

***Chicana (W)Rites on Word and Film. Edited by Maria Herrera-Sobek and Helena Maria Viramontes. Series in Chicana/Latina Studies. Berkely: Third Woman Press, 1995.***

## **Introduction**

*Mana Herrera-Sobek*

The strength, vigor, and beauty of Chicana creative writings and now filmmaking (in its infancy) can be seen in the works included in this anthology. We believe Chicana productivity will continue to delight us and intellectually stimulate us. It will also continue to challenge existing canons by redefining and amplifying the conceptualization of what "literature" is or ought to be. Chicana writings likewise will continue to invigorate and charge with new blood the field of Chicano/a studies. The comments that follow are designed to highlight the contributions Chicana writers and critics are making in Chicana literary studies.

### **Poetry**

Bernice Zamora's poem "A Book on Goodness" is a metaphysical discussion on the concepts of Good and Evil. The poetic voice redefines the religious male's conceptualizations of the two concepts and proposes her own definitions of the terms. The poems included here follow in the footsteps of her previous work published in her collection of poems *Restless Serpents* (1976). Zamora's strategy is to juxtapose a male *weltanschauung* against a female one. In "A Book on Goodness" there is a marked difference between the two subject positions. The poetic voice, who we assume is female from the poem's content, asserts her loyalty to her female self and the community of women. The poetic persona expresses her views on "A Book on Goodness" i.e. the Bible and through a feminist optic posits her own conclusion regarding its teachings. William, the patriarchal voice of authority, is deconstructed into Willy (as in "willy, nilly"). In a sarcastic mode she inverts the names Willy and William rendering William as the nickname and Willy as the name. ("Willy, William for short, . . ."). The first line of the poem unauthorizes William and his voice of authority, who **(15)** the female subject in the beginning (as in "in the beginning was the word and

the word was God") admires for his supposedly lucid ability to distinguish Right from Wrong.

Willy, William for short, could take  
A volume of backpages and gain  
a sermon indicative of good  
Real search on God.

The closing line provides an ironic finality to the first part of the poem. The "I" is introduced in the last line as a counterpoint to WiHiam, and again in a sardonic image between males bathing their feet and contemporary holy water fonts. In spite of this, the poetic persona reiterates her belief in a Good and Evil world with God incarnating the Good.

An abrupt change issues in the second half of the poem and redirects the focus of the text away from a male world and into a female one. Not only is the reader now forced to focus his/her gaze on the female poetic voice, but this female speaking subject is brought to a lower level, spatially speaking, and to a mundane level, spiritually speaking, in lines ten and eleven:

A woman like myself,  
plumped  
In a chair, adjusting a  
Bra strap, leaning forward

The lofty search for good is brought to a human level, to a feminine level, for the speaking female subject appropriates the Word and transforms it into a happy discourse. Through the Word in the woman's mouth the world can soar to Himalayan heights. The appropriation of the Word by the female subject reveals new insights for now the speaking subject is more sure of what Good and Evil are. Good is "happy discourse" and Evil is redefined "As possible evil I imagine/Such a woman as dragged among/ The God givers." For the poetic persona Evil resides in the institutionalization of religion.

While "A Book on Goodness" redefines the ethical concepts of Good and Evil, and does this from a feminist perspective thus displacing patriarchal order, "The Wine of Romance" is a caustic indictment of married life with an alcoholic man and the position (16) of women and children within this dysfunctional married relationship. The poetic voice flatly recounts the few options women have in life, mainly one—to get married. "I married with one option." The poetic persona was supposedly forewarned, however she did not heed the warning: "In so many moral ways I laid/Down the guard and Guardian/of a winning life." The narrative voice evinces nostalgia for another life that could have been successfully realized and that she allowed to slip away. The second stanza narrates in the third person the bitter results, i.e. the nightmare of living with an abusive, alcoholic husband who imprisons wife and children in his iron-clad tragic grasp. The narrative persona, however, places the blame directly on the wife herself. The poem seems to be a guilt-ridden confession of a woman who threw caution to the wind (albeit having few options) and married a drunk. The hell forthcoming from this marital situation does not effect only the wife herself, but the helpless children are also thrown into a nightmarish inferno of violence and oppression.

