States, its various layers are key to understanding the multidimensionality of a people. In understanding Aztlán as a palimpsest—a site in which texts have been superimposed upon one another to displace previous or competing histories—we can better analyze the use of this myth both as a symbol of politicized movement and as a trope within Chicano Literature. Daniel Cooper Alarcón, in his essay “The Aztec Palimpsest,” reminds us that “histories, although their authors may try very hard to present them as monolithic, pristine texts, never emerge on a ‘blank wall’” (Alarcón 34). It is therefore important that we understand the notion of palimpsest “as a model of textual superimpositions and territorial remappings” which is “inherently shifting and overlapping boundaries” (Alarcón 35). With each remapping and shifting border, cultural, political, and social reordering is the effect, creating new internal and external relationships which become manifest within literature. This section will first identify Aztlán’s earliest appearance in Western texts in order to contrast its usage as a myth and symbol four-hundred years later during the Chicano Movement in the 1960s.

One of the earliest documents to mention Aztlán is the *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme* in 1581 by the Spanish missionary Diego Durán. Durán’s work compiled a history of Mesoamerican culture in order to better understand

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<sup>37</sup> Attempts to draw clear boundaries between myth and history are challenged as they become mixed and mutually influence one another as we will see with the myth of Aztlán (Alarcón 35).

Mesoamerican beliefs and to facilitate Spanish efforts to convert Native Americans to Catholicism. Aztlán was first documented as belonging “toward the north and near the region of La Florida” (Alarcón 53). However, during Durán’s time, ‘La Florida’ did not refer solely to what is today the state of Florida, rather it referred to the region of northeastern Mexico and southeastern Texas. This established Aztlán’s association with a region north of the Mexican city Tenochtitlán, which was the capitol of the Aztec Empire at the time of Hernán Cortés’ Conquest of Mexico. According to their own history, the Aztec people had migrated from a place called Aztlán, which means “Land of Herons,”<sup>38</sup> in 1168 to central Mexico in 1325 when they founded Tenochtitlán<sup>39</sup>. Aztlán was considered the Edenic place of origin for the Aztec people (Alarcón 56).

Encouraging the Spanish interest to move northward after the capture of Tenochtitlán in 1521, some scholars believe that the Aztec people, in an attempt to divert the conquistadors from destroying and dominating their people completely, intentionally misled the Spaniards in their obsessive quest for gold. However, in *The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest*, John R. Chávez notes that “the Spanish [. . .] projected their own myths<sup>40</sup> onto the unknown region that was to become the Southwest,” and this fueled their explorations northward (Chávez 8). He continues:

People linked all sorts of fables with the north, the most common of which was the legend of the Seven Cities. According to the legend, sometime in the Middle Ages seven Portuguese bishops had fled the advancing Moors and founded the Seven Cities of Antilia or Silver in a land across the Atlantic. When the Spaniards arrived in the New World, they brought the legend, as can be

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<sup>38</sup> However, according to scholar John R. Chávez, it can also mean “land of whiteness” (Chávez 8); and was appropriated during the Chicano Movement as meaning “the lands to the north” by Rodolfo Gonzáles and Alberto Urista in the document “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” in which they say, “Thus Aztlan refers to what is now known as the southwestern states of this country” (Gonzáles and Urista 5).

<sup>39</sup> According to legend, an Aztec god told the Mexica people to build a city where they find an eagle, perched on a cactus, destroying a serpent. When they found this eagle, it was on a rock in the middle of a lake. Through their innovative engineering abilities, such as chinampas which is a farming technology used to create land on water, the Mexica were able to build their city on the lake. The symbol of this prophecy can be seen in Mexico’s flag (see Appendix [Fig 6]), highlighting the important relationship between myth, history, and the present.

<sup>40</sup> Chávez says, “They imagined that to the north there was a rich land of warrior women, that in that direction there were silver cities, or that at the very least the unexplored region touched on a waterway that would link Europe to the wealth of the Orient” (Chávez 8).

seen in the name they gave the West Indian islands—the Antilles. As the West Indies failed to produce any cities, the locale of the tale was naturally assumed to be elsewhere, though still in the Americas. This locale was situated in northwest New Spain when the Spaniards began to associate the Seven Cities with the Seven Caves of the Aztecs<sup>41</sup> [ . . . ] the myths of the Seven Caves and the Seven Cities merged. These superimposed images formed the guiding myth of the Spanish exploration of the Southwest” (Chávez 14-15).

Chávez maintains that the Spanish were projecting images derived from Greek mythology onto the landscape of the New World and these images were being reflected by the Native Americans (Chávez 11). As the myths of the Spanish and the Aztecs became intermingled, interest in the Southwest grew. In 1538, two friars, Juan de la Ascunción and Pedro Nadal, led the first formal expedition to the Southwest by land. They were in search of Chicomoztoc, another name for Aztlán meaning ‘place of the seven caves’ (Chávez 13). This expedition was the first to seek Aztlán within this area and as a consequence, it was the first time the region as a whole became associated with Aztlán. After decades of Spanish exploration without finding the idealized Aztlán<sup>42</sup>, the Spanish discovered that the wealth they sought lied in the agricultural value of the land itself. Later descriptions of New Spain emphasized “the land and its produce, rather than of silver cities” (Chávez 19).

In the late twentieth century, the myth of Aztlán was revived and appropriated by proponents of the Chicano Movement. The recent social, cultural, and political struggle mentioned in the preceding sections is critical to understanding the use of Aztlán within literature today. It is from these events that the myth and symbol of Aztlán came to be overwhelmingly associated with the Southwest of the United States—the states which were

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<sup>41</sup> The Spanish explorer Nuño de Guzmán noted that storytellers had recounted that Aztlán had seven caves which were totemic shrines of Aztec clans (Chávez 13).

<sup>42</sup> Chávez says, “In 1530, about four hundred miles northwest of Mexico City, the conquistador Nuño de Guzmán encountered a place called Aztatlán, whose name and environment resembled those of the legendary Aztlán. Though the evidence indicated (and still indicates) that Aztatlán and Aztlán were one and the same place, it must have seemed too mundane a location for a land that had been idealized to the point of a paradise on earth” (Chávez 13).

seceded to the United States as a result of the Mexican American War<sup>43</sup>. At a time when people from various class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds began to organize and fight for social justice, the history and myth of Mexican and Mexican-American origins set them apart from African Americans: Chicanos felt an “ancestral birthright” and “staked their claim to the ‘northern land of Aztlán’” which is “a territory that had been stolen from them by a ‘brutal gringo<sup>44</sup> invasion’” (Alarcón 51).

The first political document to mention Aztlán in association with Chicanos appeared in “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán”<sup>45</sup> at the Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in 1969. This document proclaims Aztlán as a nation and as the homeland of the Chicano people in addition to the following: Chicanos will not recognize the imposition of borders established by “European invaders,” the Chicano community is to remain unified, Chicanos wish to have “social, economic, cultural, and political independence” i.e. be self-determined, and art must strengthen and maintain the unity of the Chicano people<sup>46</sup>. We see here the most recent layer of the Aztlán palimpsest in which the myth of Aztlán is used to counter American hegemony stemming from American myths<sup>47</sup>. In the documentary, Chicano! Quest for a Homeland, educator Tomás Atencio supports this claim by saying, “We had been educated under mythologies and myths that basically emanated and came out of the American experience. Whether it’s Manifest Destiny or the cherry tree, or whatever myths that energize our culture. We now had something. The myth of Aztlán, it connected us all” (Galán).

The myth of Aztlán empowered Chicanos by “reaffirm[ing] a Chicano identity rooted in ancient Aztec myths” (Galán). Adding to this, scholars Angie Chambram and Rosa Linda

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<sup>43</sup> Daniel Cooper Alarcón says, “What we can take away from Chávez is his astute observation that the various versions of the Aztlán story (or the various layers of the palimpsest) caused the legendary region to be one that shifted as necessary to meet the demands of the dialogue between and within cultures” (Alarcón 59).

<sup>44</sup> ‘Gringo’ is a derogatory term used to refer to a person from an English-speaking country.

<sup>45</sup> See Appendix [Fig 7]

<sup>46</sup> “We must insure [sic] that our writers, poets, musicians, and artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture” (Alarcón 51).

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Cooper Alarcón says, “the palimpsest’s structure of interlocking, competing narratives has the advantage of preventing the dominant voice from completely silencing the others” (Alarcón 35).

Fregoso explain in their book *Chicana/o Cultural Representations* that “Aztlán, the legendary homeland of the Aztecs, claimed by Chicano cultural nationalism as the mythical place of the Chicano nation [. . .] provided a basis for a return to our roots, for a return to an identity before domination and subjugation—a voyage back to pre-Columbian times” (Chabram-Dernersesian 27). By blending the myth of Aztlán with the social, cultural, and political struggle of the twentieth century, the location of Aztlán became real—indisputably placed within the entire region of the Southwest. In this context, Aztlán functions as a symbol used to ground a people who have become dislocated by social and historical upheaval. Luis Leal adds a second aspect to the contemporary symbolism of Aztlán: “As a Chicano symbol, Aztlán has two meanings: first it represents the geographic region known as the Southwestern part of the United States [. . .] second and more important, Aztlán symbolizes the spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they may live or where they may find themselves” (Alarcón 49). However, critics have claimed that this symbol divides more than it unifies.

On the one hand, the concept of Aztlán unifies Chicano nationalists, but on the other hand, the concept of Aztlán “obscures and elides” intracultural experience, as I touched upon in the section “Chicano and Xicanisma,” and intercultural experience. Chicanos are the product of intercultural experience, and although the Chicano Movement exercises indigenous pride as a reaction to discrimination and oppression<sup>48</sup>, it denies the European influence of Chicanos by stigmatizing it and attempts to exclude it completely. In addition, the ambiguity of indigenous ancestry allows one to pick and choose their identity for specific purposes and ignores the intercultural conflicts between indigenous tribes such as those who were terrorized by the Aztecs. It also threatens to exclude Mexican-Americans who do not

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<sup>48</sup> Scholars Fregoso and Chabram state that, “Chicanos emphasized native as opposed to European origins, and they articulated publicly that we were ‘brown’ and that ‘brown was beautiful’ (Fregoso and Chabram 27).

agree with all aspects of Chicano ideology<sup>49</sup> as it is a myth used to counter competing myths such as Manifest Destiny. Therefore, understanding Aztlán as a palimpsest acknowledges the exclusionary power and provisional quality of identity, and the complexity and shape-shifting of this myth reflects the complexity and shape-shifting of a people. Understanding this is important because Chicano literature is in part an expression of the complexity and heterogeneity of the Chicana/o identity.

### **Chicano Literature: Life in Search of Form**

In literature life is submitted into the labyrinth of finding form—since the word, as a symbol, can verify, can search, can identify, can conserve. In short, the literary intent is but one, a very important one at least, of the many reflections of the intellectual development and of the very own characteristic of the people or ‘*raza*.’ It will not be necessary to underline the fact that there now exists a Chicano literature because it already exists. It is out of the oral or latent states. We can observe the *Chicano’s frenetic intent in getting into the labyrinth and searching for forms*. We can sense that here is life in search of form.

-Tomás Rivera, Tomás Rivera: The Complete Works

Until recently, Chicano literature was understood to begin in 1959, but now a longer tradition is recognized. In “Pre-Chicano Literature: Process and Meaning (1539-1959),” Luis Leal speaks of Pre-Chicano literature, which refers to the literature from which Chicano literature stems—before the contemporary use of the term ‘Chicano.’ Leal says, “It was not until the last few decades of our century that Chicano critics have come to agree that this literature was not born in 1959, but has a history that extends as far back as the colonial period. No less important is the fact that few researchers have dedicated themselves to the

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<sup>49</sup> Educator Carlos Muñoz, Jr. recounts his experience explaining his political activism as a Chicano to his family: “Unfortunately, we had not reached all of our people, even our own families—we had a lot of confusion about ‘why call yourselves Chicano’ for example, ‘you’re mexicano,’ and we had to explain to our own families why we were ‘Chicano’” (Galán).



arduous task of recovering that history,” (Leal 83). In fact, through the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project<sup>50</sup>, scholars are working hard to recover many Mexican and Mexican-American texts among others. Several texts have been discovered thus far, and it is certain that many remain to be brought to light. However, although this is a very long and tedious task, Leal is certain that his outline of Mexican-American literature will need to be revised in the coming years<sup>51</sup>.

This highlights the fact that the canon of Chicano literature is taking shape at present. In fact, it was also only recently that the whole canon of U.S. literature was reevaluated in order to include “works so long excluded from the canon of U.S. literature [which] are every bit as ‘universal’ as other works that have historically been included” (Tatum 6). It was only approximately thirty years ago when anthologies used for U.S. high school and college classes excluded women, ethnic, and racial minorities, such as Chicana/o, African American, Native American, and Asian American writers (Tatum 6). In *Chicano and Chicana Literature: Otra voz del pueblo*, Charles Tatum explains this change: “With the wholesale reevaluation of social norms and political practices that took place in the 1960s, women and underrepresented minority students, teachers, professors, scholars, and others began to demand that voices historically excluded from the U.S. literary canon be represented” (Tatum 6). Chicano literature is becoming an important part of American literature, not only in its medium to convey the Chicano experience but also in its innovative literary techniques. This section will briefly discuss some discerning features of Chicano literature.

Augenbraum and Olmos remind us that “the spectacular flowering of U.S. Latino letters from the 1960s onward grew from seeds carefully and painstakingly sown by earlier

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<sup>50</sup> According to the project’s website, “Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project is a national project to locate, preserve, and disseminate Hispanic culture of the United State in its written form since colonial times until 1960” (Latinoteca).

<sup>51</sup> Luis Leal concludes by saying, “This brief summary of Mexican-American literature prior to 1959 will, most certainly, have to be revised and enlarged, as we are sure that with time, new works will be discovered which will force us to rewrite its history” (Leal 83).

writers”<sup>52</sup> (Augenbraum and Olmos 137). Although the term ‘Chicano’ did not come into use until the middle of the twentieth century, Mexican-American literature appeared a few years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo<sup>53</sup> and became dominated by cultural nationalism in which a call for resistance displaced focus from Spain to the West (Augenbraum and Olmos 64). María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s novel, *The Squatter and the Don*, is one such work. This novel, which is the first novel acknowledged to have been written by a Mexican-American, was published in 1885, and recounts the invasion of California by Anglos from the perspective of the Californios—those whose families had been living in California before it was ceded to the U.S. However, this novel has been criticized for reflecting “Anglo aesthetics of characterization and style” (Augenbraum and Olmos 65). Other Mexican-American writers, like Eusebio Chacón, believed that “Anglo literary aesthetics could not convey the life and society of Mexicans in the United States”<sup>54</sup> (Augenbraum and Olmos 65). One main reason for this was language.

Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, most Mexican-American authors wrote in Spanish. However, during the twentieth century, assimilation within U.S. society created an increase of English language use among those of Mexican descent<sup>55</sup>. Today, many writers of Chicano literature write primarily in English with frequent use of “Chicano Spanish.” In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” author Gloria Anzaldúa defines Chicano Spanish as follows:

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who

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<sup>52</sup> Augenbraum and Olmos add, “Their lonely efforts often went unrecognized by mainstream critics as well as by younger Latino authors, who were frequently unaware of their existence” (Augenbraum and Olmos 137).

