

## COATLICUE ON THE LOOSE: ENCOMPASSING THE DUALITIES IN ANZALDÚA, PORTILLO TRAMBLEY, AND CISNEROS

In Mexican and Mexican-American traditions, women are provided with very narrow and limited cultural models and patterns. For the most part, these roles are defined by the woman's relationship to an other: as mother, her identity is based on her relationship to her child(ren); as whore, her identity is based upon her having sexual relationships with men. The paradigms in the culture are more complex than merely mother and whore, but these serve as the bases for most of the female models. Gloria Anzaldúa writes that there are three archetypal mothers in the Mexican-American culture: la Malinche, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and la Llorona. Chloe Furnival suggests that there is a fourth potential role, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Her role is traditionally not defined by a relationship as such, but instead by the absence of one; she is a nun, cloistered in a convent. These four cultural models serve in the patriarchal society as a means to split the psyche and fragment the self to the extent that it can be argued that a self does not even exist in any one of these models. Woman is a communal identity, not a recognizable individual. It is only through the demythification of the traditional roles and a reformulation which re-examines the cultural, mythical, and historical details of these women that (re)new(ed) models can be proposed. The model which is currently receiving the most attention as a viable archetype is Doña Marina/la Malinche. However, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa presents the Aztec goddess Coatlicue as a figure who is capable of containing, and thus depowering, the dualities inherent in patriarchal society. Estela Portillo Trambley, in *Trini*, provides us a type of Coatlicue: a new mother, one of unification, conglomeration, and accommodation, a mother who has space enough to encompass the duality and fragmentation which the culture propagates in its archetypes. Similarly, Sandra Cisneros, in "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me," presents us with the woman who can bring together both sides of the binaries. By examining the traditional models and the new feminist reinterpretations of those roles, we will see how Anzaldúa, Portillo Trambley, and Cisneros represent the potential for a new female model, defined not by the other, but by elements of others' characters which she has selected and incorporated into herself.

The "good" mother in the Mexican and Mexican-American traditions is la Virgen de Guadalupe, the American manifestation of Mary, the mother of Christ. La Virgen represents the imposition of the Catholic tradition onto the indigenous. In December of 1531, on a site dedicated to the worship of the

Aztec goddess Tonontzin, she appeared to an Indian named Juan Diego. According to Carlos Fuentes in *The Buried Mirror*, this represents the synchronization of the Indian and the European cultures and religions.<sup>1</sup> One has only to look at the site where she appears, her skin color, the language she speaks, the person to whom she speaks, and the symbols and images associated with her to see the incredible amount of cultural integration which she represents; she is Spanish and Indian. While she may represent an ideal for cultural integration, she does not represent a practical model for individual self-creation. The problem with having la Virgen as a viable model for women is that she is unrealistic. Whether or not one believes in the Immaculate Conception, the model requires that the woman lack sexuality. Even if the Immaculate Conception did occur, it only occurred through divine intervention; it was not meant to be standard practice for humans; it was a concept meant to set Christ apart. With this archetype, sex is not intended (or permitted) for pleasure (on the woman's part), but for the production of children, for the continuation of the patriarchal institution. Identity for the woman becomes dependent on her ability to bear and raise children according to cultural standards. Anzaldúa writes that la Virgen is the symbol that unites the peoples of different races, religions, and languages.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the very scope of the symbol is part of the problem. By having such a wide-ranging and religiously indisputable symbol of womanhood—Luke cites the angel Gabriel as saying, "Hail, thou [Mary] that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women"<sup>3</sup>—the culture may be unified, but it comes at the expense of the woman's chance for a self. La Virgen is so integrated into the culture that she is incorporated unconsciously as the paradigm. The girl or woman sees her everywhere: at church, at home, on banners, as well as on t-shirts, baseball caps, and car dashboards. By literally being deified, la Virgen loses her human potency. She, and thus the woman who uses her as model, loses sexual power in exchange for an ethereal religious role, a role which is the bond that is designed to hold or unify others together.