Zamora's last poem "Theater" is a relatively long philosophical dissertation on the changing fate of the sexual act. Her central metaphor of sex as theater brilliantly captures the many scenes sex has played out in the past four decades (1950-1991). The sexual stage begins in the fifties, a decade we all remember as an innocent sexual age. It was an era, nevertheless, notorious for backseat-of-the-car necking and petting and the ever present sexual scene played behind the barn, the emblematic 1950s' warning of "Nice girls don't" frequently forgotten.

The sexually liberating sixties and early seventies were a time for experimentation, and the poetic voice who is really not too keen on sex witnesses (experiences?) the performance of sex:

Sex upstage, behind doors—  
Barns and barreHed—up street  
Towned and tarred, backed in  
aHeys,  
Bound or burned, legal and iHegal,

Licit and illicit, stretched or  
Fetal, moral—oh, ever moral—

However, as the AIDS epidemic emerged in the eighties, sex all of a sudden acquired terrifying proportions

. . . the plot abandoned  
Now. Colorfully packaged  
condoms  
Tickets to a failed play  
Passed freely as a failed ploy,  
Clutter cemeteries  
Crematoriums and stages,  
Prosceniumed and unsizzling. **(18)**

The AIDS epidemic has indeed shut down many a foreplay, the consequences of engaging in "free love" now unmentionable and terrifying. Zamora's poem achieves perfect closure with the lines

And, out behind the barn,  
Summer rehearsals are closed.

The "behind the barn" sexual metaphor of a more innocent age has brought closure to our sex plays.

As the poems demonstrate, Zamora's creative works are characterized by a deep metaphorical and philosophical strain. Her metaphors are generally abstract and complex and the reader has to use his/her intelligence to grapple with the issues delineated within the poems. Zamora's poetry is not easy to read; it requires active involvement on the part of the reader. However, after careful reading of the poems, the reader is rewarded with the keen insights on life this splendidly talented poet has to offer us.

Demetria Martinez, a young Chicana from New Mexico, offers us poetry impregnated

with images of love, war, and nature. Her literary output evinces a close communicative spiritual state with the mountains and landscape of her native New Mexico. Here nature and humans are one living in harmony and peace. It is only the destructive tendencies of people that disturb the balance and bring pain and suffering into the world. Her poem "Landscape, Alcalde, N.M." is typical of Martinez's nature oriented poems. It describes the sun peeking between two hills as a "squash/blossom/necklace."

Love is also ever present in Martinez's work. Her poem "The Idol" is an ironic comment on the vagaries of a love relationship not fully realized; perhaps gone sour. The poetic voice acknowledges the distance between her lover "Far off/as God" and herself: she only receives postcards. The poetic voice becomes reconciled at not having this unattainable love object and in an ironic tone closes: **(18)**

I am a  
lucky woman.  
You can't  
hurt me.  
All I lack  
in the world  
is you.

Martinez's other six poems "Point Blank," "Postscript," "War," "The Conquest," "Power," and "Ceasefire" are all imbued with sharp images critical of a world where children go to sleep hungry; where the gun and the rifle are the only voices heard; where the conquered struggle daily to keep a firm hold on reality and not succumb to alienating myths of half truths and outright lies.

The poet is skillful in conflating the everyday, the quotidian with violent images of war and destruction. In "Point Blank" the natural imagery of a New Mexican(?) sunrise is associated with a verb connoting violence.

Through lace curtain  
sun explodes

color of papaya

The verb "explodes" intimates of violence to come. The following strophe reiterates the hint of a violent human world juxtaposed against a peace loving natural cosmos.

dirt yard  
saguaro cactus  
like fingers  
sing of peace

The natural world begs for humans to end their bellicose conflicts. Peace is nature's way.