<sup>53</sup> Beginning in the 1850s, several autobiographies by Mexican-Americans were published such as the memoirs of Juan Según, and a collection of Californian oral histories by Frederick Bancroft (Augenbraum and Olmos 65).

<sup>54</sup> On the other side, Augenbraum and Olmos note that, “While writers were establishing what has been called the ‘boom’ of Latin American narrative, their U.S. counterparts were forging a distinct tradition in poetry, drama, and fiction in their own voices” (Augenbraum and Olmos 137).

<sup>55</sup> Charles Tatum says, “Up until about the end of the nineteenth century most Chicana/o writers published their works in Spanish, either because it was their only language or because it was their first, or dominant, language. Many writers who were fluent bilinguals and equally comfortable in both languages preferred Spanish because, among other reasons, it was the language of most of their readers. During the twentieth century, as Americans of Mexican descent began to assimilate more rapidly into mainstream Anglo society and to become progressively less fluent in Spanish, most writers for whom English was now their dominant language naturally wrote in English. From about 1965 forward, contemporary Chicana/o poets, playwrights, novelist, short story writers, and essayists have published primarily in English” (Tatum 9-10).

are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni ingles, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages<sup>56</sup> (C. García 40).

With this in mind, Gloria Anzaldúa continues by saying that just as there is no one Chicano experience, there is also no one Chicano language (C. García 44). Within Chicano literature, a reader will find variations of English, both standard and vernacular, and variations of Spanish, both standard and vernacular<sup>57</sup>. Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia, known by the pen name Alurista, demonstrates this very well in his writing.

Alurista is a major figure in Chicano literature. He promulgated the concept and symbol of Aztlán within his writing, and during the Chicano Movement, often read his poetry during demonstrations<sup>58</sup> (Augenbraum and Olmos 287). Through his conceptualization of Aztlán within his poetry, Chicano writers everywhere began to adopt the symbol of Aztlán within their writing. Chicano writer Juan Felipe Herrera describes this moment as a “bomb” going off with the sudden appearance within Chicano literature of Aztlán and related images such as the Mexica gods, especially the sun god Quetzalcoatl (Herrera). This type of literature cultivated pride in the cultural past of Mexican-Americans, and was often blended with notions of colonialism and revolution to reflect the present struggle Mexican-Americans were facing with Anglo hegemony. Alurista’s first book, *floricanto en aztlán* (1971), is a

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<sup>56</sup> Augenbraum and Olmos add that these mixing of “cultural codes” is a powerful technique to express “peripheral identities” (Augenbraum and Olmos 140).

<sup>57</sup> Anzaldúa adds, “And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are: 1. Standard English 2. Working class and slang English 3. Standard Spanish 4. Standard Mexican Spanish 5. North Mexican Spanish dialect 6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations) 7. Tex-Mex 8. Pachuco (called caló),” (C. García 40).

<sup>58</sup> Augenbraum and Olmos say, “As opposed to the more nostalgic and romantic literary perception of earlier Latino writers, however, the authors of the 1960s by and large produced militant calls for social change, particularly in poetry and drama. No longer confined to the traditional forms of publication or concerned with critical recognition, writers delivered their works directly to an eager public at political rallies, union meetings, street performances, and myriad storefront coffeehouses” (Augenbraum and Olmos 140). Rodolfo “Corky” González was another prominent Chicano figure during the Chicano Movement, and his poem, “I Am Joaquín telescopes all of Chicano history, from before the Spanish conquest to the present day, into the personal ‘I,’ using the self as a narrow entryway into a vast social, political, and artistic arena” (Augenbraum and Olmos 265).

compilation of one hundred poems whose central themes reflect those of the above. By using Aztlán as unifying metaphor, Alurista helped to inspire and create a growing social consciousness among Chicanos. The term ‘floricanto’ was later used by Juan Felipe Herrera as “a metaphor to refer to a whole new system of knowledge spreading throughout the Southwest,” which fostered an excitement about knowing and understanding one’s past, and in turn, fostered a desire to become more socially aware and active in the present in order to procure a better future for all Mexican-Americans (Herrera). In the 2011 edition of *floricanto en aztlán*, Alurista writes, “Floricanto is a seminal oeuvre in the emergence n foundation of a ‘new’ literature, a ‘modern’ national literature codifying the heart n mind of Xicano people in borderless Aztlán. In it, Xicano multilingualism (standard n quotidian spanish n english as well as nahuatl n maya locutions<sup>59</sup>) was given a ‘forum’ to formally recognize n already existing communicative reality heretofore, legitimizing it [. . .] sin la palabra el recuerdo de las armas muere<sup>60</sup>” (Alurista). With his form reflecting his substance, Alurista’s words allude to the powerful use of language and therefore importance in recognition of one’s language, one’s voice, as valid. Gloria Anzaldúa’s use of Ray Gywn Smith’s words—“Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?”—refers precisely to the cultural harm and oppression a people feel when their language is not recognized, and by the same token, the indigenous languages of pre-Columbian America became dominated by Spanish and later by English, so the need to invoke one’s own language or the language of one’s ancestors fueled Chicano counterculture and literature (C. García 37).

Following this tradition of the 1960s<sup>61</sup>, scholars Augenbraum and Olmos say that, “the literary task was perceived as promoting political struggles and serving as a stimulus for

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<sup>59</sup> There has been some attempt to revive the Nahuatl and Maya language within Chicano literature. However, this is a rather difficult task for the contemporary Chicana/o writer who most likely grew up speaking, hearing, reading, and writing Spanish and/or English.

<sup>60</sup> This roughly translates to ‘without the word the memory of fighting dies.’

<sup>61</sup> In *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos Among Mexican Americans*, Ignacio M. García says, “Chicano art, Chicano literature, and Chicano music remain a product of the Movement” (I. García 144).

action against social injustices” (Augenbraum and Olmos 139). Declarations were made in two Chicano political manifestos. The first was the manifesto, “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” of the 1969 National Liberation Youth Conference which mandated that “art was to strengthen identity and maintain unity”<sup>62</sup> (Alarcón 51). The second was in the political program of La Raza Unida Party which the co-founder of the party, José Ángel Gutiérrez, claims expressed “a need to manifest [political] goals in art form” (Galán). Gutiérrez says that through this, Chicanos could identify themselves as “creators” rather than as victims. Augenbraum and Olmos add to this point by saying, “The articulation of countervalues also extended to the construction of countermyths, such as the promotion of the mythological Aztlán” (Augenbraum and Olmos 139). However, recent Chicano scholarship seeks to explore Chicano literature as more than just a manifestation of political consciousness.

Chicano Studies scholar Marissa López, gives a brief summary of Chicano literature scholarship in her essay, “Chicana/o Literature: Theoretically Speaking, Formally Reading Ana Castillo’s *Sapagonia*.” López reminds us that Chicano literary criticism is a very new discipline and that not much has been written in the last thirty years to revolutionize Chicano literary study<sup>63</sup>. López explains by saying, “All argue from the premise that Chicana/os are an oppressed group speaking from the margins, that the dominant culture has an obligation to hear these minor voices, and that the recognition of these voices will in some way rectify inequality” (López 142). López maintains that even when such an approach is employed, the scholar cannot assume that the study of any minority group’s literature simply reveals the dominant culture’s racist or classist ideologies because the scholar’s “conceptual categories—like ‘individual,’ ‘experience,’ and ‘self’—are borrowed from the very institutions they seek to criticize” (López 142). Rather, the scholar’s duty must be to find a way to call these

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<sup>62</sup> However, the effect of such attempts can be contrary to strengthening and maintaining unity.

<sup>63</sup> Rosaura Sánchez also reminds us of the limited publication of Chicano literature by saying, “In Chicano literature, for example, production and reproduction continue to be limited, for the most part, and determined primarily by the funding available to the two major Chicano publishing enterprises (Arte Público Press and Bilingual Review/Press) supported by university and other public funds” (Sánchez 6).

categories into question. López warns against the traditional analysis of Chicano literature by saying, “I only mean to suggest that content-level analysis driven by the desire to locate a recognizable oppositional politics within the text does a disservice to Chicana/o literature and participates in the very mechanism of oppression it seeks to dismantle” (López 143). In brief, López holds that there is a disproportionate amount of attention given to the content of Chicano literature as well as privilege given to “the author as the locus of meaning in textual interpretation,” and this scholarly focus must shift from a content-based analysis to a balance between text-based and content-based analysis (López 143); one which will bring a new and needed perspective to Chicano literary criticism.

On the one hand, the distinction of Chicano literature within the United States has been shaped by a particular history and shared experience of oppression among those of Mexican descent. It is a literature springing from a desire to recover a lost history and reconnect with one’s ancestral past as referenced by the words of Octavio Paz: “The history of Mexico is the history of a man seeking his parentage, his origins” (C. García xv). On the other hand, to focus solely on the social and political binaries of the haves and have-nots is to ignore the innovative literary forms and devices of many writers of Chicano literature. At its heart, Chicano literature is not exclusive to those who are interested in Chicano politics nor to those who are accustomed to a ‘Mexican-American way of life.’ As expressed in the preceding, there is no one Mexican-American experience, and because of this heterogeneity among individuals and among writers, the body of Chicano literature adds a rich branch to American literature as we will continue exploring, through the work of Ana Castillo, in the following sections.

## Part II

# Challenging the Line between Myth, History, and Fiction in Sapogonia

### **Reshaping Historiography and Myth through Historiographic Metafiction**

Throughout the [human] inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

-Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, an Indologist and History of Religions professor at the University of Chicago's Divinity School, defines myth as, "a story that is sacred to and shared by a group of people who find their most important meanings in it; it is a story believed to have been composed in the past about an event in the past" (Mali 4)<sup>64</sup>. Myths are central to human culture and serve many purposes. They help us make sense of present phenomena as we have seen with the contact between the Spaniards and the indigenous populations of the Americas<sup>65</sup>. They reinforce social norms and cultural traditions as well as function as metaphors to promote specific personal behavior. Myths also give insight into the culture of a people—the way they see themselves and the way they understand the world

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<sup>64</sup> The quote continues, "or more rarely, in the future, an event that continues to have meaning in the present because it is remembered" (Mali 4).

<sup>65</sup> Alarcón says that both the Spaniards and the Native Americans frequently relied on myths for explanations: "To understand these phenomena they often turned to myths for answers [. . .] we have already seen that Durán responded by turning to Judeo-Christian myth for his answers" (Alarcón 55).

around them. All these features accentuate an interesting aspect of myth; it is mutable. I have demonstrated this attribute with the myth of Aztlán by invoking a palimpsestic reading of it. Alarcón says that it is this palimpsestic quality of Aztlán which makes it “fluid and unanchored, and thus an easy myth to appropriate and invest with new meaning” (Alarcón 60). By understanding a myth as a palimpsest, it “challeng[es] attempts to draw clear boundaries between myth and history” (Alarcón 35). M.A.R. Habib extends this concept by referencing Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*. Habib says, “What myth does, then is to free certain concepts or meanings from their original history and context, and to implant a ‘whole new history.’ Hence, ‘the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be appropriated’” (Habib 640). Habib notes that Claude Lévi-Strauss observed astonishing similarities between myths throughout the world (Habib 631)<sup>66</sup>. According to Carl Gustav Jung, the reason for these similarities is due to the “collective unconscious” (Hyde 174) of which all humans share. Therefore we ‘inherit’ myths by having a predisposition to particular thought-formations which manifest themselves through “archetypes” (Hyde 172). Joseph Campbell shares this position. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell says,

The wonder [of myth] is that characteristic efficacy to touch and inspire deep creative centers [which] dwells in the smallest nursery fairy tale—as the flavor of the ocean is contained in a droplet or the whole mystery of life within the egg of a flea. For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source (Campbell 1-2).

However, according to anthropologist Percy Cohen, the rule of myth is “to locate things in time, even if the exact time is unspecified, [which] creates a far more effective device for legitimization, for example, than simply creating a set of abstract ideas which are

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<sup>66</sup> Habib says that Lévi-Strauss claimed “his method eliminates the problematic quest for a true or earlier version of a myth. He defined the myth as consisting of all of its versions [ . . . ] Even when variants exhibit differences, the latter can themselves be correlated. Hence there is no single true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth. A myth displays a ‘slated’ structure, which comes to the surface through repetition. Myth grows spiral-wise until the intellectual impulse behind it is exhausted. Its growth is a continuous process whereas its structure remains discontinuous” (Habib 632).



timeless” (Mali 5)<sup>67</sup>. This challenges Jung’s perspective concerning myth and leans toward Vladimir Propp’s analysis of Russian Folktales in *Morphology of the Folktale* which explores particular patterns within a folktale that are used to reinforce social norms and cultural traditions. Peter Burian agrees with this understanding of myth: “Myth functions as a system whose signifiers are closely aligned to the central values (and therefore the central conflicts) of a culture. It is engaged, among other things, in a struggle to validate cultural norms” (Burian 191). Expanding upon this, Myth Criticism of the mid-1900’s called for an understanding of myth as integral to human thought. Critics of this movement “believed that literature emerges out of a core of myth, where ‘myth’ is understood as a collective attempt on the part of various cultures and groups to establish a meaningful context for human existence” (Habib 631). Therefore the “literature,” which arises out of every culture, is affected in some way by the mythologies of that particular culture. As mentioned above, the inability to draw clear boundaries between myth and history—as manifested in the term ‘mythistory’ which refers to history made of or mixed with myths—permits exploration of the intimate relationship between history, myth, and literature. In order to better understand this relationship, let us briefly explore the history of historiography.

In *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography*, Joseph Mali brings into question the conventional opposition of myth and history. He proposes a reconciliation of the two in which the crucial role that myth plays in constructing individual and communal identities, as well as the role that myth plays in shaping historical realities, is recognized. Mali says that according to Herodotus, “the task of the historian is not to eliminate but to illuminate historical myths” (Mali 2). The question as to whether or not historical myths of particular nations are true or false is irrelevant. Rather Herodotus’ approach lies in

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<sup>67</sup> Mali elaborates: “The impersonal style of the mythical narration, aptly characterized by Claude Lévi-Strauss as ‘anonymous, collective, and objective,’ serves this purpose by making the messages impervious to any logical or historical refutation. ‘The original form (provided this means anything) is and remains forever elusive. However far we may go, a myth is known only as something that has been heard and repeated’” (Mali 5).

examining the meaning of these myths. Mali praises Herodotus' approach: "[Herodotus] was guiding historical research toward the exploration of the unknown and the forgotten" (Mali 2). The obvious problem with Herodotus' mythological historiographic approach is that it cannot be critical about its sources<sup>68</sup>. The historiographic approach that we are more familiar with comes from Thucydides who defied Herodotus' approach to historiography by "deliberately using distinct literal measures"<sup>69</sup> (Mali 2). Yet, later Greek historians such as Polybius, Diodorus, and Pausanias, realized that the mythical tradition continued to thrive in poetical creations, rhetorical orations, and political institutions and thus had to be incorporated into history as 'fact' (Mali 12). Michael Anderson adds to this point:

For the communities that preserved and transmitted them, myths provided a revered form of validation for cultural institutions, practices, and beliefs. They recorded the foundation of cities and sanctuaries, explained the origins of religious rituals, conveyed beliefs about the gods, mapped out social relations and hierarchies, exemplified positive and negative behavior, and reflected generally upon the cycle of human life, exploring its most intense joys and its deepest sorrows (Anderson 122).