The woman, like the Bible, becomes a culturally approved medium for the transmission of the patriarchal structure to the children. She instructs both the boys and the girls as to the appropriate roles in the cultural construct. Anzaldúa implicates the mother for her complicity with the propagation of the patriarchal system:

Culture is made by those in power—men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror: Reflections on Spain and the New World*, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1992; p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, Aunt Lute, 1987; p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Luke, 1: 28.

sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives?<sup>4</sup>

The mother comes to occupy an interesting and important space in the existence of the patriarchy: she is both its victim and its propagatrix. Much of this is complicit in the myth of la Virgen and in Catholicism itself. According to Anzaldúa, the women in the culture are the ones who, far more than the men, are expected to show "greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system" of the culture.<sup>5</sup> She adds that "both the Church and the culture insist that women are subservient to males."<sup>6</sup> The model of la Virgen de Guadalupe entails the incorporation of a set of beliefs which posit the woman below the male in the culture, and yet it is the male who is not even expected to be as committed or acceptant of the very tenets which place him on top. La Virgen and Catholicism represent the oppression by the patriarchy, the double standard for conduct and lifestyle, and the propagation of the same defining masculine culture, and yet, despite all her negative, reductive, and defining characteristics, la Virgen de Guadalupe *is* the model presented, the culture does not offer la Malinche or la Llorona, or even Sor Juana, as the model for the female. The only "positive" female image presented is the sexless, virgin mother.

The female archetype most frequently placed in opposition to la Virgen is la Malinche. She, like la Virgen, is recognized throughout the Mexican and Mexican-American cultures, but her recognition is not a desired one: she is blamed and held responsible for the Spanish conquest and colonization of Mexico. Interestingly though, she is also the woman most proposed by feminists as the model for the creative woman. According to the unnamed Aztec source of Sahagún, Moctezuma was devastated to find out that an indigenous woman was leading the Spaniards to México: "Fue dicho á Mocthecuzoma como los Españoles traian una india mexicana que se llamaba *María*, vecina del pueblo de *Teticpac* ... y que traian esta por intérprete, que decia en la lengua mexicana todo lo que el capitan D. Hernando Cortés le mandaba."<sup>7</sup> Since Moctezuma, la Malinche (Doña Marina, Malintzin, la Chingada) has born the blame for betraying the indigenous populations to the Spaniards and thus opening up the Americas for the conquest and colonization. Fuentes, in one of his more recent novels, *Cristóbal nonato*, describes her as "Madre impura Nuestra Señora la Malinche, la traidora amante del conquistador, la puta madre del

<sup>4</sup> Anzaldúa, op.cit.; p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Bernardino Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España: Tomo III*, México, Alejandro Valdés, 1830; p. 15.

primer mexicano."<sup>8</sup> Cortés is not shown to be blameless, but la Malinche is "impura," "la traidora," and "la puta madre." Octavio Paz is even worse in his depiction of la Malinche (the *Chingada*):

Por contraposición a Guadalupe, que es la Madre virgen, la Chingada es la Madre violada. ... Se trata de figuras pasivas. ... La Chingada es aún más pasiva. Su pasividad es abyecta: no ofrece resistencia a la violencia, es un montón inerte de sangre, huesos y polvo. Su mancha es constitucional y reside ... en su sexo. Esta pasividad abierta al exterior la lleva a perder su identidad: es la Chingada. Piedre su nombre, no es nadie ya, se confunde con la nada, es la Nada.<sup>9</sup>

Paz is unrelenting in his location of blame and passivity in la Malinche; he defines her as passive, nameless, Nothingness. Given Paz's emphasis on her passivity, la Malinche would appear to be an unlikely candidate to be a cultural model; Paz refuses even to let her be an active traitor.

It is not surprising to see why Anzaldúa would call her the abandoned mother: "la Chingada (Malinche), the raped mother whom we have abandoned."<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa carefully words her description of Malinche to show that she is not the traitorous whore that "history" has made her out to be, but instead, she is twice victimized: once by Cortés who raped her, and once by us who abandoned her. Betty Garcia-Bahne notes that the "bad" woman in the culture is the one who is independent, assertive, socially mobile, and self-determinant.<sup>11</sup> These attributes are the ones associated with Malinche; therefore, they come to be promoted as the causes of her actions. This association with a woman so despised in the culture is a means to subconsciously prevent the woman from even wanting to express a self, to be assertive, to be independent, to be socially mobile, or to be self-determinant, lest she be associated with la Chingada. To counter these negatively defining roles, Adelaida R. del Castillo proposes that we re-evaluate the actual, not mythic role which Doña Marina played in the history of the Americas. She suggests that Marina embodies effective and decisive action in a feminine form and by her actions syncretized the two conflicting worlds into a new one.<sup>12</sup> Norma Alarcón writes that female writers must "reinvent" Malinche as a model by demythifying her. For Alarcón, there are four steps to this process: first, she must be defended as being enslaved