The beginning stanzas intimate the development of a violent universe. And indeed the strophes that follow delineate a woman's efforts to obtain a vest (bulletproof?) from a sheriff friend for a priest in El Salvador. The everyday activity of the anonymous woman contrasts sharply with her request. Scenes from a wartorn El Salvador: i.e. the murdering of Jesuit priests, nuns, and **(19)** civilians enters the readers consciousness. Martinez does a masterful job of integrating slices from everyday life in America with the violent activities taking place in El Salvador.

"Postscript," another poem, continues the above theme of war in El Salvador. Here the poetic persona recounts the idealistic dreams of a couple who wanted to change the world. With wine glasses high they toasted, loved and planned a new world order. The poem closes with the death of the male lover.

In Morazan you died  
defending a chicken wire  
clinic, a doctor who wrests  
bullet from bone

The female voice ends her romantic/revolutionary interlude with

All I saved, Pedro,

were these corks.

That is to say, all the poetic persona has left is the memory of those wine-filled nights of love and idealism.

The poem "The Conquest" comes closer to home and the incessant war of words Chicanos/as are forced to use in the streets and homes of the United States. New Mexico's state motto is "The Land of Enchantment," but for Chicanos and Native Americans it is a land of constant confrontation, battling dehumanizing myths and a history tinged with the horror of lynchings, massacres, etc. The poet angrily answers an unknown interlocutor (a tourist?)

You say you envy  
my roots.

You don't know  
how little I sleep,

How I bruise  
on a pumice metate,

grinding like dry corn  
the myths you cherish, **(20)**

The two last poems included in Martinez's selection, "Power" and "Ceasefire," are in the autobiographical mode. The poetic persona, a militant voice in the sixties, is finding peace and harmony in the present. In "Power" the poet states

At 30 you bury  
those years  
like umbilical cord,  
return to mornings  
listening,  
coffee, blank book,

language of trees.

And in "Ceasefire"

day darkens

like dishwater,  
quiet, wind  
on the lip

of a bottle,  
old man hoses  
down sidewalk,  
you're home.

Elba Rosario Sanchez's collection of poems can be divided into three categories: feminist issues, social protest, and erotic love poems. In the first category we can include "In a Dream my Sisters," "Mirror Image: Womanpoetry," "Espejismos: Mujer Poesia," "Moon Corn," "Maiz Luna," "Codex," "Lizard," "Lagartija," and "Woman's Word." In the second category are poems reflecting concern with social issues: i.e. war, poverty and worker's exploitation. Included in this category are the poems "There Is a War Going On," "Cruzando Fronteras," "Watsonville: Mas de dos anos despues" (in reference to the cannery strikes taking place in that northern California agricultural town in recent years). The third category provides us with a glimpse of Sanchez's sensual erotic poetry: included here are "Rumbamos" and "Moon Harvest."

Sanchez's poetry evidences a strong artistic talent for the construction of delicate but incisive metaphors. In her poem "In a Dream my Sisters" we have the metaphor of two women poets— **(21)** the poetic voice speaking to an interlocutor—ostensibly Lorna Dee Cervantes, a well-recognized poet, since the poem is dedicated to her. The poetic persona finds inspiration and feels a strong bonding with her interlocutor, with whom she identifies spiritually. Interlocutor and poet merge in this sea of spirituality and creativity. There is great admiration and love for this Other woman, who is described as having the wisdom of the "ancient one," a nature goddess—the fount of beauty and

inspiration.

In "Mirror Image: Womanpoetry" the brilliant and famous Mexican painter Frida Kahlo is the source of inspiration and homage. Frida is perceived as a powerful role model for women. Sanchez's poetic voice also finds inspiration in ancient Mesoamerican goddesses such as the Moon Goddess, the Corn Goddess, and Coatlicue. All of these are female deities with whom the poetic voice intuitively has a special relationship and creative bond.