For these reasons, learning and recording the myths of a people becomes both historically and anthropologically relevant.

However, just as culture is always in flux, so too are myths. Anderson elaborates upon what he calls "adaptive mythmaking" (Anderson 122):

In dramatizing stories of Orestes, Oedipus, and other familiar heroes, the tragedians blended tradition with contemporary innovation. They borrowed heavily from preceding poetry, particularly from the vast corpus of epic, but they also customarily reshaped inherited myths by modifying plots, introducing new characters, and even creating new episodes. The license to invent was not unlimited—with few exceptions the characters of drama remained located in the legendary world of the past and closely linked with established myths—but Greek tragedy was never merely a dramatic transcription of a preexisting narrative (Anderson 121).

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<sup>68</sup> Mali says, "Herodotus began his History with a long recitation of the Homeric myths about the origins of war (relating them to marital quarrels of gods and heroes) and only then, gradually and hypothetically, developed his own theory about their mere human causes" (Mali 2).

<sup>69</sup> Mali quotes Thucydides as saying, "Of the events of the war . . . I have described nothing but what I either saw myself, or learned from others of whom I made the most careful and particular inquiry" (Mali 2).

As its name implies, mythmaking adapts to the time and place of a particular culture, and all myths are transmitted through narrative means. This proposes an intimate, narratological relation to historiography and literature. Ana Castillo in particular explores this relationship within her craft as she plays with mythological figures and their narratives within her literature.

The changing understanding of historiography and myth has led historians to re-evaluate Herodotus' and Thucydides' approaches:

During the past two or three decades, however, there has been a remarkable change in the evaluation of both historians. The emergence of 'new cultural history' out of the new social sciences of anthropology, psychology, and narratology has shifted the attention of scholars of historiography from scientific to hermeneutic questions. For example, what do historians actually do when they tell a story? How do they thereby participate in the creation of collective memories and identities? Recent studies of Herodotus have been deeply affected by these theories and have done much to recharge them by showing how Herodotus's work may be pertinent to modern discussions on 'heterology,' 'social memory,' or 'narrative construction of reality.' As John Gould remarks, 'Thucydidean narrative, in the very rhythms and texture of its language, claims and enacts authority. Herodotean narrative, by the same criteria, is a very different thing: it retains the rhythms and forms of oral tradition, familiar to us in folk-tales and märchen, but at the same time incorporates into the text, as folk narrative never does, its own authorial commentary on the sources and truth-value of the narrative [. . .] in order to know who the Egyptians [. . .] really were [. . .] the historian must know who they thought they were, where they came from, and where they went. And the best—perhaps the only—way to get this knowledge is to take their historical myths seriously (Mali 3)<sup>70</sup>.

The presentation and style of narration, within any text, is highly important as it has the power to 'claim and enact authority.' This is what sets literature and myth apart from history texts. However, the separation of the literary and the historical is being challenged in literature and literary theory today.

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<sup>70</sup> Adding to this, Mali says, "For historical myths are now commonly perceived as 'foundational narratives,' as stories that purport to explain the present in terms of some momentous event that occurred in the past. Stories like these are in many ways historical—though rarely, if ever, do they refer to an actual past. Rather they refer to a virtual past, to the fact that historical communities, like religion or nations, consist in the beliefs that their members have about them—more concretely, in the stories they tell about them" (Mali 4).

Linda Hutcheon claims that far from any objective truth, historical texts derive their force from verisimilitude, and it is this very concept with which literary texts play and explore (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 105). As a result, both the historical and the literary text are unveiled as “linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality” (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 105). Hutcheon says that these are specifically the implied teachings of historiographic metafiction<sup>71</sup>; a literary device which we will explore further within Ana Castillo’s *Sapogonia* as one of several elements which work to blend myth, history, and fiction.

### **Mythic Place in Sapogonia**

A map of the real world is no less imaginary  
than a map of the imaginary world

-Alberto Blanco, “Maps”

*Sapogonia* follows the anti-romantic<sup>72</sup> story of Máximo Madrigal and Pastora Aké. Through the use of several analepses and ellipses, the reader is presented with a narrative that takes place during the late twentieth century and follows Máximo’s journey from his native country of Sapogonia to Spain, where he meets his estranged father, and finally to the U.S. where he meets the Chicana musician Pastora. Sapogonia is a fictionalized country in the Americas “where all mestizos reside” (*Sapogonia* 1). It is said to be “the metaphorical homeland of all mestizos,”<sup>73</sup> but at the same time, it has a physical presence, as well as a

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<sup>71</sup> Hutcheon defines the term ‘metafiction’ as “fiction about fiction—that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” (*Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* 2).

<sup>72</sup> This is overtly indicated by the subtitle “An Anti-Romance in 3/8 Meter” on the cover page.

<sup>73</sup> This is according to the synopsis of the novel displayed on its back cover.

history, within the novel. This blending of the real and the figurative allows the reader to place Sapogonia within the mythic as it resembles the “evershifting” (Sapogonia 2) location of Aztlán, and this evasiveness alludes to the notion of the nation as a construct.

The narrator describes Máximo’s comparison of Paris to Puerto Sapogonia: “The structure of the city was impressive. Puerto Sapogonia, as the capital of his country, had an equally long history, once having belonged to an advanced indigenous civilization, and later the Spanish architecture of colonization dominated, so that present-day Puerto Sapogonia was noble with history” (Sapogonia 36). This “equally long history” alludes to the actual historical events of the Spanish conquest and colonization of the Americas as indicated by “the Spanish architecture of colonization” which dominated over “an advanced indigenous civilization.” By associating Sapogonia with this history, it endows the historiography of Sapogonia with authority. Adding to this, the prologue mimics the verisimilitude of historiographic texts and divulges ethnographic pieces of information regarding Sapogonia:

Their cultural roots may be traced back further than 7,000 B.C. [. . . and their people contributed] chile, corn, beans, and chocolate to the world at large [. . .] The Sapogón is besieged by a history of slavery, genocide, immigration, and civil uprisings [. . . The Sapogón’s] European ancestry, which is commonly Spanish with the invariable contribution of indigenous blood, makes him shorter in stature with dark features not characteristic of the Aryan or Anglo (Sapogonia 1-2).

By using historiographic metafictional elements, such a rendition of a ‘make-believe’ place makes Sapogonia seem real. However, due to the incapacity to give it an actual geographic location within the novel, only a general placement within the Americas, and a shared history with Latin America, its image resembles the mythical land of Aztlán which Alarcón describes as a “free floating” image (Alarcón 53). This effect is enhanced by the constant jumps in time and location throughout the novel. The reader too finds difficulty locating the time and place of events within this ever-shifting narrative.

The end of the prologue highlights the mythical and metaphorical aspect that both Sapogonia and Aztlán share which resists permanent placement. The prologue concludes:

Any acknowledgment of indigenous American ancestry causes him almost immediately to be relegated to the world of Sapogonia [. . .] Sapogonia (like the Sapogón/a) is not identified by modern boundaries. Throughout the Americas, Sapogones, those who are wholly or in part descended from the indigenous peoples of what was erroneously named ‘The New World,’ continue to populate, breed and therefore dominate the lands of their ancestors (Sapogonia 2).

The fact that a Sapogón can be “relegated” to Sapogonia at any moment just by its acknowledgement makes Sapogonia sound more like a state of mind than an actual geographic location. This mirrors Luis Leal’s statement of Aztlán as a symbol and metaphor rather than a location: “Aztlán symbolizes the spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they may live or where they may find themselves” (Alarcón 49). The association of the Sapogón with “those who are wholly or in part descended from the indigenous peoples of what was erroneously named ‘The New World’” emphasizes the indigenous pride of the Chicano, accentuated by the use of the word “erroneously,” and it alludes to the main premise of Aztlán: “the lands of their ancestors” (Sapogonia 2). Underlining this association with “the lands of their ancestors,” is Máximo’s pursuit of Pastora, whose name is linked to the land<sup>74</sup>. He too wishes to “dominate” her and refers to sex with Pastora as a “conquest” (Sapogonia 143 and 149). Adding to this, Máximo’s name translates to ‘maximum,’ referring to the greatest quantity possible which is synonymous with ‘majority.’ In this context, we could link it with racial majority and there is a parallel here between sexual domination and land colonization. As we will see below, Pastora is also associated with the indigeneity of America which Máximo rejects and later seeks to reconcile.

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Pastora’ in Spanish means ‘shepherdess,’ and her name bears a striking resemblance to the word ‘pastoral,’ which relates to the country or rural areas. This is also complemented by Máximo’s family name, Madrigal, which is “related to a pastoral stanzaic verse form” from the Italian Renaissance (dictionary.com).

Sapogonia's resistance to being "identified by modern boundaries" (Sapogonia 2) along with its composed history unveils the nation and history as ideological constructs (López, "Chicana/o Literature: Theoretically Speaking, Formally Reading Ana Castillo's Sapogonia" 149)<sup>75</sup> which are constantly in flux. Identity therefore is understood in relation to these constructs as the Sapogón's identity also resists "modern boundaries" as indicated above. In addition, its free-floating existence and shared history with the indigenous populations of Latin America creates a mythic association to Aztlán, making Sapogonia mythical as well. This construction of mythical place therefore extends to those who dwell within it as we will see the characters of Sapogonia are also associated with the mythic.

### **Anti-heroism in Sapogonia**

Sapogonia begins with an italicized statement that alerts the reader to the type of story to follow. The statement reads, "this is a story of make-believe people in a real world; or, if you like, the story of real people in a make-believe world." Below this statement, we have a three-part definition of 'anti-hero' as defined by the protagonist, Pastora. The following page is given the title "Prologue," yet this blending of reality and fiction on the previous page indicates the commencement of Sapogonia's diegetic world although there is no page number nor title. This works to blur the line between the author's world and the diegetic world, and as highlighted by the italicized statement above, the characters within Sapogonia can be understood as "make-believe people" or "real people" as both perspectives are valid. Below, this announcement of understanding literary figures as both 'real' and/or 'make-believe' is then contrasted with the definition of anti-hero whose first definition reads,

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<sup>75</sup> López says, "Sapogonia is an allegory of modern and primordial understanding of 'nation,' the former represented by the conflicted histories of many Latin American countries whose civil strife and economic woes are precipitated by U.S. involvement in their affairs, and the latter represented by the indigenous ways of knowing that counter these forces" (López, "Chicana/o Literature: Theoretically Speaking, Formally Reading Ana Castillo's Sapogonia" 149). The latter here also connects to Castillo's novel *So Far from God*, which is discussed in part three, as its descriptions favor the methods and remedies of the curandera/o over the modern day doctor.

“1. In mythology and legend, a man who celebrates his own strength and bold exploits.” By laying these pieces of text side-by-side, there is a connection that is constructed between the two. Before we have fully entered the narrative, we see a literary association with the mythic. This directs the reader’s attention to those mythic qualities—anti-heroic or other—possessed by or associated with the fictional characters of Sapogonia.

Pastora, a character we do not meet until half-way through the novel, although this defies the actual chronology of the story, is the first character introduced within the text as it is her definition of ‘anti-hero’ that we first see. Although we follow Máximo Madrigal’s story until he meets Pastora, and after this the narrative is constantly shifting between the perspectives of these two characters, it is Pastora who is the ‘hero’ of the story. Her definition of anti-heroism colors the favored virtues of the characters, as presented within the novel, by fore fronting the unfavorable ones. There is an overt negative connotation with these anti-heroic qualities, and as Pastora is the one providing the definition, she situates herself in opposition to such qualities. This is also stressed by the use of the word “man.” The reader then begins to associate such anti-heroic qualities with the male character Máximo as this opening definition filters our interpretation of Máximo’s conceitedness<sup>76</sup>.

Máximo is described as “that brother one didn’t ask for but got anyway” (Sapogonia 29). Throughout the novel, Máximo is portrayed as a character with many faults. His overconfidence and self-absorption compensate for his lack of confidence and paranoia. Although he loves Pastora, “Max did not pretend to be sincere with women” (Sapogonia 161). He constantly uses others in order to further his own career as an artist<sup>77</sup>. This is most obvious with his relationship to the politician Maritza, whom he marries only for “reasons

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<sup>76</sup> Máximo says, “It was unthinkable to me that I could not persuade one or both with my unfailing charisma” (Sapogonia 123).

<sup>77</sup> The narrator says, “There was always someone there to serve as a stepping stone” for Máximo (Sapogonia 333).



that were advantageous to [him]" (Sapogonia 335). Máximo unveils his motivation for entering into a relationship with her:

It was as important for me to have people respect her because through her my possibilities were heightened to secure commissions that other artists in the city could only hope to compete for when submitting handsome portfolios and impressive dossiers. I had Maritza now to make sure it was my work that remained on top of the stack and was selected in the end (Sapogonia 317).

This connects to Pastora's second definition, "2. Any man who notes his special achievements," as Máximo strives to receive the same amount of artistic success as Pastora yet never reaches it.

Pastora's final definition, "3. The principal male character in a novel, poem, or dramatic work," removes all characteristic features and places the label of 'anti-hero' upon any male protagonist within a novel, poem, or dramatic work. This certainly encompasses a large frame of literary work. It would appear that Pastora is being cynical by using such an inclusive definition. However, cynicism aside, this signals a lack of heroism in contemporary literature. This definition also corresponds to the definition of 'hero': "3. the principle male character in a story, play, film, etc." (dictionary.com). We have the same definition but two different and contradictory labels. The prefix 'anti' means 'opposite of,' yet according to this definition, 'hero' and 'anti-hero' share the same meaning. However, at the same time, the word 'hero' now becomes replaced by 'anti-hero' due to the generality of this third definition, conveying an 'opposite of' the 'hero' we are used to seeing in such stories, thereby commenting upon contemporary literature: is the 'hero' of contemporary literature fated to be an ironic one? The progression from the first definition to the last implies that the literary tradition of anti-heroism stems from "mythology and legend."

According to Joseph Mali, the use of the ironic hero still evokes the concept of the classical hero:

However, as many critical commentators have seen, the ironical allusions to myth in *Ulysses* and in *The Waste Land* do not necessarily convey an ironical conception of myth as such. Rather, they attest to the acute critical and historical perception of the potency and relevancy of myths, even in an age that cannot live up to their classical 'heroic' order and standards (Mali 12).

In accordance with Mali, Castillo's use of anti-heroism calls to mind the mythical tradition of the classic hero. As it situates itself in opposition to heroism, due to the prefix "anti," Castillo summons a basic understanding of the classical hero within the reader in order to understand the use of anti-heroism within her text. Despite Pastora's label, "anti-hero," in addition to the novel's subtitle "anti-romance," the tale of the anti-hero resembles that of the classical mythic hero: "the human experiences and problems they confront are like those that the mythical heroes, and indeed all [people], must deal with: mortality, liberty, sexuality, and other eternal insoluble riddles" (Mali 12). As Castillo's text defies the conventions of the classic hero's tale through her use of anti-heroism, her text rewrites the tale of the classic hero as the anti-hero's tale relies upon the "classical 'heroic' order and standards" and both "attest to the acute critical and historical perception of the potency and relevancy of myths" (Mali 12).