<sup>8</sup> Carlos Fuentes, *Cristóbal nonato*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987; p. 41

<sup>9</sup> Octavio Paz, *El laberinto de la soledad, Posdata y Vuelta a El laberinto de la soledad*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981; pp. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa, *op.cit.*; p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Betty Garcia-Bahne, "La Chicana and the Chicano Family," en Rosaura Sánchez y Rosa Martínez Cruz (comp.), *Essays on la Mujer*, Los Angeles, Chicano Studies Center Publications, UCLA, 1977; p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> Adelaida R. del Castillo, "Malintzin Tenépal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective," en Rosaura Sánchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz (comp.), *Essays on la Mujer*, Los Angeles, Chicano Studies Center Publications, UCLA, 1977; p. 125.

to certain historical circumstances; secondly, she must be shown as a myth of patriarchal imagination for the control of the female voice; thirdly, she must be shown as a goddess of female redemption and imagination; and finally, she must be shown as a figure who can truly explain the socio-history of the indigenous and *mestiza* women, as the figure in the margin of legitimate society.<sup>13</sup> In *Days of Obligation*, Richard Rodríguez reverses the traditional view of the conquest in such a way as to have Mexico "steal" Spanish and Catholicism from the *conquistadores*:

Marina was the seducer of Spain. ... Look once more at the city from La Malinche's point of view. Mexico is littered with the shells and skulls of Spain, cathedrals, poems, and the limbs of orange trees. But everywhere you look in this great museum of Spain you see living Indians. ... Where, then, is the famous conquistador? *We have eaten him*, the crowd tells me, *we have eaten him with our eyes*.<sup>14</sup>

With a smooth rhetorical gesture, Rodríguez makes Marina the active force in the theft and ingestion of Spanish and Catholicism; Marina becomes, not a debased passive role, but an active, aggressive model. As Alarcón, del Castillo, Rodríguez, and others have written, la Malinche is the archetype who can be used most easily and effectively as a new model for the Mexican or Mexican-American woman; however, this can only be accomplished after she has been stripped of her patriarchal identity and given one which is (more) independent of her relationship and complicity with the male hegemony.

Chloe Furnival proposes that the third female role is that of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the "socially deviant scholar."<sup>15</sup> This model does not seem to be very different from Anzaldúa's potential option of "entering the world by way of education and career and becoming a self-autonomous person."<sup>16</sup> However positive the scholarly role may seem, its association with Sor Juana creates its own set of problems. Portillo Trambley has written a play on Sor Juana which presents her as intelligent and creative, but it lacks a real sense of sexuality; the play exhibits incredible restraint in what seems to be an attempt to focus on her "feminist" intellectual and ideological pursuits.<sup>17</sup> Ilan Stavans, in his introduction to *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*, makes clear that Juana was a very

<sup>13</sup> Norma Alarcón, "La literatura de la chicana: un reto sexual y racial del proletariado," en Aralia López González, Amelia Malagamba, y Elena Urrutia (comp.), *Mujer y literatura mexicana y chicana: Culturas en contacto*, Tomo 2, México, El Colegio de México, 1990; p. 211.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rodríguez, *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*, New York, Viking, 1992; pp. 22-24.

<sup>15</sup> Chloe Furnival, "Confronting Myths of Oppression: The Short Stories of Rosario Castellanos," en Susan Bassnett (comp.), *Knives and Angels: Women Writers in Latin America*, London, Zed, 1990; p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Anzaldúa, *op.cit.*; p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Estela Portillo Trambley, *Sor Juana and Other Plays*, Ypsilanti, Michigan, Bilingual Press/ Editorial Bilingüe, 1983.

sexual woman (likely bisexual) as well as intelligent;<sup>18</sup> until her sexuality can be integrated into her creative and intellectual self, Sor Juana will be a difficult model.