On the other hand, in her poem "Lizard" the poetic voice finds in Self her own source of power, beauty, and inspiration. In "Woman's Word" the poetic persona is even more aggressive in expressing her newfound woman power.

Sanchez's protest poems deal forthrightly with issues of war, i.e. the United States' involvement in wars such as the Persian Gulf War (1991) and the Chicano's frequent meeting with death in these confrontations. The irony expressed is that Chicanos fight in wars when the real battles are against drugs, poverty, racism, ignorance and other ills besetting this minority group right here at home in the United States. Her other two poems, "Cruzando fronteras" and "Watsonville," broach such issues as family separation due to the necessity of working in a far-away land, and poverty due to poor wages and unemployment. There is a bittersweet tone to Sanchez's protest poetry, for although it may be a militant type of social protest poetry, the artistic manner in which she elaborates her message gives the poems both depth and beauty.

Sanchez's erotic poetry celebrates the rhythms of love, of life, of sensuality. In "Rumbamos" lovemaking is metaphorically described as a dance, as an exciting rhythm similar to the rhythm of fiercely beating drums. And in "Moon Harvest" a sensual, delicate description of a love scene in the darkness of the moon is rendered in sensuous, mystical imagery. **(22)**

## **Prose**

In "Little Miracles/Kept Promises" Sandra Cisneros introduces us to the world of the retablo or exvoto. The retablos are paintings depicting a special favor or miracle

granted by a particular saint to a devotee who had prayed and devotedly asked for this particular miracle. The recipient of the miracle makes a *manda* or "promise" to have a *retablo* painted with a picture of the Virgin, Jesus, or a saint, and a scene describing the miracle if the request is granted. A short narrative describing the nature of the miracle accompanies the painting, usually inscribed below or along the side of the drawing. The paintings are usually executed by folk artists and are done in a primitive, sometimes almost childlike style.

Cisneros has brilliantly integrated this religious folk art and religious belief-system (the *milagro*, or miracle, and the *manda*, or promise) and transformed it into an original creative work of fiction. However Cisneros has not only successfully integrated the various folk genres and belief-systems, but she has done so with strong doses of feminist ideology and social protest—and she has done all of this with a sharp sense of humor.

Cisneros' narratives incorporate with great poignancy and humor the travails, needs, and hardships of working class Chicanos/ as. Through the succinct narratives, most are only a few lines long, the reader experiences the hard life of the proletariat. We learn of the poor health of Chicanos and lack of proper medical services, the exploitation of the poor, the undocumented **who** work and are not paid their wages (they fear deportation if they go to the police). We witness the struggles of staying in school in a **school** system that is not relevant to the needs of the Chicanos and has an alienating culture. A fine example of this is the request from Eliberto Gonzalez from Dallas, Texas who asks Saint Jude Patron Saint of Lost Causes: "Help me pass my English 320, British Restoration Literature class and everything to turn out ok." Through the narratives we hear the voice of the dispossessed the powerless, the working poor whose only recourse is to appeal to supernatural forces for miracles.

In Cisneros' *milagritos* we also hear a strong feminist voice. Feminist ideology is expressed in various *milagros*, and in particular the last one. The devotee Rosario "Chayo" de Leon has a **(23)** monologue with the Virgin de Guadalupe/Tonantzín/Coatlaxpeuh where she articulates her feminist concerns: (1) refusal to follow in the passive, submissive tracks of her female forebears, (2) placing a high value on her independence—she prefers to live alone—and loves her solitude and

freedom to think for herself, (3) but most of all she does not want a man to marry and lord

it over her. She is self-sufficient. For this show of independence and self-reliance she suffers the taunts and jeers of relatives and friends. She experiences strong pressure to conform to a patriarchal culture that wants to force her back into the fold, the mold.