### **Mythological Figuration within Sapogonia**

Pastora's character is associated with the "divine" (Sapogonia 347), and Máximo defines her as the "beauty of [his] fantasies" (Sapogonia 316). In contrast, Máximo's character says that in Pastora's presence, "[He] was only a man" (Sapogonia 336), whereas other women made Máximo "into a demigod" (Sapogonia 335). The diminishment of Máximo's godliness is reinforced by Pastora's reproach to Máximo when she says, "You are less of a god than you think" (Sapogonia 149), turning Máximo's character into a foil, thereby enhancing Pastora's association with the mythical. This highlights and restores the female as a figure of mythical veneration.

Throughout the text, we have several associations with Pastora's character suggesting that she possesses supra-human features. Here, Pastora's character exhibits a timeless quality:

I am the first to admit, Pastora's physical attractiveness had the character of infinity. It was chilling. A man could guess she was, oh, say, anywhere between sixteen and thirty when we met, although at times she behaved as old as the Sphinx. The taut legs, her firm breasts, the lean torso, were such that any young girl would've been envious. Her beauty put me off, because she wore it like an heirloom pendant. One could view and admire it, but was not allowed to handle it (Sapogonia 135).

Máximo is narrating, and through his perspective, he associates Pastora with the infinite, giving Pastora an immortal quality. This is then strengthened by Pastora's comparison with the Sphinx<sup>78</sup>. The description of Pastora that follows renders her more statuesque than human: "The taut legs, her firm breasts, the lean torso [. . .] One could view and admire it, but was not allowed to handle it," reinforcing Pastora's resemblance to a mythic icon. Such qualities fascinate Máximo<sup>79</sup> about Pastora as she appears to be a mystery that no one is able to demystify: "She seemed an enigma<sup>80</sup> and no one I broached on the subject could give me a full account, so that she was even more of a curio" (Sapogonia 135). By referring to Pastora as a 'curio,' Máximo objectifies Pastora, as with his association of Pastora with the Sphinx, she is turned into something that is to be admired and contemplated, and throughout the novel, he resists understanding her as human. This may be due in part to Máximo's profession as an artist. He understands the aesthetic as an "heirloom," a manifestation of that which is to be awed and revered by humans generation after generation. This also relates to the survival of and similarities between myths around the world as mentioned above.

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<sup>78</sup> The Sphinx refers to both the stone figure near the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and to the classical mythological figure: a monster, usually represented as having the head and breast of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of an eagle. Seated on a rock outside of Thebes, she proposed a riddle to travelers, killing them when they answered incorrectly, as all did before Oedipus. When he answered her riddle correctly the Sphinx killed herself (dictionary.com).

<sup>79</sup> Máximo is also a 'santero' which is someone who makes statues of saints.

<sup>80</sup> This reinforces Pastora's association to the myth of the Sphinx (above).

Máximo understands Pastora similarly: “I saw her a good many times so that finally I felt I had never seen her for the first time at all, but had always been aware of Pastora on the periphery of my existence. It seemed her name had come to me in veiled images, a presence, the resonance of her voice, in fragments, perhaps in dreams or conversations I’d overheard” (Sapogonia 135).

Máximo’s character nicknames Pastora “Coatlícuē”<sup>81</sup>, the Aztec goddess of creation and destruction. Such a nickname appears to be assigned to her due to her self-identification as a “Chicana” (Sapogonia 318). For Máximo, on the other hand, “Chicano was a new word for him” (Sapogonia 81)<sup>82</sup>. Máximo’s relation with indigenous pride greatly differs from Pastora’s<sup>83</sup>. In fact, within the prologue, the reader is told: “The truly updated Sapogón (as in the case of the one in our story) [. . .] may fake an entire Latin-European background or Mediterranean autobiography” (Sapogonia 2). The narrator refers to Máximo within the parenthesis, and the implication is that “the truly updated Sapogón,” feels the need to “fake” or emphasize a European background thereby denying his or her connection to indigenous American heritage, which opposes the Chicano ideology of indigenous pride yet reasserts the forsaken European heritage. This quote continues: “Any acknowledgement of indigenous American ancestry causes him almost immediately to be relegated to the world of Sapogonia” (Sapogonia 2). The use of the word ‘relegated’ accentuates a negative connotation associated with Máximo’s perception of his country, and it is this American

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<sup>81</sup> The text says, “Coatlícuē—as he referred to Pastora in the private realm of his thoughts” (Sapogonia 150).

<sup>82</sup> In Sapogonia, Chicano is defined as follows: “Chicanos had been in California, the whole Southwest of the United States so long, they could still remember when it was Mexico” (Sapogonia 81).

<sup>83</sup> The narrator describes Máximo’s dislike for Pastora’s last name, Aké: ““Miss Velásquez’ [. . .] He didn’t know why, but he preferred her Castilian surname to the Indian one of her mother” (Sapogonia 144).

indigenous aspect of Pastora that becomes highlighted<sup>84</sup> as it manifests Máximo's struggle with his own identity as someone of mixed heritage<sup>85</sup>.

Pastora begins to 'consume' Máximo. Máximo often finds himself wondering about Pastora after their first meeting. When they finally sleep together during a drunken night, Máximo experiences a physical pain in his chest and what seems to be a hallucination: "Máximo closed his eyes; a sharp pain burned inside his chest, the pounding of his heart that had begun moments before was now an excruciating throb. He pressed both hands to his chest and bent over until he hit the floor face first. 'Xalaquia,'<sup>86</sup> he whispered from a strangling throat. 'Xalaquia, ayúdame'<sup>87</sup>" (Sapogonia 149). Then in the following sentence, Máximo opens his eyes and "the syllables that clung to his tongue, 'Xalaquia,' meant nothing to him" (Sapogonia 149). It is unclear as to whether or not Máximo sees the figure of Xalaquia or if he is simply reciting the name. What is clear is that Máximo's recognition of Xalaquia is temporary, and he is penetrated by this name only after making love with Pastora. Furthermore, Pastora's association with the goddess Coatlicue leads to a direct association with the figure Xalaquia, who is a temporary personification of Coatlicue (Sapogonia 149). This creates an analogy between Máximo / Pastora and Xalaquia / Coatlicue. Because it is Máximo's chest which begins to burn, alluding to the extraction of the victim's heart, it is Máximo who becomes Xalaquia, the sacrifice for Coatlicue. The text then describes Pastora and Máximo lying together: "Her hair tangled about him. She had

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<sup>84</sup> The narrator says, "Her indigenous background was prominent" (Sapogonia 145), and this indigeneity becomes associated with Máximo's country: "Pastora wore a handwoven blanket over her body that came down to her knees. Its motif was reminiscent of the work done in his country" (Sapogonia 75).

<sup>85</sup> Máximo leaves Sapogonia as a teenager in search of his father in Spain. He lives in Europe for several years before moving to the U.S. His family wishes for him to return to Sapogonia to live, but Máximo refuses.

<sup>86</sup> The text explains Xalaquia as follows: "Xalaquia, a temporary personification of Coatlicue who danced and pirouetted, hair loose and flung about, whose face was painted to represent the colors of corn and harvest, who went on with the rite until exhausted, was carried up to the altar of the temple, disrobed and given up to satisfy *Coatlicue's hunger and thirst*" (Sapogonia 149). This description of the Xalaquia harvest ritual is supported by Despina Bonadies' findings: "the Xalaquia, a female captive or slave, with face painted red and yellow to represent the colors of the maize-plant . . . unaware of the horrible fate awaiting her, she danced and pirouetted gaily among the rest . . . the victim was stripped to a nude condition, the priest plunged a knife of flint into her bosom, and tearing out the still palpating heart, offered it up to Chicomechuatl [another name for Coatlicue]" (Bonadies 4).

<sup>87</sup> 'Ayúdame' is Spanish for 'help me.'

swallowed him in his entirety and left him to suffocate inside her entrails” (Sapogonia 149). This ‘consumption’ by Pastora restores the mythical female figure as powerful, possessing the ability to create or destroy as is the case with the mythical figure of Coatlicue yet in the dominating Christian mythology of the Americas, the power of the mythical female figure is inexistent. Such an association within Castillo’s text with powerful and prominent feminine mythological figures and her characters renews and rewrites the myth

This metaphorical consumption also allows us to say that Máximo is being ‘consumed’ by his indigenous American roots which he denies. It is only at the end that a reconciliation is reached. Rather than denying his ties to an indigenous American ancestry, Máximo finally embraces it: “I spread out a Sapogón blanket on the floor [. . .] I mused over the photographs. Pastora’s grandparents? One of the pictures was of an old woman in full indigenous costume [. . .] She was reminiscent of my own grandmother” (Sapogonia 347-348). Máximo’s resistance of his indigenous ancestry appears to diminish, and it seems that Máximo creates space for himself within mythic imagery as Pastora’s association with the mythic continues through a series of references which include an iconic counterpart associated with Máximo.

### **Artists and Icons**

Máximo compares Pastora and himself to two Mexican cinema icons: Jorge Negrete and María Félix. These two figures are synonymous with the Golden Age of Mexican cinema which Juanita Heredia places roughly between 1936 and 1956 (Heredia 39)<sup>88</sup>. Jorge and María were featured as lovers in the film *Peñon de las ánimas* and later engaged in a real-life romance and married before María’s death shortly after their wedding. It was this

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<sup>88</sup>Heredia adds, “In the transnational reception of Golden Age Mexican cinema, among the most affected spectators are contemporary Chicanos/U.S. Mexicans [. . .] the construction of masculinity and femininity in cinema has played a pivotal role in gender identity formation for generations of U.S. Mexican men and women” (Heredia 39).

film which caused Máximo to fall in love, for the first time in his life, with María Félix as a boy (Sapogonia 331), and as an adult, this admiration is transferred to Pastora. Máximo associates the two of them: “When I first saw Pastora, she was reminiscent of Mexico’s beloved silver-screen actress María Félix [. . .] the nocturnal sounds of the city turned Pastora [. . .] into the impeccable beauty of my fantasies” (Sapogonia 316)<sup>89</sup>. This association with the Golden Age of Mexican cinema alludes to the term’s classical mythological meaning: the five ages of humankind<sup>90</sup>. The Golden Age signifies the first of these stages. Within Aztec mythology, these ages are mirrored by destruction and creation cycles and manifest themselves as the five Aztec suns, the fifth ‘sun’ being the era in which we now live. This association helps to strengthen Máximo and Pastora’s relationship to the iconic and mythical. Their relationship is also portrayed as a cycle of destruction and creation: “They were each sources of destruction for the other [. . .] they valued each other inasmuch as they valued the necessity of each to create, not wanting to obliterate the other completely, only enough so that each would be reminded of her/his own imperfection” (Sapogonia 158). Their relationship is one of love and hate, and this is reflected in Máximo’s references to other tragic, iconic love stories, which Máximo refers to as “the illusory romance of cinema, of fable, of myth” (Sapogonia 347).

During a summarization of the film *Peñon de las ánimas*, which follows a tragic love story<sup>91</sup>, Máximo makes a connection to other tragic figures: “If this material rings vaguely of Romeo and Juliet with a hint of Orpheus, you can see why the movie made such an impact on me, which reached new dimensions years later when I became so fond of Shakespeare’s work” (Sapogonia 332). This association highlights film’s relation to theatre and creates a

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<sup>89</sup> Máximo also associates himself with “Jorge Negrete” (Sapogonia 336).

<sup>90</sup> Hesiod notes five—Golden, Silver, Bronze, Heroic, and Iron—whereas Ovid notes four—Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Iron.

<sup>91</sup> Máximo describes the film: “They didn’t get very far before the grandfather, an old fart patriarch, took out his gun and shouted, ‘IF HE IS GOING TO TAKE HER, THIS IS HOW IT IS GOING TO BE!’ and shot her dead” (Sapogonia 332).

tradition of the tragic mythological figure within literature. Máximo and Pastora therefore become part of this tradition: “I went home to my wife and I was seen with her in public as Pastora was being seen with her husband, as husbands and wives of other lovers would be seen and had been seen since time ad infinitum” (Sapogonia 336). Máximo also mentions himself and Pastora in relation to those who create and perpetuate literary and mythic traditions: artists. Máximo says, “I had thought of being married to Pastora, imagined the tremendous couple we would have made, one to surpass all artistic couples in history. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo? Virginia and Leonard Woolf? They would become insignificant compared to us” (Sapogonia 335). Coincidentally, the association reinforces Máximo and Pastora’s success within their art and their unsuccessfulness within their relationship<sup>92</sup>. More importantly, this relation between mythic and literary figures, and the artists who both create and perpetuate such traditions, stresses a bi-directional relationship: the cultural influence and impact such figures have upon us and how our own lives shape and contribute to the telling of their tale.

Yet, we still have reminders of Máximo and Pastora’s mere humanly aspects. Máximo and Pastora have a conversation in response to Máximo’s discovery of Pastora’s son, whom he believes to be his: “It’s humanity, Máximo. The moment you and I acted like mating animals, that is when we submitted to our mortality. We’re not here forever, Máximo [ . . . ] The discussion on mortality only made him feel the urgency to pursue his goals. They were a way of preserving his notions of immortality” (Sapogonia 304-305). Pastora accentuates their temporary existence as human beings in the world, and she stresses that individual immortality is not accomplished through having children. Rather, this is humanity’s continuation. Máximo responds by preserving immortality in his art: “you went off afterward, relieved of that need and charged with creative energy. You diffused it in your

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<sup>92</sup> At times, the “aim” of their meetings “was to stick each other with vengeful remarks” (Sapogonia 182).



work” (Sapogonia 304). The fact remains that Máximo and Pastora are not supra-human<sup>93</sup>. However, as artists, their work has the potential to harbor and preserve the immortal stories and figures i.e. myths, of humankind.

### ***Shifting Narration and the Voice of the Collective within Castillo’s Work***

Within Sapogonia, the reader is often confused as to who exactly is narrating as the narration is constantly shifting between characters, an internally focalized, hetero-diegetic narrator, and what appears to be an intruding author. Such interweaving and ambiguity as to who is narrating turns the narrating ‘I’ into a narrating ‘we,’ thereby challenging the “European philosophical subject’s logocentric ‘I’” (Chambram and Fergoso 30). Mikhail Bakhtin classifies this type of narrative as a polyphonic narrative<sup>94</sup> (Prince 19). The multitude of voices impedes any one voice from having more authority than another. This concept is accentuated by Máximo’s family name, Madrigal, which refers to a type of song from the Renaissance that utilizes several voices at once. In this section, we will explore Sapogonia’s shifting narration and its implications to myth and history.

Sapogonia opens with a prologue which provides the reader with ‘historical’ background information about the country and people of Sapogonia. It is signed with the initials “A. C.” and below this signature, “Chicago” is indicated as the birth place of the signer (Sapogonia 2). It appears that the initials “A. C.” stand for our author, Ana Castillo as her birthplace is also Chicago. Throughout the novel, this assumption is not negated. The writer announces a particular intimacy with the narrative that follows: “The truly updated Sapogón, however (as in the case of the one in our story), will also attain fluency in English” (Sapogonia 2). This narrator reveals him or herself to be knowledgeable of the “story” that follows as the narrator tells the reader what “will” happen, and by using the possessive

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<sup>93</sup>Máximo says, “Until then it seemed as if I would never in my humble lifetime know that Pastora, like any other woman, like any human being, cried” (Sapogonia 334).