The final archetype which appears throughout the culture is la Llorona. She is probably the most ambiguous of the female models; the myths surrounding her are diverse, conflicting, and complicated. Anzaldúa states that la Llorona is a composite of la Virgen de Guadalupe and la Malinche but does not explain why. According to the Aztec account given to Sahagún, one of the omens that preceded the conquest was a weeping woman calling to her children: "La sexta señal, ó pronóstico fue, que se oyó de noche en el aire una voz de una muger que decia: ¡O hijos mios, ya nos perdemos! algunas veces decia: ¡O hijos mios, adonde os llevaré!"<sup>19</sup> Given the great diversity in Llorona tales, this could easily be a pre-conquest mentioning of her. Clarissa Pinkola Estés writes that the story of la Llorona is a pre-Spanish tale "about the river of life that became the river of death. The protagonista is a haunting river woman who is fertile and generous, creating out of her own body."<sup>20</sup> In some tales, la Llorona kills her own children; in one; they are born blind because she has drunk from a certain river during pregnancy; in another, her children drown, and she dies of grief; and in another, she searches the river for her lost creativity.<sup>21</sup> With the myriad depictions of la Llorona, it is difficult to understand how she can be a significant or consistent role model. The significance which seems to connect the versions of the myth is the loss of children or creativity by the mother/woman. In Anzaldúa's analysis of the three mothers in the Mexican-American tradition, she mentions la Llorona as "the mother who seeks her lost children."<sup>22</sup> She adds that la Llorona wails for her lost sons, brothers, and husbands and that this

wailing is the Indian, Mexican, and Chicana woman's feeble protest when she has no other recourse. These collective wailing rites may have been a sign of resistance in a society which glorified the warrior and war and for whom the women of the conquered tribes were booty.<sup>23</sup>

La Llorona, according to this representation, is a maternal or spousal figure whose only possible response to the atrocities of patriarchal sponsored death and destruction is to wail. Anzaldúa filters out the suggestions of responsibility and the other sinister aspects of the myths; this interpretation of the myths

<sup>18</sup> Ilan Stavans, "Introduction," en Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, *Poems, Protest, and a Dream*, Margaret Sayers Peden (trad), New York, Penguin, 1997; p. xxvii.

<sup>19</sup> Sahagún, *op.cit.*; p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*, New York, Ballantine, 1993; p. 301.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 301-04.

<sup>22</sup> Anzaldúa, *op.cit.*; p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 33.

posits on la Llorona an element of the maternal care and a trace of an exertion of a defiant or protesting self. This model also seems incomplete for a woman who seeks a more coherent or complex self because the identity of la Llorona is still dependent upon the lack of a male member. She wails, and thus has identity as la Llorona, only if her husband, son, or brother is missing.

Anzaldúa looks to Aztec mythology in order to find her model for the Mexican or Mexican-American woman, Coatlicue. Before the shift to a patriarchal religion and society, Coatlicue, the Lady of the Serpent Skirt, "contained and balanced the dualities of male and female, light and dark, life and death" and was the "creator goddess" and "Earth Mother."<sup>24</sup> One can see how she would be an ideal space for one who wants to escape the boundaries of binary identification and the myth of patriarchal origin. Anzaldúa moves from merely writing about *Coatlicue* to having her become a part of herself; *la Coatlicue* becomes a spirit which visits her and enlivens her. *La Coatlicue* allows Anzaldúa to accept the often contradictory impulses which are part of being human; she allows Anzaldúa to express ideas that work against majority or mainstream thought; she allows Anzaldúa to be the new *mestiza* living in the borderlands: "*Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory. In her figure, all the symbols important to the religion and philosophy of the Aztecs are integrated. ... she is a symbol of the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror."<sup>25</sup>

Anzaldúa's representation of unity, coherence, and wholeness is an ideal, but it is more realistic than artificially separating the sexual (la Malinche) from the intellectual (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz) from the maternal (la Virgen de Guadalupe) as we have seen that the traditional roles do. Also, it can be argued that the split in the traditional roles parallels Freud's division of the psyche into the libido, the id, the superego, but not the ego. The libido and the id seem to fit with the self-sacrificing and self-abnegating nature of la Virgen; la Llorona could be either the mother in the primal state wailing for her children which would represent the id, or she could be giving up her self in the search for her lost son, husband, or brother, which would be more reflective of the superego; but, in none of these cases is there an ego or recognizable self. It is only with a more complex character or model that we can see the presence and emergence of a self; this self appears in the demythified/remythified la Malinche, and in Coatlicue, whom Trini, in the novel by Estela Portillo Trambley, resembles, and whom Sandra Cisneros's persona in her poetry also resembles.