Cisneros demonstrates through her creative energy the political force and impact a folk genre such as the *retahlo milagro* narrative can have in the hands of a talented writer.

Mary Helen Ponce's short story "It" explores the travails of a pre-teen Chicanita who longs to have her menstrual cycle started. In a humorous tone, Ponce describes the day to day and month to month anxious moments of a young girl who longs to be like her other teenage friends who are already experiencing their menstrual cycle. Ponce's story "It" falls within her previous work of chronicling the warm, comical, bittersweet growing up experiences of Chicanos/as living in the San Fernando Valley in California during the 1950s and 1960s.

Helena Maria Viramontes' short story "The Jumping Bean" is an excellent example of her splendid ability to delineate characters. With a fine stroke of the pen her characters acquire life and draw the reader into their fictional world. In this story the figure of the father is particularly striking. In her delineation of a hardworking Latino father, we come to know and understand the difficult and painful life of a man struggling for both spiritual and physical survival. The reader begins to understand that the violence inflicted on the soul of a man in a cruel, racist society is not left at the doorstep of his home but is indeed brought inside the hearth and visited upon his innocent children. The children too are presented as survivors; they are delineated as a bright and sensitive brood who try their utmost to make the best of a difficult situation. Maria de la Luz, child-surrogate mother, takes charge of the household chores upon her mother's chronic illnesses. But it is the invisible child—the child from whose point of view we read the story—that tugs at our heartstrings. She, the invisible, nameless one, introduces us to her world of surprise and wonder. Her (24) links to the natural world, i.e. the snake and the moth, present her as an innocent primordial being whose pain at a puzzling world becomes our pain. At the conclusion of the story, nevertheless, the "invisible child" blossoms and acquires a new sense of being and self-confidence when

she takes the initiative and swallows the contested jumping bean. Through her quick action she saves her father from the difficult quagmire he had walked into. Her new-found self-esteem leaves the reader with a pleasurable feeling—with a sense of optimism—that life will turn out okay for the young, vulnerable child.

Ana Castillo's contribution to this volume is an excerpt from her 1990 novel *Sapogonia*. The selection included in this anthology is Chapter XXXVIII where we find Pastora Velasquez, the principal protagonist of the novel, in jail serving a prison term for transporting undocumented workers in Michigan. Pastora, a committed activist, had been under surveillance when she was asked by a local pastor to transport Dory Sierra Madeira (the exwife of one of Pastora's lovers) and her child residing without legal documents in Michigan and in need of transportation to a church sanctuary in Chicago. Pastora agrees to the task but unfortunately is caught and incarcerated.

During her prison term Pastora befriends Mary Lou Acevedo a Latina with whom she has an intimate lesbian relationship. The narrative explores the friendship between the two women as they wait their release from jail. Mary Lou is a frail woman easily manipulated and intimidated by others. Her relationship with Pastora imbues her with a sense of confidence. At the same time Pastora becomes cognizant of some aspects of her personality she had not been aware before. Pastora's problems with the bully inmate Elaine McElroy who is jealous of her because of her relationship with Mary Lou makes her realize she needs to develop a stronger courageous self if she is to avoid trouble in the future. The prison term proves to be productive in the sense of Pastora's acquiring a new self-knowledge and inner growth and strength. Since her "crime" had been in the service of humanity the reader empathizes with Pastora and learns from her spiritual growth and experience, however harrowing or unpleasant this may have been.

Castillo's strength in narrative development lies in her perceptive understanding of the relationship between two women. In *Sapogonia* a major portion of the novel is this constant journey into (25) an exploration of the bonds developed between two women. In this sense *Sapogonia* continues the narrative thread her previous novel *The Mixquiakuala Letters*, 1986, had woven in her continuing depiction of women and their intimate relationships as they struggle to gain subject positions within a phallogocentric world.

## Criticism

By appropriating the confessional mode the above Chicana authors are deconstructing male-dominated narratives and re-inscribing themselves as subjects and acquiring their own voice. Chicanas are therefore breaking the silence Chicano hegemony had imposed on them in the name of ethnic unity.