<sup>94</sup> Also referred to as a ‘dialogic narrative’ (Prince 19).

pronoun “our,” declares inclusive ownership of the tale: it belongs as much to the reader as it does to the writer presenting it. This narrator periodically interjects, throughout the novel, with italicized text offering bits of information outside of the diegetic world, e.g. “Xalaquia, a temporary personification of Coatlicue who danced and pirouetted, hair loose and flung about, whose face was painted to represent the colors of corn and harvest, who went on with the rite until exhausted, was carried up to the altar of the temple, disrobed and given up to *satisfy Coatlicue’s hunger and thirst*” (Sapogonia 149). This gives the reader access to information that the characters do not have: ““Xalaquia,’ meant nothing to him” (Sapogonia 149). Such interruptions are situated within the narratives of others: between paragraphs, between sentences, etc. and the indication that this text is intrusive is often marked by italics. Yet, as it is interwoven into the text of other narrators, there is a plurality of text and of voice that is created by this narrative technique.

Chapter thirty-eight is completely narrated in the second person. By using the personal pronoun, ‘you,’ the reader becomes included within the text. This chapter follows the perspective of Dora, an immigrant from Sapogonia who has been deported by the U.S. government and imprisoned by her own country for “criminal acts against her country” (Sapogonia 220): “You wake up [. . .] You are on kitchen duty for the breakfast shift [. . .]” (Sapogonia 213). This inclusiveness, made possible by the pronoun “you,” not only allows the reader to identify with the character’s perspective but makes the reader a character within the story. Dora’s identity is not divulged until the following chapter, although her character has already been established within the plot, and the effect of this seemingly anonymous identity reinforces the reader as the subject as the “you” seems to refer to no other character. This further helps to blur the distinction between the one narrating and the one who is narrated. We see this throughout the novel.

The first chapter of the novel introduces the reader to the hetero-diegetic narrator. We meet an unidentified male character, and then a few paragraphs after, we are introduced to an unnamed narrating “I” who turns out to be Máximo (Sapogonia 8), yet we do not learn that this is Máximo narrating until four chapters later (Sapogonia 16). Our introduction to characters defies the chronology of the story: the reader meets characters already established within the storyline and then their entrance into the story is retraced through analepses: Pastora’s character is mentioned by Máximo (Sapogonia 119) and then the reader is presented with Pastora’s entrance into the story when she meets Máximo (Sapogonia 123).

Shifts in time coupled with shifts in narration create dislocation. Within each chapter, we encounter multiple narrators, time shifts, and location shifts:

I got off the plane on a humid day in April [. . .] We drove off to the most familiar of neighborhoods to the New York immigrant [. . .] the Lower East Side [. . .] It was through one of his father’s underworld connections that he secured a false set of documents that allowed him to pass customs at Kennedy Airport (Sapogonia 61-62).

[. . .]

He was afraid of stairs [. . .] He’d been afraid of stairs since he was twelve and Mario—his best friend [. . .] the children were thought to be asleep [. . .] Máximo stood at the bottom of the stairs and looked up to the attic [. . .] He would begin working on a new sculpture that afternoon. Laura’s garden filled his nostrils [. . .] Max remembered the mouse, already dead and shriveled when his seven-year-old eyes spotted it [. . .] He halted at the bedroom door, so as to examine the collection of figurines in deliberate arrangement on the bureau [. . .] Without looking at Pastora, who he knew watched from behind [. . .] (Sapogonia 176-179).

The top quote is narrated in the first-person and is Máximo speaking about his experience in New York. Then the narrator changes to the third-person perspective, narrating about Máximo’s experience in New York. The bottom quote shifts between italics and normal print, and it is not clear if these are two separate narrators or the same narrator. It seems odd that the same narrator would repeat the fact that Máximo is afraid of stairs, yet the subtle change of verb phrase, “He was” to “He’d been,” gives the reader a clue: we are shifting between past and present as a memory of Máximo is being provoked due to the sight of a

staircase. The italics in this instance mark shifts in time. Another indication that we are not only shifting in time but also location here is the narrator's mention of the characters present. Laura is a character that Máximo meets before Pastora and the collection of figurines is in Pastora's house. Throughout the novel, the reader jumps back and forth between locations—France, Spain, New York, Chicago, and Sapogonia—and therefore back and forth in time.

Such a presentation of the narrative creates a ping pong effect, and the constant switching between the narrated pronouns evokes a fluidity of the subject: “I”/ “you”/ “he”/ “she”/ “we”<sup>95</sup>/ “they.” The subject becomes all-inclusive, a plural one which challenges notions of individual subjectivity and therefore leans toward a collective subjectivity. This relinquishes the power of an authoritative narrator as it gives voice to all. This proves especially relevant for history and myth as with both, all versions of their stories “belong” to them because “there is no single true version of which all the others are but copies or distortions” (Habib 632). This narrative authority is specifically challenged in Castillo's poem, “Daddy with Chesterfields in a Rolled up Sleeve,” through Castillo's consistent use of a lower case “i”: “Had i been 19 not 9 / i'd have pulled my hair / [ . . . ] i speak English with a crooked smile” (C. García 168-169).

In addition, Castillo's novel in verse, *Watercolor Women Opaque Men*, also shifts between narrators and pronouns: “Forget / the beans we had for supper again, / the last baby that died soon after birth, / the tío suffering of tuberculosis / when each morning he rose with the rest, / coughing, coughing. / Grandparents we never spent / a birthday with, whom we hardly knew” (*Watercolor Women* 9-10). Here we have an inclusive pronoun, “we,” and a situation consisting of mundane matters. This is greatly contrasted by such chapters as the chapter titled “Cipactli: Woman as Monster,” which is narrated by the mythic creature Cipactli: “I am a shark, / a sawfish, / a leviathan dragon to rival all / Who the god of the

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<sup>95</sup> “We debated [ . . . ] We were forced to find another location [ . . . ] We were out having something to eat [ . . . ]” (*Sapogonia* 42-46).

morning / and the god of night / coiled in the form of serpents” (Watercolor Women 31). This novel exhibits the same shifting narration style as in *Sapogonia* and gives voice to mythic figures themselves, allowing them to narrate their own tales rather than passively being narrated, therefore reinscribing narrative authority.

Through her mixture of mythic and ordinary figures and places within her fiction, Castillo blends myth, history—therefore ‘narrative constructions of reality’—and fiction, thereby challenging the supposedly clear line between which myth, history, and fiction can be drawn. Castillo’s work is not simply about what is immanent in the text as through its various associations, juxtapositions, and narrative techniques, it unveils all texts as constructed. Castillo’s shifting narration technique challenges individual subjectivity within a text and revitalizes notions of collective subjectivity. Within her work, this is particularly directed toward mythical and historical texts as these texts stem from a long tradition of story-telling and are the most prevalent and influential within human culture, making the question of narrative authority specifically important to them. In the next part, we will further investigate this relationship between myth, history, and fiction within Castillo’s novel *So Far from God*.

## Part III

### Myth and Magical Realism in *So Far from God*<sup>1</sup>

#### Magical Realism

Reality is a question of perspective; the further you get from the past, the more concrete and plausible it seems—but as you approach the present, it inevitably seems incredible

-Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

The English term ‘magical realism’ comes from the German phrase “magischer realismus” which was coined in the mid-1920s by Franz Roh. Roh used this term to refer to a “counter movement in art through which the charm of the object was rediscovered” (Jorgenson 154). The term was later appropriated by Latin American writers as a way to express the marvelous reality unique to their own cultures (Jorgenson 155). The unique mystical practices and beliefs of Latin American indigenous cultures of the past continue to influence Latin American cultural practices and beliefs of the present. The Latin American “boom” of the 1960s and 1970s incorporated the literary techniques of magical realism as a way of addressing political and social clashes. In *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American "Boom" in the Neoliberal Marketplace*, Brett Levinson says, “Magical Realism, a key aesthetic mode within recent Latin American fiction [. . .] materializes when Latin American history reveals itself as incapable of accounting for its own origins, an incapacity which traditionally—though not here, within magical realism—represents a demand for myth: mythos as a means to explain the beginnings which escape history’s narrative” (Levinson 26). Within the novel *So Far from God*, Castillo proposes a new mythology

within Mexican and Mexican-American culture by joining myth and reality. This fusion is enhanced and sustained by narrative techniques which blend the ordinary and the extraordinary. By converging myth and reality, myth becomes demystified, and according to Levinson, this demystification leads to “dehistoricization,” thereby removing history as ground and rendering it irreducible to representation (Levinson 26). Therefore history’s narrative can no longer be understood as invincible or impenetrable, and it allows history’s narrative and myth to become the subject of re-examination and re-interpretation within *So Far from God*. In this part, I will explore the narrative techniques employed throughout *So Far from God* and examine how they create a diegetic world wherein the ordinary and the extraordinary become merged and the implications this imposes upon mythic and historic narratives.

### **Narrative Reticence and Irony in *So Far from God***

*So Far from God* follows the story of Sofia and her four daughters. It is set in the present-day, small town of Tome, New Mexico and recounts the extraordinary events that occur within the ordinary lives of the protagonists. The novel is organized into sixteen chapters which are all given descriptive titles: “1. An Account of the First Astonishing Occurrence in the Lives of a Woman Named Sofia and Her Four Fated Daughters; and the Equally Astonishing Return of Her Wayward Husband.” The rhetoric of each title alludes to the heroic adventures we would expect to find within myths and legends as demonstrated here by words such as “fated,” “astonishing,” and “wayward.” We expect to enter something of this narrative type. The story to follow is announced as “an account,” a term that connotes objectivity, and thus attempts to remove the fictive nature of the text by presenting it as a real “occurrence.” These chapter titles are contradicted by the self-affirming title page: *So Far*

from God: A Novel. This paratext<sup>96</sup> confirms the reader's assumption that the following story is indeed fiction by presenting itself as 'a novel.' However, the reader is still uncertain what type of fictional story it is. The diegetic world of this novel appears to mirror the reader's world. The reader soon questions this supposition as the narrator's hesitation in clarifying events mystifies the realism of the novel. By blurring the line of reality, Castillo plays with our notions of reality and fantasy by depicting ordinary events as extraordinary and extraordinary events as ordinary.

Sometimes, such events within the novel are presented as "domestic prophecies" (So Far 50). Caridad, one daughter of Sophia, experiences "clairvoyant" (So Far 72) abilities after a traumatic event. These abilities manifest themselves in four prophecies: the arrival of Esperanza, her sister, who lives out of town (So Far 46), the winning lottery ticket of don Domingo, her father, who uses the number '113' after hearing about Caridad's dream of 113 horses (So Far 49), the arrival of their dog Wilma who had been missing (So Far 49), and her own departure from home, which the narrator says is "a matter of individual opinion whether one wants to consider it a prediction or simply an announcement" (So Far 50). Such 'predictions' trivialize the concept of clairvoyance and appear comedic here. In this sense, an extraordinary event becomes mundane. However, the reverse could also be said. Caridad, possessing no real clairvoyant abilities, makes 'predictions' in such a way as to appear "clairvoyant" to her family. This would therefore render an ordinary 'prediction' as an extraordinary 'prophecy.' The narrator says, "While it is the gambler's nature to fall prey to superstitions, in a household such as Sofi's it was becoming increasingly difficult for her husband to determine what was a definite 'sign' to play a hunch on and what was just part of

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<sup>96</sup> Gérard Genette defines this term as follows: "text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this word but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (Paratexts: Threshold to Interpretation 1).



its daily activities” (So Far 58). This quote underlines the general question that the reader asks him or herself throughout the entire novel: which events are truly extraordinary and which events are simply ordinary?

The very first line of the story begins by introducing Sofia’s youngest daughter, La Loca. The narrator says, “La Loca was only three years old when she died” (So Far 19). This introduction appears very odd to the reader. According to the synopsis, the reader understands that La Loca is one of the protagonists within So Far from God. Why then are we being introduced to a protagonist via the announcement of their premature death? Three pages later, the narrator describes an event at La Loca’s funeral:

The lid had pushed all the way open and the little girl inside sat up, just as sweetly as if she had woken from a nap, rubbing her eyes and yawning [. . .] Father Jerome got hold of himself and sprinkled holy water in the direction of the child, but for the moment was too stunned to utter so much as a word of prayer. Then, as if all this was not amazing enough, as Father Jerome moved toward the child she lifted herself up into the air and landed on the church roof<sup>97</sup> (So Far 22-23).

The narrator demonstrates irony with the use of the phrase, “Then, as if all this was not amazing enough.” This helps the reader to identify with the narrator’s perspective. We are not yet sure what type of narrative we are getting into, and with the assistance of the narrator, the reader does not simply excuse the events within the story as pure ‘magic’ or fantasy. This ‘miracle’ as described by the villagers of Tome was experienced as a holy “resurrection” (So Far 28). The reader soon finds out that La Loca has epilepsy which accounts for her unconsciousness during her funeral, and at the end of the story, we discover that she was misdiagnosed by a young intern at the hospital and pronounced dead. Due to this information provided later by the narrator, the reader understands that La Loca’s ‘death,’ and therefore “resurrection,” are not divine. However, the narrator presents this scene to the reader without this important information, and the reader experiences the same bewilderment as the villagers

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<sup>97</sup> La Loca’s ascension to the church roof will be discussed later.

who witness the resurrection. We too wonder if we are stepping into the realm of the holy. After the narrator announces La Loca's epilepsy following this scene, this holy event becomes demystified. The reader smiles at the thought of 'holy resurrections' occurring before modern science; most prominent in Western culture is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through such a presentation of information by the hetero-diegetic narrator, an ordinary event has become extraordinary.

### **The Mergence of the (Extra) Ordinary**

This trickery<sup>98</sup> at the beginning sets the tone for the entire novel. As extraordinary events continue to occur, the reader continues to question what is truly happening. Part of this confusion is due to the narrator's alternation between internal and external focalization. At times, we are given access to the thoughts and feelings of characters:

Sofi was hearsick at not having for an escort the guy she had seen only once and whose name she did not even know and who, as far as she knew, had already eloped with that . . . puta<sup>99</sup> (yes, that was the word Sofi actually used, although only to herself) from the dance in Belen" (So Far 108).

At other times, we are not given access to the thoughts of characters: "And then, whatever it was that she 'saw' but could not tell in words caused her to cry unconsolably" (So Far 50). Facilitating this confusion is the narrator's reticence. The above description of La Loca's resurrection ends by saying, "she lifted herself up into the air and landed on the church roof." The narrator offers the reader a 'logical' explanation for how La Loca "resurrected," yet we are not offered the same for La Loca's ascension to the church roof. This ambiguity is an

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<sup>98</sup> A subsection describing La Loca's cooking exclaims, "here's the trick, there's always a trick, you know" (So Far 167), which highlights the overall trickery occurring within the novel. This statement is also preceded by the italicized word 'patience' (So Far 166), and by La Loca's statement, "you have to first learn to be patient" (So Far 164), which mirrors chapter eight's title, "What Appears to Be a Deviation of Our Story but Wherein, with Some Patience, the Reader Will Discover That There Is Always More Than the Eye Can See to Any Account" (So Far 120). The correlation between these statements indicates that it is imperative that the reader exercises 'patience' in unraveling all of the narrative 'tricks' within the novel.