Trini's identity is created by the integration of a series of mother figures from whom she incorporates certain characteristics; these characteristics are

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; pp. 32, 27, 46.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 47.

often contradictory, but she, like Coatlicue, is able to contain the contradiction and continue. Trini then separates herself from the individual, allowing her to progress beyond the mirror stage of identity. Julia Kristeva discusses the process of identification through the mother, whom she identifies as the guarantor of "symbolic coherence" and "more of a filter than anyone else—a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" meets "culture."<sup>26</sup> The mother becomes the filter through whom the individual discovers the culture or outside and thus is able to form some degree of self-identity. The process of identification of the self through the mother is related to the Lacanian process of the creation of the "I" through the Other in the mirror stage. However, the "I" must progress *through* the mirror stage lest the death drive inherent in this libidinal narcissism end the process of self-identification.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, for Trini, she must recognize her mothers, incorporate certain of their characteristics into her self, and then separate herself from the individual mothers so that she does not lose her own self in their images. She can only be an independent self when her identity is not dependent upon her status as (m)Other.

Trini's first mother is her biological mother, Matilda. Matilda is an earth mother, like Coatlicue, who dies in the first chapter when Trini is only thirteen. In the one scene we have with Matilda, she is pregnant and working in the soil: "Her bare feet [were] half-covered by the red, warm earth ... she picked up a handful of earth and let it pour through her fingers."<sup>28</sup> In this brief episode, we see that Matilda's natural environment is the earth; she experiences the soil. Added to this is the fact that she is pregnant while she is engaged with the earth. However, the mythic romance of the scene is abruptly ended by her death. She falls to the ground and lies there with a deathly pallor, and yet one hand was "still lying across her stomach as if to protect the child she carried with her."<sup>29</sup> Even in the shadow of death, Matilda presents her self-abnegating maternal element. But this sacrifice is undercut by both her death and the death of the child. Had Matilda died and the child lived, her death would have been heroic in a patriarchal sense; she would have given herself to increase and extend the family. Also, the mother is further associated with the earth when she is dying on the ground: "her blood form[ed] a pool, turning the grass darkish purple."<sup>30</sup> Later in the novel, Trini describes her mother: "Her feet were buried in the earth, and I had the feeling she was like a tree."<sup>31</sup> Her mother is

<sup>26</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S. Roudiez (comp.), traducción al inglés de Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, y Leon S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1980; p. 238.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, traducción al inglés de Alan Sheridan, New York, Norton, 1977; p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Estela Portillo Trambley, *Trini*, Binghamton, NY, Bilingual Press, 1986; p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 148.

planted in the earth; Trini must get beyond the inertia of place in her journey toward self and a more complete womanhood. The separation of Trini from her mother by death allows Trini to have an opportunity for a series of mothers, and thus a series of maternal identity filters. Matilda is not as limiting a construction as *la Virgen* or the traditional readings of *la Malinche*, but she does not contain the space to encompass the dualities as Coatlicue does.

The next mother who tries to exert herself is actually Trini; however, she is quickly shown to be incapable of or not truly prepared for the task. This incapability or unpreparedness is part of the reason why I argue that Matilda does not provide her with the complete model for her later identity as mother/woman. "Trini felt the injustice of it all. After all, she was thirteen and quite capable of looking after Buti and Lupita."<sup>32</sup> Despite originally feeling capable of taking care of her siblings, she soon afterward "felt the same kind of helplessness [as her father] ... her heart would cry, oh Mamá, we need you so!"<sup>33</sup> Admittedly, she is only thirteen, but we do receive an opportunity to see Trini with one maternal influence, as opposed to the end where we can see how she has changed after the incorporation of numerous "mothers."