Erlinda Gonzales-Berry, in her article "The [Subversive] Mixquiabnala Letters: An Antidote for Self-Hate," illuminates our understanding of Ana Castillo's outstanding novel. Gonzales-Berry perceives *The Mixquiabnala Letters* (1986) as subversive toward patriarchal hegemony, but liberating for Chicanas. She identifies several strategies Ana Castillo uses in the novel to dismantle or deconstruct male dominance. As an example, Gonzales-Berry points to the epistolary form of the novel, the dialogue with Julio Cortazar—i.e. the dedication to Cortazar—and the various possible readings of *The Mixquiabnala Letters*. Cortazar's game plan for the reading of his novel *Rayuela* is to offer two approaches: to read *Rayuela* in a linear fashion, or as Cortazar has instructed. However the readers are divided into two: a Lector Macho (active) and a Lector Hembra (passive), with the Lector Macho (or "Complice") being privileged and the Lector Hembra devalued. Castillo on the other hand, offers three possible readings: (1) conformist, (2) cynic, and (3) quixotic. A fourth possible reading of course is to read the work chronologically. Castillo offers yet another choice to the reader—any way he/she chooses to read it— thus undermining her own authority as author, and in the process exposing Cortazar's patriarchal leanings and breaking the slavery pattern of "Father" or "Master" to daughter, as was alluded to in the epigram to Anais Nin: "I quit loving my father a long time ago. What remained was a slavery to a pattern."

It becomes apparent, as in the case of Moraga and Chavez, that Chicanas are writing their own script and challenging master (26) narrative discourses, while in the process re-inscribing themselves as subjects of these new narratives.

Hector A. Torres also examines Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiabnala Letters* in his excellent article "Story, Telling, Voice: Narrative Authority in Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiabnala Letters*." He perceptively points out how Castillo cleverly uses the epistolary genre to

critique patriarchal ideologies extant in Latino and Anglo Cultures. Castillo appropriates a phallogentric genre—i.e. the novel—and stamps her own voice on it. Through her storytelling devices she is able to invade the linguistic domain long dominated by male articulations. The *Mixquiabuala Letters* presents the voice of one Chicana retelling the development and maturing of friendship with another woman. Through their adventures in Mexico and the United States the protagonist, Teresa, and her interlocutor, Alicia the addressee of the letters, come to know themselves and each other, and in the process discover strategies for dealing with the male universe that surrounds them. Torres asserts that through writing, Castillo gives herself, and by extension other Chicanas, a subject position. In gaining narrative authority the writer challenges a phallogentric discourse that misrepresents women. Thus by her gaining access to writing, Castillo authorizes Self and other Chicanas to become subjects. In the process of giving voice to a marginalized group she also calls into question and challenges the established American literary canon.

In my article "The Street Scene: Metaphoric Strategies in Two Contemporary Chicana Poets" I examine two poets, Evangelina Vigil and Beverly Silva, who through their writings demonstrate a certain ambivalence toward public and private space, and thus the metaphors of *casa* (private space) and *cantina* (public space) appear and reappear in their works. In the early 1980s when Vigil's *Thirty an' Seen a Lot* (1982) and Silva's *The Second Street Poems* (1983) were published, Chicanas were beginning to assert their independence as reflected in their works. Vigil's and Silva's literary oeuvres were also early indications of a desire to free themselves from the Chicano master narrative script. Thus they inserted themselves not as devoted *rnarnacitas*, *al~uelitas*, or *~efitas*, but as women in charge of their lives. Women who walked the streets, not as prostitutes, but as subjects exploring their own neighborhood streets which had been forbidden to them in the past. But not only do the poetic persona in the writings of these two poets open the locked doors (27) and sealed windows, but in addition to walking out into the world they invade the once-forbidden strictly male domains such as the *cantinas*. Previously, dance haHs and *cantinas* belonged solely to males, or to those despised and even more marginalized women —the *viiified* whores. Silva's protagonist, in an uncharacteristic manner (for Chicanas as perceived by the Chicano gaze), leaves husband and the comfort of a middle-class home to explore the world, her Chicana roots, and to "find herself." Likewise, Vigil's poetic voice, again in an uncharacteristic