<sup>99</sup> 'Putas' translates to 'bitch'/'whore.'

important element within *So Far from God* because it keeps the reader from simply dismissing the novel as a fantasy.

This event transforms the ordinary life of La Loca. Because the villagers of Tome witnessed La Loca's phenomenal resurrection, she is granted the title of "Santa" (So Far 25), and people come from around the world to receive her blessing. However, La Loca acquires an adverseness to people after her experience in "hell"<sup>100</sup> (So Far 23) during her 'death,' and as a result, she is soon forgotten by these strangers, but she remains a local legend. Conversely, the creditability of La Loca's sainthood is put into question by her sister Fe. The narrator says, "She did not remember 'El Milagro,' as her mother referred to La Loca's resurrection that day in front of the church, and highly suspected that such a thing as her little sister flying up to the church rooftop had never happened" (So Far 29). Fe's skepticism<sup>101</sup> is mirrored by the reader's skepticism, but later this account is supported by Father Jerome's perspective. The narrator says, "He had never gotten over the sight of the infant who had risen from her little casket and ascended to the church roof" (So Far 84). La Loca's ascension is confirmed by Father Jerome and is nowhere else negated by the narrator. This creates a discrepancy between the 'reality' each character experiences, and it offers the reader multiple interpretations of phenomenal events.

A similar experience occurs with Sofia's other daughter, Caridad. After being cheated on by her husband, Caridad responds with a life of promiscuity. One night, she is badly assaulted: "Sofi was told that her daughter's nipples had been bitten off. She had also been scourged with something, branded like cattle. Worst of all, a tracheotomy was performed because she had also been stabbed in the throat" (So Far 33). Caridad spends

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<sup>100</sup> The mention of 'hell' is later used in association with dreams: "Then, as if bad dreams once having been entered are the inevitable long road to hell itself" (So Far 210). This gives the reader an alternative understanding of the use of 'hell' here rather than La Loca literally having traveled to hell.

<sup>101</sup> By naming her characters after theological virtues, Fe (Faith), Esperanza (Hope), and Caridad (Charity), Castillo invokes an ironic, allegorical interpretation of the narrative which comments upon religion, specifically Christianity.

three months in the hospital before she can come home. One night, Caridad is seen “walking soundlessly” (So Far 37) throughout the house in her sister Fe’s wedding gown. When Sofi and her daughters gather together to find Caridad in the bedroom, they see a transformed figure of Caridad: “Sofi stepped back when she saw, not what had been left of her daughter, half repaired by modern medical technology, tubes through her throat, bandages over skin that was gone, surgery piecing together flesh that was once her daughter’s breasts, but Caridad as she was before” (So Far 38). This ‘miracle’ is referred to as a “holy restoration” in order to describe her recovery (So Far 43). Although the narrator does not overtly explain this miraculous recovery, as with La Loca’s resurrection, the narrator does offer an alternative description of the event: it is a “phenomenal recovery” (So Far 43). Certainly for the reader, a phenomenal recovery, although not frequent, is possible in the real world. This alternative explanation is supported by the character, doña Felicia, when she says to Caridad, “you healed yourself by pure will” (So Far 55). However, my interest lies in the ambiguity of the word ‘phenomenal’ which teeters between the explainable and the unexplainable, between observable ‘fact’ and the unbelievable ‘extraordinary.’ For the other characters in the novel, an extraordinary element is attributed to this occurrence; that of the divine. This “miracle” (So Far 36) is believed to have occurred because La Loca “prayed real hard” for Caridad (So Far 37-38). Throughout the novel, the act of praying parallels miraculous occurrences, and although the narrator does not explicitly claim that the act of prayer cured Caridad, in juxtaposing the two, the narrator implies a connection between these two events, and the reader questions if the recovery was in fact due to some sort of divine intervention. The narrator adds that praying “was La Loca’s principal reason for being alive, as both her mother and she well knew” (So Far 32).

La Loca also prays for her sister Fe’s recovery after Fe suffers a nervous breakdown due to her boyfriend’s abandonment. Fe is constantly screaming, earning her the nickname

“La Gritona” (So Far 37) which means ‘the screaming woman,’ and she often bangs her head against the wall. Fe recovers from this nervous breakdown, and her “transformation” (So Far 38) converges with Caridad’s restoration. The narrator then offers a quasi-explanation for this: “Caridad and Fe’s spontaneous recoveries were beyond all rhyme and reason for anyone” (So Far 39). Here the narrator does not provide a clear explanation as to what occurred, but the narrator again gives an alternative interpretation to the characters’ interpretation of the same event. By proposing that there is no clear explanation as to what occurred with the phrase “beyond all rhyme and reason,” the narrator negates La Loca’s certainty that it was her praying which set these phenomenal events in motion, and therefore the reader understands that the juxtaposition of prayer in correlation to phenomenal events does not signify a clear cause and effect relationship. This occurrence falls along the same lines as the questionability of La Loca’s ‘flight’ to the church roof. The reader’s faith in the realism of the novel continues because of the narrator’s ironic distance and reticence, yet this reticence often leads us to question the truth of each miraculous event as we are often uncertain as to what we are witnessing.

As the reader’s confidence in the narrator remains, the nature of the diegetic world becomes questionable. Is this diegetic world a mirror of the real world or a fantasy? Another miraculous event occurs in which Caridad takes her lover, Esmeralda, by the hand as they “fly” off a cliff (So Far 211). This is preceded by the narrator’s words, “We don’t know why she did what she did next” (So Far 210). However, the narrator then explains that from the point of view of Caridad and her lover, a vision of the Pueblo Indian spirit deity Tsichtinako calls to them, and they unhesitatingly run to the cliff’s edge and jump. The narrator says that they heard a “voice,” a voice which was also heard by the surrounding spectators, and the text says, “*Tsichtinako was calling!*” (So Far 211). This is juxtaposed with a conversation that Esmeralda and her grandmother have, and upon overhearing this conversation, Caridad falls

to the ground crying, and it is immediately after this that she jumps off the cliff. By prohibiting access to what it is that Caridad overhears—something which seems of great significance as the order in which the information is presented by the narrator makes it appear as the main motivation for her suicide—the reader is alienated, and this estrangement further mystifies the event of Caridad’s death. The narrator describes Caridad’s response to what she overhears: “all she could say to herself at that moment [. . .] was ‘How could I be so blind? [. . .] when Caridad heard what she heard, she could do nothing [. . .] ‘What is it?’ Esmeralda asked when she heard Caridad’s loud sobs and came out to see, but Caridad could not answer” (So Far 210). Expecting a description of Caridad and Esmeralda’s death to follow their leap from the cliff, the reader is confused to find a description of the crowd’s interpretation of the event: “But much to all their surprise, there were no morbid remains of splintered bodies tossed to the ground down, down, like bad pottery or glass or old bread. There weren’t even whole bodies lying peaceful. There was nothing” (So Far 211). This point of view is then contrasted with the memory of Caridad’s father, don Domingo which confirms her death: “the jumping off a mesa like an Acapulco cliff diver with no ocean below [. . .] were hideous memories” (So Far 213). As seen here, seemingly miraculous events are given an alternative ordinary explanation. At the same time, ordinary events become seen as extraordinary through the perspective of the characters within the novel. The reader is able to understand the character’s interpretations of events as phenomenal and to understand why shocking events are often understood to be associated with the divine as the small town of Tome is described as having a large Catholic and Pueblo Indian religious and cultural influence. However, the realism within the novel becomes very questionable after the disappearance of Sofia’s oldest daughter, Esperanza.

## **Into the Mythic**

Esperanza is a reporter who is sent to Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. Two army privates deliver the news of Esperanza's death, but her body is never found. Esperanza's return is announced by the partial chapter title, "the Ectoplasmic Return of Sofi's daughter." The humor induced by the word "ectoplasmic" keeps the narrator at a distance and protects the realism of the novel from being compromised. La Loca is seen speaking to a "transparent" figure that is recognized as Esperanza (So Far 163). Both don Domingo and Sofi see the figure, and the narrator says that "Caridad [. . .] was having long discussions, even if mostly one-sided, with Esperanza" (So Far 163). The description of Caridad's conversations being "mostly one-sided" hints that the transparent figure of Esperanza could be within the imaginations of her family as a way to reconcile the "mystery" of her "missing body" (So Far 160). In other words, as a response to the trauma of Esperanza's mysterious death, her family projects an image of her. However, the narrator describes a second figure with Esperanza: the mythic figure La Llorona (So Far 159). Again the narrator places humor in the description by describing La Llorona as the "Chicana international astral-traveler" (So Far 162). This juxtaposition of Esperanza's transparent figure with the mythic figure La Llorona<sup>102</sup> compromises the realism of the story and creates a 'magical' element. This makes the reader re-consider other extraordinary elements and events within the narrative.

Within *So Far from God*, the supernatural is integrated within the norms of perception of the diegetic world. This is accomplished by the narrator's presentation of ordinary and extraordinary events without a clear separation between the two. The effect of this is that both the natural and the supernatural inhabit the same plane; if the supernatural was presented as such, the natural would appear as more valid, thereby threatening the credibility of the supernatural. As a result, the magical realism would fall apart. Castillo plays with the

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<sup>102</sup> More will be said about this mythic dimension within *So Far from God* below.

reader's sense of the rational and the irrational. The narrator's use of presentation paired with the unclear language used to describe events works to create ambiguity regarding what the reader perceives, and through several clues throughout the text, multiple valid explanations can be constructed. This is similar to Castillo's frequent use of words such as "miracle" and "phenomenal" throughout the text, as mentioned later, which adds to this ambiguity as readers are faced with the discrepancy between the literal, idiomatic, and figurative uses of such words. In addition, the repetition of words, such as the several anaphoras occurring within the first chapter<sup>103</sup>, calls attention to the word itself; reinforcing the word as a construct, and through this repetition, the word itself begins to lose its meaning as the reader, like a child, becomes more attentive to the sound than to the message.

### *The 'Magic' in Science*

Although the narrator remains distant, the narrator also demonstrates a respect for the 'magical' elements within *So Far from God*. The narrator devotes a sub-chapter, called "A Brief Sampling of Doña Felicia's Remedios" (So Far 65), to the diagnosis and treatment methods of the character doña Felicia who is a curandera. There is no hint of irony as the narrator gives great detail in describing various ailments and treatments, which allows the reader a window into the rhyme and reason of the folk healer. A good deal of textual space is used to describe holistic remedies that are used to treat patients, and this veneration is paralleled at the end of the novel in which La Loca, having immaculately contracted AIDS, undergoes a psychic surgery. The narrator announces to the reader that a "psychic surgery" (So Far 228) is being performed on La Loca; however the description that follows renders the surgery real which reflects the fact that Sofi and La Loca believe the surgery to be real:

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<sup>103</sup> "although apparently asleep, jerking. Jerking, jerking [. . .]" (So Far 20), "A sad, sad story" (So Far 20), "Why? Why? [. . .] Oh, why? What?" (So Far 22), "Please, please" (So Far 22), "Over and over" (So Far 23), "Hija, hija" (So Far 23), "the devil doesn't produce miracles! And this is a miracle" (So Far 23), "when she was alive. Well, the fact was that she was alive" (So Far 24), "unappreciated appreciation" (So Far 26) and so on.



The doctor's hand disappeared into her body. She felt no pain, although she did find it hard to breathe deeply, as the doctor was telling her to do while the right hand also went inside her stomach, the opening maintained by the left one. In a few seconds he pulled out his right hand holding a bloody coagulation which he held up for Loca's appraisal, explaining that it was a blood clot and then dropping it into the bowl of water his wife held out for him. He continued his treatment two more times, maintaining his left 'material' hand in the opening, while the right 'spirit' hand sought out the maladies. He next pulled out some cystic fibroids and finally a tumor that had lodged itself to one of Loca's ovaries [. . .] La Loca wasn't the same Loca no more (So Far 228-229).

The fact that La Loca "felt no pain," and Castillo's use of quotations marks around the words 'material' and 'spirit,' is a reminder to the reader that there is not a real surgery occurring, yet the description that surrounds it counters this fact. The descriptions of "blood clots," "cystic fibroids," and "tumors," along with the detail with which the doctor removes such maladies and the process of performing the surgery seem real. In fact it is so real that Sofi faints while watching the surgery take place (So Far 228).

This 'magical' act which has been rendered 'real,' is then juxtaposed with the narrator's statement, "But as el Doctor Tolentino had told Sofi before his tratamiento, there was no guarantee of saving Loca from AIDS, because this was still a time in which the cure was as mystifying to all of society as was the disease" (So Far 229). This statement places medical science on the same level as the 'magical.' The narrator draws a parallel between the scientifically unexplainable e.g. the divine, mythological, holistic practices of the folk healer, and the scientifically explainable. The use of the word "mystifying" creates this parallel, and although medical science has now demystified this disease, the use of the phrase, "this was still a time in which," highlights the phenomenal and extraordinary interpretations we have before such mysteries are given 'scientific' explanation. 'Magic' then appears to simply be something which has not yet been demystified<sup>104</sup>. The narrator alludes to this in a description of la Loca watching her father: "her dad [. . .] entertained her with

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<sup>104</sup> This mirrors the reader's first understanding of La Loca's resurrection.

card games and cheap magician's tricks that to Loca were nevertheless extraordinary" (So Far 152). The 'magic' of the "cheap magician's trick" before its secret is revealed attests to this. In addition, Joseph Campbell's "cosmological function" of myth (The Masks 611) asserts that even science at one point was based in mythology, and this helps us to become aware of the shared space that myth and science inhabit. In making such statements, the narrator keeps the realism of the story from being shattered because they keep the reader's bias at bay that 'magical' phenomena cannot occur within reality. Rather, this emphasizes that reality is constructed and one's interpretation or perspective, no matter how much it differs from individual to individual, has a true and real effect on one's mind and body. This concept is also reflected linguistically in the novel as mentioned above. A "phenomenal recovery" can become a "Holy Restoration," and awakening from an epileptic seizure can become a "resurrection," a term which is also used to describe the reunion of Sofi and don Domingo, e.g. "with the reappearance of her father a likely resurrection of her parents' marriage" (So Far 46). The frequent use of the word "miracle" through the novel also calls attention to our casual use of the word in expressions such as "what a miracle," "it was a miracle," etc. Within the novel, the characters truly believe that certain events are a miracle of the divine and the supernatural. However, the recovery of Caridad's assault and the awakening of La Loca before it is known that she has epilepsy are truly miraculous in the idiomatic use of the expression and point to the fact that such extraordinary language has found its way into common use. This common use of such expressions to convey phenomenal experience is a linguistic gateway to integrate the extraordinary in our daily lives.