Sabochi, an Indian *ahua*, becomes Trini's next mother. "Sabochi had come after Matilda's funeral ... He had promised to return again soon to help and to try to be the children's 'mother.'"<sup>34</sup> He appears at the funeral, conveniently timed to transition the children into a new mother. Shortly thereafter, it is said that he has become their mother: "Since his return, Sabochi had been the children's 'mother' ... Sabochi often took them to explore the hills."<sup>35</sup> As mother, he has provided the native and natural identities for Trini which will serve to balance the mestiza and urban which she already has or will acquire later. Sabochi also provides Trini with a male identity; it may not be as complete or as encompassing as the male element Anzaldúa locates within Coatlicue, but it is at least adequately represented to provide Trini with a developed sense of a male self. Soon after Sabochi has been shown as mother and he has told Trini that he must go and see his ailing father, she asks him to cease being her mother: "I don't want you to be my mother, Sabochi. Not any more."<sup>36</sup> This separation is generated by natural events, the father's illness, and a sense of being abandoned on Trini's part, but it does not allow Trini to speak the lines of separation to facilitate her further process of self-identification. After this separation, Trini looks into a mirror and notices the process of becoming a woman has begun: "Mamá's gone. Sabochi's gone ... She picked up a mirror and looked at her reflection, eyes somber, a trace of womanliness

<sup>32</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibíd.*; pp. 11-12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 16.

in the shape of the mouth. Still a child's face, a face wanting so many things unhad."<sup>37</sup> This scene becomes more telling when it happens again at the end and she is able to turn away from the mirror. However, for now, it allows us to see the beginnings of her process of becoming a woman and recognizing herself.

After Sabochi leaves, José Mario (Trini's father) leaves to "look for his sister. He would bring her back to take the place of their mother."<sup>38</sup> Tía Pancha is first described in this novel as the "austere virgin of thirty-three."<sup>39</sup> This brief epithet evokes la Virgen de Guadalupe and Christ, who was thirty-three when he was crucified. With this introduction, we should not be surprised to find that Tía Pancha quickly imposes the Catholic structure on the children: "Buquis, inquesen! Pídale a Dios gracias, y pidan que les ilumine el pensamiento."<sup>40</sup> She also establishes the crucifix as a central symbol of their devotional times: "The long string of beads had to make one complete circle back to the crucifix. All eyes were on the crucifix, the stop sign, the sign for them to groan, themselves out of their kneeling positions."<sup>41</sup> The children are in a prone position before the symbols of Catholicism. It is also at the point where Trini says to herself, "I'm a sinner."<sup>42</sup> Tía Pancha is clearly the mother figure in this novel who represents the Catholic Church and the other remnants of the Spanish structure. In the scene where the Indians are in front of an altar to both la Virgen and Tonontzín, Tía Pancha refuses to allow the children to participate. However, this is one place where Trini expresses her individuality and her separation from the aunt by not leaving the ceremony. Trini emphasizes the split by later saying, "I am Tonontzín."<sup>43</sup> According to Anzaldúa, after Aztec society became patriarchal, Coatlicue is effectively split into her good characteristics, as represented by *Tonantsi*, and her more sinister aspects, as represented by *Tlazolteotl* and *Cihuacoatl*.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Coatlicue, through Tonontzín, is connected to la Virgen de Guadalupe (Anzaldúa even proposes that the name Guadalupe itself could be a homonymic misinterpretation of *Coatlalopeuh*).<sup>45</sup> Despite her dedication to the church, Tía Pancha is not as immovable as it is. After Trini has been raped, Tía Pancha tells her that it does not matter if she is not a virgin. Also, she tells Trini that she and a married man had once been lovers: "We were one energy in the same house. We became lovers, passionate, passionate

<sup>37</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> Anzaldúa, *op.cit.*; p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 27.

lovers ... I lived each day to be loved."<sup>46</sup> It seems as if she is both virgin and lover; somehow she has been able to encompass this duality, although it does not appear that she still encompasses the element of passionate love as she has before. Trambley shows that Tía Pancha is a more complex character than merely a governess figure. She not only has deep religious convictions which she feels are her responsibility to pass on to the children, but she is also capable of deep love, which she demonstrates to Trini after the rape scene. As a mother, she reinforces the patriarchal culture and religion by passing it on, but also as a mother, when a child becomes victim to an element of the culture (or the culture itself), she is willing to go beyond its rigid constraints.