fashion, instead of supporting Chicano machismo reacts against it in no uncertain terms, and in the process invades male linguistic domains of forbidden expression as exemplified by the use of such expletives as "Chingon," "motherfucker," "huevos," etc. Thus these two authors rewrite the script and insert themselves as subjects.

Elizabeth Ordonez, in her study "Webs and Interrogations: Postmodernism, Gender, and Ethnicity in the Poetry of Cervantes and Cisneros," demonstrates how the poetry of two Chicana authors functions within the purview of postmodernist politics. She posits that the "modernist urn" has been "cracked" and the new liberating movement—i.e. postmodernism—challenges old conceptualizations of what is aesthetically correct and pleasing. Postmodernism provides the liberating context in which tradition can be broken and new modes of expressing reality can be explored.

Ordonez analyzes the works of Cervantes and Cisneros, who she views as functioning within the postmodernist project of "challenging master narratives" and "questioning dominant cultural codes." Both Chicana writers reposition the Subject within their writings and engage in a reinscription of said Subject in a radically different way than the male patriarchal gaze has done in the past. Cervantes employs memory in her quest for deconstructing male narrative plots. Cisneros employs various strategies, including a rewriting of master narratives of love. Both authors, however, are not completely free of modernist aesthetics, and their work, according to Ordonez, is a synthesis of both the modernist and postmodernist projects.

Although there are few Chicana novelists, interest in the few authors who do write novels is growing, as evidenced by the articles focusing on Ana Castillo and Sheila Ortiz Taylor. Ortiz Taylor has been neglected by Chicano/a critics in the past and in "Faultline: Sheila Ortiz Taylor's Third Woman Utopia," Juan (28) Bruce-Novoa speculates that perhaps this is due to lack of overt identification with her Chicana identity and perhaps, in part, because she belongs to another marginalized group—lesbians. Bruce-Novoa examines her novel *Faultline* from the perspective that through its construction—both formally and content-wise—the work offers a radical view of subjectivity, identity, and the nature of reality itself. The very title conjures up a jagged image between two surfaces with a space in between, thus erasing neat lines of opposition and offering a more fluid view of reality. According to Bruce-Novoa, "from

the very beginning the text simultaneously sets up a system of logical, bipolar terms (witness/jury? accused/accuser, text/reader) and infuses the system with apparently anarchical, even chaotic content and form." This is intentionally done since the protagonist Arden, a lesbian, is in litigation with a heterosexual husband, Malthus, who "insists on the possibility of varying and even contradictory interpretations of any event, of the joy of interpenetrating fields, of intersecting lines and dialoguing spaces." Bruce-Novoa avers that through Faultline Ortiz Taylor, a lesbian, is positing a Third womanist position where "identity is not either/or but the process itself which bonds elements in constant flux."

While Ordonez, Bruce-Novoa, Herrera-Sobek, and GonzalesBerry examine Chicana authors and their literary writings, in "Cognitive Desires: An Allegory of/for Chicana Critics" Norma Alarcon focuses on the precarious position of the Chicana critic. Alarcon perceives the Chicana critic wedged between two literary critical theory movements: Anglo-American and European feminisms. Alarcon charges that both systems of literary interpretations place the Chicana in an uncomfortable position, since they both not only neglect these minority women's sociohistorical positions, but indeed silence her with charges of "declassé" and of practicing essentialist notions or, worse yet, of being ethnocentric. The Chicana critic soon realizes that there is no space in the Academy for her and is bounced from Spanish Departments to English Departments, to Ethnic Studies Departments, to Women's Studies Departments, not really fitting in any of them. Alarcon perceptively reasons that this inability of the academic system to find a space for the Chicana critic forces her to become a "migrant worker," traveling from one university to another, never finding a proper home. (29) Even so, Alarcon posits that Chicana writers and their texts are presently more likely to "succeed" in academia since their texts have been found to have use-value within the parameters of diversification—i.e. the politics of cultural diversity. For now, however, the Chicana critic can still be classified as "homeless."