This blending of the extraordinary with the ordinary continues via the integration of mythological characters. As mentioned above, the prominent Mexican, mythic figure La

Llorona<sup>105</sup> becomes a character within the novel. She has been coming to see La Loca for many years, despite the fact that no one ever told her the story of La Llorona (So Far 160). La Loca tells the family that Esperanza's spirit is friends with La Llorona, and La Llorona has come to see La Loca in order to confirm Esperanza's death.: "So it was she whom Esperanza sent to deliver the news to her dear mother in Tome, knowing by then that La Llorona was on a first-name basis with her little sister who had always hung out by the acequia. And everyone knows, if you want to find La Llorona, go hang out down by the río, or its nearest equivalent, especially when no one else is around. At night. Which was where, after that, that Esperanza was also occasionally seen" (So Far 163). Here, Castillo plays with this well-known, as reflected in the statement "everyone knows," mythic and cultural figure, and her mundane description<sup>106</sup> and integration of this figure demystifies it by placing it on the same plane as the figures of the ordinary, natural world within the novel. Castillo accomplishes this by resisting extravagant language to describe extraordinary characters. In addition, this blending, with the aid of language and narrative presentation, forces the readers to re-examine their own understanding of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

### **Mythologization of the Ordinary**

Not only does Castillo place mythic figures in the realm of the real, but she also places real figures in the realm of the mythic. The previous quote creates a parallel between the character Esperanza and the mythic figure La Llorona as it describes the most prominent features of La Llorona's tale now being associated with Esperanza, e.g. being seen by water at night. In this way, Esperanza becomes associated with the mythic realm. In addition, all of the female protagonists within the novel demonstrate a resemblance to La Llorona as each

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<sup>105</sup> Refer to part one, sub-section "Chicano and Xicanisma."

<sup>106</sup> Phrases such as "first-name basis" and "hung out" demonstrate that La Llorona has a social life outside of her eternal punishment of searching for her children while she cries, adding various dimensions to this mythic figure who was previously presented within narrative as a one-dimensional character.

suffers the abandonment by a male figure in their lives and are often described in association with the words “weeping,” “wailing,” and “sobbing”<sup>107</sup>: “all three women began to wail and moan like Cihuacoatls, holding each other and grieving over the loss of Sofi’s oldest child” (So Far 162). Here, Sofi’s family is also associated with the Aztec mythological motherhood and fertility goddess Cihuacoatl. This association between the female characters within *So Far from God* and female mythological figures creates a connection between them and works to mythologize the protagonists within *So Far from God*. According to scholar Amaia Ibarra Bigalondo, the mythic qualities of the female characters within *So Far from God* comment upon gender disparities. Bigalondo draws upon the work of Carmen Salazar Parr and Genevieve M. Ramírez in her essay “Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*: A Story of Survival”:

We have found that in these female-authored works women exhibit the same heroic qualities as men. The ‘dragons’ challenged by women are the conventions created in a male-dominated world. Perhaps the foremost heroic achievement resides in the assumption of those heroic qualities, possible only in the conscious deviation from the traditionally feminine characteristics imposed by men. Our women heroes do not, however, seek superiority and dominance but rather parity and equality of stature, respect, and opportunity. Clearly, they are neither the traditional heroes in positions of power nor the traditional heroines whose roles support the heroic achievements of men (Bigalondo 28).

While this is very interesting, and I agree that the female characters within the novel resist and challenge traditional female roles such as Sofia’s decision to run for mayor of Tome (*So Far* 149), it deviates from the very object Castillo is deconstructing which are the myths themselves. Bigalondo<sup>108</sup> insists too much on the novel’s overt reflection on gender disparities within society whereas the depiction of *La Llorona* should be understood as an

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<sup>107</sup> *La Llorona* too is given a direct association with the figure of *La Llorona*: “[after *La Llorona*’s death] in Tome, for a long time people claimed to catch sight of her by her favorite acequia” (*So Far* 248). In addition, the narrator ascribes an extraordinary quality to Sofia’s family by saying “Eventually it would be revealed that none of the women in that family was without some unusual trait” (*So Far* 58).

<sup>108</sup> Scholar Susan Thananopavarn also focuses on the overt gender, racial, and political messages within *So Far from God* in her essay, “Conscientización of the Oppressed: Language and the Politics of Humor in Ana Castillo’s *So Far from God*.”

offering; an alternative version of the prominent, mythic, feminine figure which rewrites her legend and is in the same spirit as the narrator's alternative versions of the same event throughout the novel. Castillo constructs a new myth of La Llorona: she is a compassionate figure who helps rather than terrorizes, and her alternative forms, i.e. the female protagonists within *So Far from God*, offer ordinary figures with which the reader can sympathize rather than demonize as La Llorona has often been.

This mythologization continues with the mysterious figure "Woman-on-the-wall" (*So Far* 79). The narrator describes Caridad's first sight of this woman, who we later learn is Esmeralda, by saying, "she stopped short at the sight of the most beautiful woman she had ever seen sitting on the adobe wall that surrounds the sanctuary. At that moment the woman also turned toward Caridad, but since she was wearing sunglasses, Caridad wasn't sure whether her gaze was being returned [. . .] All the while, Caridad kept sneaking glances over at the woman on the wall who, as far as she could tell, was unabashedly staring at her as well" (*So Far* 77-78). Esmeralda's name is replaced by a descriptive title<sup>109</sup>, and this creates distance between her and the other characters by placing her on a different plane; that of the mythic. Subsequently, humor is employed to debunk this mythic quality first assigned to Esmeralda's character by altering her name according to the changing context, and this brings her figure back down to the plane of the ordinary. Esmeralda's name then becomes "Woman-on-the-wall-now-on-a-hill," (*So Far* 79) and later "Woman-on-the-wall-later-woman-on-a-hill-with-someone-else" (*So Far* 81). In addition, by extracting the words 'woman-on-a-hill,' we have a reference to John Winthrop's famous line, "city upon a hill," from his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity." This plays upon American mythology by instating a "dark" woman (*So Far* 79) rather than a patriarchal, Anglo, Christian society as an exemplary model for the world. A few pages later, we have another reference to American

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<sup>109</sup> This mirrors the name of the mythic figure La Llorona which is also descriptive as it translates to 'The Weeping Woman.' Fe's nickname, La Gritona, functions similarly as it translates to 'The Screaming Woman,' and La Loca, which translates to 'The Crazy Woman,' has earned this name due to her epilepsy.

mythology. Amelia Earhart, both an historic and mythologized American, female figure, is referenced in association with the loss of Fe's voice. The narrator says, "Fe had severely damaged her vocal cords during the days when she had so violently and ceaselessly screamed; as a result, when she spoke now her voice was scratchy-sounding, similar to a faulty World War II radio transmitter, over which half of what she was saying did not get through, something like talking to Amelia Earhart just before contact was broken off altogether and she went down" (So Far 85). Castillo places Fe's muted voice alongside the disappearance of an American, female, mythic figure thereby drawing a connection between the two. Amelia Earhart, as the first female to pilot a plane across the Atlantic Ocean, mirrors the other female characters within *So Far from God* who take 'flight,' literally La Loca, Caridad, and Esmeralda, and metaphorically Sofia, Esperanza, and Fe who are empowered women serving in the traditional male spheres of society<sup>110</sup>. This latter connection is not such a 'leap' when compared to the narrator's statement earlier in the novel, "As La Loca had told her mother, her father had indeed been to hell and back, which is what may be said of the life of the compulsive gambler" (So Far 58). Such a statement unveils phenomena as metaphor within the novel, therefore opening the door to possible figurative interpretations of events.

The ordinary street and market life of Tome also becomes associated with the characteristics of mythic narratives:

It was that month in the 'Land of Enchantment' when it smelled of roasted chiles everywhere. Fresh red ristras and sometimes green ones were hung on the vigas of the portales throughout—all along dusty roads, in front of shops and restaurants to welcome visitors and to ward off enemies. Propane-run chile roasters were hand-rotated by bagboys in front of local supermarkets and everyone who didn't grow their own lined up to get their chiles, women were packing them up, whole dried, and in sauces, to send off to homesick boys stationed in Panama

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<sup>110</sup> Sofia becomes a business and political woman and shares her *carnecería* with the citizens of Tome and organizes a wool making business with several other women in town and an organization called M.O.M.A.S. (Mothers of Martyrs and Saints). Esperanza is a successful reporter who is sent to Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. Fe's salary surpasses her husband's as she works as a banker and later as an employee of Acme International.

and to wayfaring relatives in Wyoming and Washington, D.C., but mostly to feed their familias right there and to freeze for the winter (So Far 170).

This is the first paragraph of chapter 11, entitled, “The Marriage of Sofia’s Faithful Daughter to Her Cousin, Casimiro, Descendant of Shepherders and Promising Accountant, Who, by All Accounts, Was Her True Fated Love; and of Her Death, Which Lingers Among Us All Heavier than Air” (So Far 170). Preceded by such an extravagant title, the mythic tone is set, and when the reader comes across the phrase, “Land of Enchantment,” mixed with a detailed description of the “shops and restaurants” and “local supermarkets” of Tome, a connection is created between the ordinary life in Tome and the extraordinary life in a mythical land. This is emphasized by the “dusty roads” and the “wayfaring relatives,” and along with the juxtaposition of the locations “Panama,” “Wyoming,” and “Washington, D.C.,” the concept of long distances is accentuated. This connotes the traditional journey of the mythic hero as stressed by Joseph Campbell’s chapter titles “Departure,” “Initiation,” and “Return” (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*). In addition, the references to “roasted,” “whole,” and “dried” chilies exemplifies the constant references to food throughout the novel and highlights a carnivalesque<sup>111</sup> quality wherein the bodily senses are celebrated. This intermingling of the mythic and festive serves to transform the ordinary town of Tome into an extraordinary place.

### **Dehistoricization and the Wandering Ghosts of the Past**

In accordance with the demystification of myth, Brett Levinson, author of *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American "Boom" in the Neoliberal Marketplace*, says that magical realism also undertakes the task of dehistoricization:

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<sup>111</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin uses this term in reference to the festive folk life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and in the prologue of *Rabelais and His World*, Michael Holquist says, “Bakhtin’s vision of carnival [. . .] is finally about freedom, the courage needed to establish it, the cunning required to maintain it, and—above all—the horrific ease with which it can be lost” (*Rabelais and His World* xxi). This element then supports leading subversive interpretations of *So Far from God*.

By dehistoricization I am not alluding to the avoidance of history but rather, to the removal of history as ground. Once the myths are demystified, we are not left with the severity of Latin American history as truth but with a third topos: the stubborn trace of the past [. . .] irreducible to a representation or to the narrative which history is. These are not historical entities but their wandering ghosts and material vestiges, unable to take root, take their place, rest within history” (Levinson 26).

The rewriting of myth within *So Far from God* demonstrates the mutability of narrative<sup>112</sup>, and the manifestation of the “wandering ghosts” of the past are not only symbolized by actual ghosts within the novel, but great emphasis is placed upon these traces of the past which manifest themselves through familial relations<sup>113</sup> as demonstrated via landownership, a reference to the historical loss of land in the Southwest for Mexican and Mexican-American families. Sofi expresses her indignation concerning the diminishment of her family’s land:

I am renting property built by my own abuelos [. . .] You know that my great-great-grandparents were the direct grantees of a land grant from King Felipe II, the very land I grew up on as a child. Except that what I grew up on was barely enough to plant a little corn, some Calabasas, chiles, nomás, and graze a few goats and sheep to keep us alive. First the gringos took most of our land away when they took over the territory from Mexico—right after Mexico had taken it from Spain and like my vis-abuelo used to say, ‘Ni no’ habiamo’ dado cuenta,’ it all happened so fast! Then, little by little, my familia had to give it up ’cause they couldn’t afford it no more, losing business on their churros and cattle (*So Far* 217).

The mention of successive-generational, family-owned land is referenced throughout the novel. Sofia understands her relationship to the past through her familial relations, and this past manifests itself physically in the land. The diminishment of family-owned land therefore becomes a direct reflection of the authorial diminishment of history’s official narrative. The narratives, both historical and mythical, passed down to Sofia through her family, trumps History’s authority. Sofia’s speech rejects the official narrative of American

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<sup>112</sup>Adding to this, Daniel Cooper’s essay emphasizes the importance of the palimpsest as a model for approaching mythical and historical narratives and warns against “the pervasive, misleading belief among scholars of a clear distinction between myth and history” (Cooper 57).

<sup>113</sup>These familial relations are traced back at length: “Sofi buried La Loca [. . .] in the camposanto of the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe where her parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, great-great-great-grandparents, great-great-great-great-grandparents, and their children, or at least most of them all lay to rest” (*So Far* 246).



history by putting forward an alternative version of the acquisition of northern Mexico by the U.S., and her emphasis on her familial relations and the land highlights the forgotten elements of history's official narrative which continue to affect the lives of the citizens of Tome. The narrator again makes mention of familial relations and land ownership after Sofia and her female neighbors create a sheep-grazing and wool-weaving cooperative in Tome: "above all, to stay on their land, to work it as their families had for many generations, was the desire of everyone who joined in and became everyone's dream" (So Far 148). This act of land-loss resistance is a refusal of history's narrative. These traces of the past which are manifested through familial relations and landownership are an alternative understanding of the past that does not rely on history's narrative. This removal of history as "ground" allows for its re-interpretation and rewriting; allowing multiple perspectives and narratives to coexist which is exactly what occurs throughout the narrative of *So Far from God*. Because there is no imposed perspective within the novel, the reader is free to "wander" (Levinson 26) and understand events from multiple perspectives. This reflects upon the irreducibility of history into one, authoritative representation. Just as the above mentioned traces of the past are unable to take root within history, the citizens of Tome too are "unable to take root" (Levinson 26) as the land their ancestors<sup>114</sup> once possessed continues to diminish, forcing them to become displaced<sup>115</sup>.

Magical realism, within literature, arises from "a demand for myth: mythos as a means to explain the beginnings which escapes history's narrative" (Levinson 26). Within *So Far from God*, Castillo proposes a new mythology of La Llorona by joining myth and reality which is sustained by narrative techniques used to blend the ordinary and the

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<sup>114</sup> The narrator describes Sofia's goal in becoming mayor which is "to engender some new spirit back into Tome, land of her ancestors" (So Far 140). This is a reference to the Chicano Movement which utilized the myth of Aztlán to endow the land of the Southwest with a new 'spirit.'

<sup>115</sup> Sophia loses her family's house, and she and don Domingo must move. They divorce and live separately. (So Far 216-219).

extraordinary. These manifest themselves through the narrator's reticence, which mystifies the realism of the novel, and the narrator's ironic distance, which mirrors the skepticism of the reader allowing the reader to identify with the narrator. The convergence of myth and reality places them on the same plane, making myth of the natural world and therefore demystifying it. This demystification leads to dehistoricization which removes history as ground, allowing for multiple perspectives to coexist. This is reflected by the presentation of various interpretations of the same event by characters. Both mythic and historical narratives become subjected to re-examination and re-interpretation, and this highlights the fact that such narratives are always in a state of flux, continually being written and rewritten. Readers are therefore invited to re-examine their own world and the narratives within it.

## Conclusion

Historiography within the U.S. proposes a western perspective which diminishes the voice of the subaltern. Chicano literature emerges from a desire to recover this lost history of the Chicano people. As Dr. Emma Martinez notes, “Education and history books have done a really poor job of telling our story [. . .] the literature books do a better job of doing that” (Uribe). This makes Chicano literature especially pertinent in addressing the interconnection between myth, history, and literature. Like myth and history, Chicano literature deals with the question of the origin of Chicano people, a people of mixed race, culture, history, and language, by examining notions of collective and individual identity, experience, and understanding of the past and present. This question of identity becomes a precarious notion to grapple with as Chicanos themselves are not homogenous and the concept of a static and linear understanding of the past is being challenged within literature today. History and myth are in a constant state of flux, and throughout this thesis, we have examined the different ways in which Ana Castillo deals with the question of myth and history within her fiction.