Licha, Trini's friend and the woman with whom she has been living, is not specifically referred to as a mother figure within the text, but Trini does say that she is a model of all the things she would like to be. "Licha was the excitement in her life, for in her Trini saw all things she would like to be—desirable, confident, gay."<sup>47</sup> These attributes are not ones she had been exposed to previously; these are more closely aligned with la Malinche—the self-confident and sexually desirable woman. Trini asks Licha if she believes in love and receives this response: "Don't be naive. That's childish and foolish. Stop being an Indian."<sup>48</sup> The lack of belief in love is revealed to Trini at this point to be the key: "Licha seemed to have everything and nothing. Celia [Licha's sister who was waiting for a dying husband] seemed to have nothing, yet everything. How strange. Loving someone made all the difference."<sup>49</sup> In Licha, we see what Trini wants for herself, yet we also see in her the recognition for Trini that there is a lack in that life. Without love, there is nothing.

The final human mother figure for Trini is Perla, supposedly a "witch who willed people to death" in Juárez.<sup>50</sup> What connects Perla with "mother" is that Trini "felt twelve again" when she met Perla and Manuk, a dwarf who reminded her of el Enano.<sup>51</sup> By feeling twelve, Trini returns to a mental state before her mother died; if she is at an age when she has a mother, then Perla is the one who takes Matilda's place. Perla is surrounded with mystery; not only is she described as a *femme fatale*, she is also associated with the ancient Aztecs: "She was tall and seemed to float in a yellow kimono; her skin was the color of ivory, like the Aztec women of Guadalajara ... Her bones were outlined monuments of a noble race."<sup>52</sup> Later, Trini describes her as "a high priestess from an In-

<sup>46</sup> Portillo Trambley, *Trini*, *op.cit.*; p. 127.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 145.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 146.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 146.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 193.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 193.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 192.

dian village unsoiled by white men."<sup>53</sup> Perla provides a mythical and mystical identity, as well as sanctuary from the modern day, both through her associations with the past and the Indian traditions and through her "garden lost in time, suspended in golden autumn light."<sup>54</sup> The "man-killer" and "Indian" descriptions associate Perla with Coatlicue, who has a human skull for a head and a necklace of human hearts, and with Malinche. The association with Malinche is furthered by her sexual nature: "I was the most desired, the most beautiful, and I learned the craft of making love well."<sup>55</sup> This role is complicated by Trumbley because she has Trini juxtapose Perla on la Virgen in a dream: "she dreamt of the Virgin, who wore the face of Perla."<sup>56</sup> In Perla, the dualistic roles of virgin and whore and Indian and Catholic are integrated. Trini leaves her after la Virgen tells her to have her child in the United States and after Perla has been beaten and demythified, but her influence has not been discarded; she provides Trini with another example of how to integrate the patriarchally defined roles in a single self. She tells Trini that "the important thing is not to live in dead space."<sup>57</sup> After leaving Mexico and Perla, Trini finds her space and makes it live; she plants her seeds.

The argument can be made that there is one final mother, la Virgen de Guadalupe. She is the figure of Trini's vision and leads her across the border and to the church where she gives birth to her son. Trini refers to her as "Sweet Mother" and "Madre de Dios."<sup>58</sup> As mother, la Virgen provides a rather tenuous role, except that she provides a space which encompasses the Mexican and the American. She exists perfectly well on both sides of the Río Grande. She is the symbol which Anzaldúa says joins all races, religions, and languages, and also, through Tonontzín, leads back to Coatlicue, the one who contains the contradictions. And, it is only after this that she can claim that she is fully a woman (no longer a child) and turn away from the mirrors of identification.

Through all these mother figures, Trini has frequently been referred to as a child or childlike: "she was catching sobs in her throat like a child"; "those are the words of a child"; "she was a child again"; and "she felt twelve again."<sup>59</sup> However, at the end of the novel, she states that, "the child had been burned out of her with the burning of Salvador's body. It had nothing to do with his death, she had decided. The journey was over, the land had been found, the family had been gathered, the dream had come true."<sup>60</sup> The end of the child

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 200.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 201.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 203.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 201.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibíd.*; pp. 209, 210.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibíd.*; pp. 79, 124, 167, 193.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 235.

within her is not due to the death of Salvador, but the possession of the land which came to her upon his death and the integration of her self as mother, and thus no longer as child. Following this recognition is Trini's return to the mirror:

Trini had caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, a face tight and dark, eyes wearing fatigue, a squinting sadness, hair rough, dull. What had happened? she asked herself in anguish, She had been too busy surviving to look before. I look like the earth she told herself, like the earth wanting rain. So fleeting—the firm hope, the firm skin. There's more to me, she told herself fiercely, turning away from the mirror.<sup>61</sup>

This is Trini's moment of self-recognition; after the complex process of self-identification and determination, she has advanced beyond the stage where she looks to others to find her self. She turns from the mirror. The self is no longer outside, but inside.