In her brilliant article " 'And you know what I have to say isn't always pleasant': Translating the Unspoken Word in Cisneros," Katherine Rios revisits the Malinche myth in Sandra Cisneros' short story "Never Marry a Mexican." She dissects issues of race, gender, and class and accurately pinpoints Cisneros' critique, from a unique feminist Chicana optic, the contradictions found in both white brown/white sisterhood

as well as Chicano nationalist concerns with identity and solidarity.

Alvina E. Quintana, likewise, in her article, "Beyond the AntiAesthetic: Reading Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior," explores how minority women writers wage battle against racist and unauthentic representations of them both in mainstream literature and minority male writings.

Both Rios and Quintana underscore how minority women writers give "voice" to those subjects who have been silenced.

## Film

The issue of marginalization and misrepresentation is taken up by Rosa Linda Fregoso in her ground-breaking article "Chicana Film Practices: Confronting the Many-Headed Demon of Oppression." As in the articles discussed previously, Chicana filmmakers have not fared any better, regarding acceptance of their works, than other Mexican American women in the literary and visual arts. Unfortunately, the battle for cineastas is fought in two fronts: in mainstream culture and with minority filmmakers themselves. The present anthology seeks to highlight the contributions these women are making in this field.

Filmmaking and novel writing are two areas of endeavor that have been alien territory, for the most part, to Chicanas. Some Chicana novelists are making great strides in achieving recognition in this area, as demonstrated by Ana Castillo and Sheila Ortiz Taylor. Similarly, in filmmaking a few Chicanas are making inroads in that difficult-to-enter artistic field. Frances Salome (30) Espana and Lourdes Portillo are two such pioneers in the film industry. We are very fortunate to publish their comments in this anthology.

In "On Film Making—A Personal Odyssey" Espana offers us a personal commentary on her career as a filmmaker. She attributes her success in this art form to her own tenacity and the spirit of creativity erupting in the 1970s under the impetus of the Chicano Movement. The Chicano Movement opened Espana's eyes to the surrounding discrimination existing in the East Los Angeles barrios. It also reaffirmed the

Chicanos/as' right to pursue their own interests and instilled a confidence in themselves to do it. The slogan "¡Si se puede!" ("You can do it!") shattered the walls of defeat and racism and empowered Chicanos/as to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Espana felt the call and with her innate talent and perseverance has been able to enter in the filmmaking industry.

Lourdes Portillo's article "On Chicanas and Filmmaking—A Commentary" provides us with an overall view of the status of Chicanos/as in filmmaking. She particularly focuses on the difficulties Chicanas encounter in the field. Portillo insists there is great prejudice against entrusting women (and even more so Chicanas) with the enormous amounts of money necessary for a filmmaking enterprise. Until this particular type of sexism and racism is abolished it will be very difficult for Chicanos/as to enter and succeed in the field. This in spite of the all-American myth that anyone can succeed through hard work and personal initiative. The filmmaking industry is still one of the strongest bastions of racism and sexism.

### Conclusion

As can be deduced from the above collection of creative works and critical writings, Chicanas are continuing to produce at full speed outstanding pieces of poetry, prose, and more recently films. This literary renaissance begun in the 1970s is currently being reinvigorated by a group of Chicana lesbian writers as evidenced by the recent publication *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls our Mothers Warned Us About* (1991). Given the continued and growing interest in Chicana creativity and criticism the two areas will continue to flourish and prosper in the years ahead. (31)