History and myth are targeted as Castillo mimics historiographic narrative techniques through her fictionalization of the country Sapogonia and through her appropriation of the prominent Chicano myth of Aztlán as Sapogonia is the “distinct place in the Americas where all mestizos reside” (Sapogonia 1). Castillo’s fiction explores how histories and myths are affected by and affect human culture as we have seen through the mythologization of the ordinary and the realization of the mythic within *So Far from God*. This highlights the mutability of both myth and history, a quality which allows Castillo to appropriate them, thereby unveiling myth and history as constructs.

Castillo’s literature examines the powerful effect such narratives have on human consciousness and plays with this. Castillo demonstrates this through her re-interpretation of *La Llorona* as this figure, like many other mythical female figures, is stigmatized by what

Castillo refers to as the 'Eve theme' and reinstates La Llorona as a saintly figure within her text, countering the demonized image of La Llorona which is often used to frighten children. Castillo's use of Sapogonia, as it bears an uncanny resemblance to Aztlán, forefronts notions of national identity which are projected through myth. This is most relevant to the appropriation of the myth of Aztlán during the Chicano Movement as a way of projecting a national identity of the Chicano people<sup>116</sup>. Myths become a means through which to unify, yet this unification is not necessarily positive. Castillo is specifically concerned with patriarchal myths within the western world, and her researches of Mesoamerican gods and goddesses have delivered similar findings concerning their promotion of patriarchy. However, these mythic figures and narratives are certainly not cast in stone and change over time. Castillo's use of myth functions as an appropriation which reinstates mythological figures and narratives under a new guise, thereby asking us to re-examine and re-interpret them.

Castillo's use of magical realism within her literature signifies a call for myth. Levinson believes this demand for myth arises from history's inadequacies in explaining "the beginnings which escapes history's narrative" (Levinson 26). However, Castillo's demystification of myth within her fiction leads to dehistoricization, removing history as ground, thereby removing its authority. In Sapogonia, we have multiple narrators and perspectives. No single voice has more authority than another. Castillo's shifting narration within Sapogonia makes the narrators indistinguishable from one another, thereby creating the effect of a collective narrating subject which includes the reader through the use of the second-person pronoun. The collective narrating subject counters the fragmented self by returning to a "more primordial, unified whole"<sup>117</sup> (López). In addition, *So Far from God* has

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<sup>116</sup> The 'nation of Aztlán' was declared by "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán."

<sup>117</sup> Castillo says, "I am in search of identity, as indeed we all are, which is a fact of living in a world of fragmented selves" (Massacre 8). Castillo continues, "Our collective memories [. . .] hold the antidote to that profound sense of alienation many experience in white dominant society" (Massacre 17).

a single narrator, yet the perspectives of the characters contradict one another, but no one perspective is presented as more valid than the other, allowing multiple perspectives and voices to coexist. This challenges the authority of the hegemonic narrating subject of history and myth as Castillo's polyphonic text permits multiple perspectives and voices simultaneously, implying a collective authorship of the various narratives within and of our own lives.

Castillo's effect of blurring the line between myth, history, and fiction through various literary techniques, comments upon 'narrative constructions of reality.' In addition, the reader becomes unable to discern fantasy from reality through Castillo's blending of the ordinary and the extraordinary via her association of ordinary characters with mythic figures, her use of magical realism, her inscription of the reader, and her use of an intruding author. Where does the diegetic world end and the reader's world begin? This invites us to re-examine the narratives within our own world and accentuates an understanding of reality—our perception of the world—which is shaped by narrative. By exploring beyond the common social and political topics of Chicano literature, we are able to delve deeper into the epistemological and ontological questions that affect all of humanity, not only lo chicano, yet we must understand Chicano literature as a literature which springs from a particular context, allowing it to lend itself better than other types of literature to examining such questions.

# Appendix

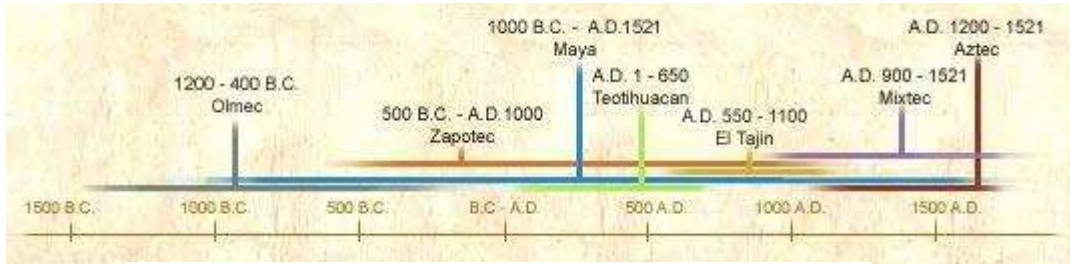
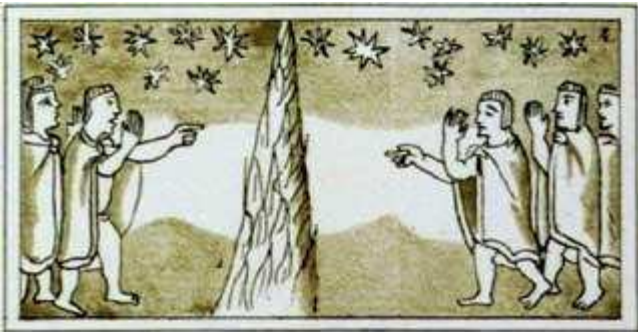


Fig 1. “John Pohl’s Mesoamerica.” Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies. 11 Oct 2012. <<http://www.famsi.org/>>

Fig 2. “Bad Omens.” The Fall of the Aztecs. 1 Feb 2013. <[www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org/)>



“First, every night there arose a sign like a tongue of fire, like a flame. Pointed and wide-based, it pierced the heavens to their midpoint, their very heart.”



“Next, quite of its own accord Huitzilopochtli’s temple burst into flame. No man could have set it; it burned of itself.”



“Then lightning struck the straw roof of Tzonmulco, the temple of the old fire god Xiuhtecutli. This happened during not a storm but a mere sprinkle with just a summer flash—not even a thunder clap.”



“In full light one late afternoon a comet appeared, bursting into three heads. Then the waters of the lake boiled up crackling, and welled upward, far enough to melt adobes and tumble houses on the island.”





“And often, in the dark of the night, a woman was heard moving, weeping. She would pace about wailing ‘My dear children, we have to go! Where can I take you?’”



“The fishing-folk while snaring birds came upon one like a brown crane. Its crest was like a round mirror. There Moctezuma peered. He was first startled, and then terrified, as he saw what looked like fighting men massed, like conquerors in war array, riding the backs of deer.”



“Finally, thistle-people—single-bodied but two-headed—often appeared. As often as anybody found one he took it to Moctezuma. As soon as he looked at one it would vanish.”

Fig 4. “Ethnic Movements in the U.S.” The University of Wisconsin Madison. 1 Feb 2013. <[www.ssc.wisc.edu](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu)>  
Note: continues on following page



European Claims 1750



The United States, 1812-22.





## PREAMBLE TO THE PLAN ESPIRITUAL DE AZTLÁN

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage, but also of the brutal "Gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility and our inevitable destiny.

We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those that plant the seeds, water the fields and gather the crops, and not to foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the Bronze Continent.

Brotherhood unites us, and love of our brothers makes us a people whose time has come and who struggles against the foreigner "Gabacho" who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With our hearts in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our Mestizo nation. We are a Bronze People with a Bronze Culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before our brothers in the Bronze Continent, We are a Nation of free pueblos, we are Aztlán.

March , 1969 (Adopted at Chicano Youth Conference, Denver, Colo.)

Fig 4. "Preamble to the Plan Espiritual de Aztlán." In Search of Aztlán. 1 Feb 2013. <<http://www.insearchofaztlan.com>>  
Note: also appears in Fig 7

Fig 5. Brown Pride. "Coatlicue: The Goddess, demon, monster, and Masterpiece." 1 Feb 2013. <[www.brownpride.com](http://www.brownpride.com)>  
Note: currently housed at Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico



"With the rise of patriarchy, the gruesome side of death becomes more prevalent in her description. Her icon depicts her dressed with serpents; in the place where her head might be are two serpents that meet face to face. The serpent in global prepatriarchal religious practices was thought to control wisdom (magic), immortality, and fertility. As such, it was the special companion of woman, the creatrix of humanity, and it often guarded earthly or celestial gardens of delight" (Massacre 106).

Fig 6. Inside Mexico. "The Mexican Flag." 1 Feb 2013. <www.inside-mexico.com>  
 Note: The flag was created in 1821, marking Mexican Independence



Fig 7. International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. "Documents of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Latin American and Latino Art." 1 Feb 2013. <www.icaadocs.mfah.org>  
 Note: typed-text of image on the following page

## **El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán**

\*Preamble\*

**Aztlán, in the Nahuatl tongue of ancient Mexico, means “the lands to the north.” Thus Aztlán refers to what is now known as the southwestern states of this country.**

El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, sets the theme that the Chicanos (La Raza de Bronze) must use their nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization. Once we are committed to the idea and philosophy of El Plan de Aztlán, we can only conclude that social, economic, cultural and political independence is the only road to total liberation from oppression, exploitation and racism. Our struggle then must be the control of our Barrios, campos, pueblos, lands, our economy, our culture and our political life. El Plan commits all levels of Chicano society--the barrio, the campo, the rancho, the writer, the teacher, the worker, the professional--to La Causa.

### **I. PUNTO PRIMERO - Nationalism.**

Nationalism as the key to organization transcends all religious, political, class and economic factions or boundaries. Nationalism is the common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree on.

### **II. PUNTO SEGUNDO - Organizational Goals**

1. Unity in thought of our people concerning the barrios, the land, the poor, the middle class, the professional is committed to liberation of La Raza.
2. Economy: economic control of our lives and our communities can only come about by driving the exploiter out of our communities, our pueblos, and our lands and by controlling and developing our own talents, sweat and resources. Cultural background and values which ignore materialism and embrace humanism will lend to the act of co-operative buying and distribution of resources and production to sustain an economic base for healthy growth and development. Lands rightfully ours will be fought for and defended. Land and realty ownership will be acquired by the community for the people's welfare. Economic ties of responsibility must be secured by nationalism and the Chicano defense units.
3. Education must be relative to our people, i.e., history, culture, bilingual education, contributions, etc. Community control of our schools, our teachers, our administrators, our counselors and our programs.
4. Institutions shall serve our people by providing the service necessary for a full life and their welfare on the basis of restitution, not handouts or beggar's crumbs. Restitution for past economic slavery, political exploitation, ethnic, cultural and psychological destruction and denial of civil and human rights. Institutions in our community which do not serve the people have no place in the community. The institutions belong to the people.
5. Self Defense of the community must rely on the combined strength of the people. The front line defense will come from the barrios, the campos, the pueblos, and the ranchitos. Their involvement as protectors of their people will be given respect and dignity. They in turn offer their responsibility and their lives for their people. Those who place themselves on the front for their people do so out of love and carnalismo. Those institutions which are fattened by our brothers to provide employment and political pork barrels for the gringo will do so only by acts of liberation and La Causa. For the very young there will no longer be acts of juvenile delinquency, but revolutionary acts.
6. Cultural values of our people strengthen our identity and the moral backbone of the movement. Our culture unites and educates the family of La Raza toward liberation with one heart and one mind. We must insure that our writers, poets, musicians and artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture. Our cultural values of life, family, and home will serve as a powerful weapon to defeat the gringo dollar value system and encourage the process of love and brotherhood.
7. Political liberation can only come through an independent action on our part, since the two party system is the same animal with two heads that feeds from the same trough. Where we are a majority we will control; where we are a minority, we will represent a pressure group; Nationally, we will represent one party, La Familia de La Raza.

### **III. PUNTO TERCERO - Action**

1. Awareness and distribution of El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán. Presented at every meeting, demonstration, confrontation, court house, institution, administration, church, school, building, car and every place of human existence.
2. September 16th. On the birthdate of Mexican Independence, a national walk-out by all Chicanos of all colleges and schools to be sustained until the complete revision of the educational system; its policy makers, administration, its curriculum and its personnel to meet the needs of the community.
3. Self defense against the occupying forces of the oppressors at every school, every available man, woman and child.
4. Community nationalization and organization of all Chicanos regarding El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.
5. Economic programs to drive the exploiter out of our communities and a welding of our peoples combined resources to control their own production through co-operative efforts.
6. Creation of an independent local, regional and national political party.

## **LIBERATION**

A nation, autonomously free, culturally, socially, economically and politically, will make its own decisions on the usage of our lands, the taxation of our goods, the utilization of our bodies for war, the determination of justice (reward and punishment) and the profit of our sweat.

**EL PLAN ESPIRITUAL DE AZTLÁN IS THE PLAN OF LIBERATION!**

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**MOTS-CLES:** Ana Castillo, Littérature Chicano, Identité Chicano, Mythes, Historiographie

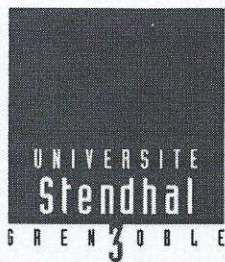
### **RESUME**

Ce travail retrace le mouvement Chicano aux Etats-Unis pendant les années 1960, et étudie ses effets sur la littérature Chicano et sur le monde littéraire en général. Considérer la littérature Chicano strictement comme le véhicule d'un mouvement politique, c'est imposer à cette dernière une vision limitée de son propos, une vision centrée sur ses évidentes implications sociales, culturelles et politiques. Ce mémoire met en avant de nouvelles manières d'approcher et d'analyser la littérature Chicano, en proposant une approche littéraire minutieuse de deux romans d'Ana Castillo, *Sapogonia* et *So Far from God*. La fiction chez Ana Castillo est utilisée comme un moyen au travers duquel explorer la question du mythe et de l'histoire, et sa relation aux « récits de la réalité » qui composent nos vies au quotidien. Ce travail se veut affilié aux recherches sur la littérature post-coloniale, sur la théorie littéraire, et sur les études culturelles, et propose des nouvelles interprétations des œuvres d'Ana Castillo.

**KEYWORDS:** Ana Castillo, Chicano literature, Chicano identity, myth, historiography

### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis recounts the Chicano Movement in the U.S. during the 1960s and its effect on Chicano literature and literary scholarship. Understanding Chicano literature as purely a vehicle for politicized movement does a disservice to Chicano literature by creating narrow readings of it, focusing on its overt social, cultural, and political implications. This thesis puts forward new ways of analyzing and approaching Chicano literature through a close reading of Ana Castillo's novels *Sapogonia* and *So Far from God*. Castillo's fiction is used as a means through which to explore the question of myth and history and its relationship to the 'narratives of reality' which compose our daily lives. This thesis is grounded in Post-colonial and Literary Theory and Cultural Studies and posits original interpretations of Castillo's literature.



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