The end of the novel may seem to discount this reading of Trini's self-creation or self-recognition, but not if it is read as a new journey or an attempt to create in her son a process of self-definition similar to the one she has experienced. Trini says, "the earth was all still inside her, waiting. She must go to Sabochi again, soon."<sup>62</sup> If Trini is a being who encompasses the dualities, it should not be detrimental to her to possess an independent self by wanting to be, temporarily, with a person integral to the construction of that self. To go back to the Indian element, the natural environment of Mexico, is not to deny her new home and land, but to accept that she is more than either in itself. And, since she is taking her son, it may be that she wants him to experience the same type of self-realization that she has. She says, "you and I will go."<sup>63</sup> She puts him first, possibly suggesting that he is the primary reason for their going. This is after she told him that his father was not Tonio, but Sabochi. She seems to want her son to recognize that the influences on him are more diverse than he may have thought at the time.

In *Loose Woman*, Sandra Cisneros presents a number of poems that locate in the persona an ability to encompass contradictions; in this sense, she is creating her own Coatlicue. The poem which is most self-conscious in its attempt to be all things is "You Bring Out the Mexican in Me." Cisneros writes this as a form of litany to an unnamed "you" who brings out the varied and often contradictory aspects of her identity. Among the figures evoked are Tlazoltéotl (the filth goddess), la Virgen de Guadalupe, and Coatlicue.<sup>64</sup> Although each of these is different, Coatlicue does, according to Anzaldúa, provide the mythic origin for the first two. In Tlazoltéotl and la Virgen, Cisneros brings together filth and

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 236.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 244.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; p. 245.

<sup>64</sup> Sandra Cisneros, *Loose Woman*, New York, Vintage, 1994; p. 6.

purity, Aztec and Catholic, Indian and Spanish. She also contains within her "Popocatepetl" and "Ixtaccíhuatl"<sup>65</sup>: Popocatepetl is a mountain dedicated to the worship of Telpochtli, the young male god; and Ixtaccíhuatl, another mountain, is the White Woman, a transfiguration of Chalchiuhtlicue, the goddess of bodies of water.<sup>66</sup> These mountains which surround Mexico City represent the coming together of earth and sky, land and water, and male and female. The poem reinforces the Coatlicue image since the "you" brings out the "eagle and the serpent,"<sup>67</sup> which Anzaldúa has stated are two of the opposite forces within the goddess. The persona of the poem also emphasizes her *mestizo*-ness, claiming both the *conquistador* and the Indian: "You bring out the colonizer in me" and "The Aztec love of war in me."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, she locates in herself "female and male."<sup>69</sup> The "Mexican" in Cisneros sounds surprising similar to *La Coatlicue* who visits Anzaldúa; it is an internal force which enables both to deal with the contradictory aspects of contemporary culture.

Anzaldúa, Portillo Trambley, and Cisneros each has taken us through a complex process, and each reaches a point where her narrator, protagonist, or poetic persona separates herself from a culturally and patriarchally imposed definition. She is Indian and she is Spanish; she is Mexican and she is American; she is rural and she is urban; she is Catholic and she is Aztec; she is female and she is male. She has encompassed all of these yet retained none individually. Anzaldúa, Portillo Trambley, and Cisneros have each presented us with an ideal, but it is because each has removed her character from a defining role to an encompassing role, and she has done it outside and independent of the male cultural structures. She, as a modern Coatlicue, like the demythified/remythified la Malinche, offers the elements for a new model, a model without the negative consequences of binary identification. Coatlicue provides the spaces in which to create selves, to integrate dualities, to exist as independent women, and to exist as independent human beings.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Fifth Sun: Aztec Gods, Aztec World*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1979; pp. 87, 158.

<sup>67</sup> Cisneros, *op.cit.*; p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibíd.*; pp. 5,4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibíd.*; p. 6.