

The Desert is no Lady. Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art.
Edited by Vera Norwood and Janice Monk. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.

Tey Diana Rebolledo

Tradition and Mythology. Signatures of landscape in Chicana Literature

The Hispano has almost vanished from the land and most of the chapels are nonexistent, but the names of hills, rivers, arroyos, canyons and defunct plazas linger as monuments to a people who pioneered into the land of the buffalo and the Comanche. These names have undergone many changes, but are still known and repeated. Very likely many of those who pronounce them daily are unaware that they are of Spanish origin.—Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, We Fed Them Cactus

These are the words of Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, writing in the 1950s about New Mexico. She centers her feeling about the land and the landscape both on a sense of loss and on the enduring, underlying Hispanic stamp upon that landscape, seen here as Spanish place names and plazas.¹ So too have Hispanic/Chicana women writers survived and endured. The signatures of their landscapes, both interior and exterior, are a monument to their survival, sense of self, and identity. They use the power of their perceptions of the landscape to transmit this sense of identity: one that is female, Chicana, and deeply connected to land, myth, and self. In their writings they have discovered the ability, the magic of words to capture their heritage and transform it through images.

In the literature written by early Hispanic women writers about the Southwest, the land is called *la santa sierra* (holy or blessed land). Many popular Anglo writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the land as virgin territory without traditions and roots, a land representing primal freedom, a land to be imagined and created by their own hands. Hispanic writers had a different sense of the southwestern landscape; for them it meant a long tradition of families not only tied to the land but (96) nourished by it. Historical referents did not come from the American East, with its large cities and materialistic concepts of progress, but from the land lying south of the border and a past in which the American Southwest belonged to Mexico. The land exemplified a heritage and a tradition in conflict with dominant Anglo values. Early writers identified the landscape with loss: of culture, of traditions, of language. Recent writers have looked to the rich and varied heritage of the past to find a regenerative and transforming sense of identity in the present and for the future.

The writers discussed in this chapter fall into two generations. Hispanics of New Mexico writing in the first half of the twentieth century and oral histories of Hispanic women of Arizona living in the same period are contrasted with the generation of writers publishing after the Chicano Renaissance in the ~1960s.² Between the two

generations value systems changed: working- and middle-class women began to write where before mostly educated upper-class women were writing; in the first generation the emphasis was only on Spanish culture, but in the second a pride in the combined Indian and Spanish heritage became much more dominant. The first generation of women writers still generally perceived themselves as Spanish; the second generation saw themselves as Chicana. There is a vast ideological and political gulf between these two terms,³ but the new generation continues to feel links and connections to its past, its values and traditions. The first generation foreshadows what is to come. Both link their culture, values, and history to the landscape.

The term *signature* means a "personal unique mark that connotes a specific pattern of human expression by its author." A signature in landscape, therefore, is its unique distinguishing feature or features as an individual or a group modifies the landscape. These features are significant within the group or individual creation. They are a "comment in space," and studying them gives us better insight into the nature of their creators. Signatures, or unique features in a landscape, can range from "predominantly visual features, such as settlement patterns, house types, gardens or clothing, to more subtle manifestations, such as types of entertainment and cuisine. All of them share a common bond: they serve as cultural or individual hallmarks."⁴ Culturally diverse patterns can be identified and examined through these features. As distinctive signatures in the landscape of Hispanic/Chicana writers, I particularly want to examine the perceptions of the desert and its plants, domesticated flowers and gardens, the cactus, and the figure of the *curandera* (healer) as the mediator between nature and human beings. These signatures are common to many Hispanic and Chicana women writers of the Southwest, and they provide a thread linking the different generations as well as a signal of changes that have taken place in the intervening years.

Until the Chicano Renaissance of the ~1960s, Mexican-American women writers were marginalized.⁵ Theirs has been called a heritage of silence. Little information is available about early Hispanic women writers, but in the 1940s, ~1940s, and 1950s several books were published by New Mexican Hispanic women writers dealing with local customs, foods, history, and folklore. These books take the guise of first-person accounts incorporating stories or tales of older relatives or acquaintances, thus extending the "personal" narrative further into the past. The Federal Writers Project, active in New Mexico in the 1940s, awakened in these women a sense of the value of Hispanic (97) folk histories and culture. The three writers considered here, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Cleofas Jaramillo, and Nina Otero Warren, came from old, landed, upper-class New Mexican families, and their stories reflect these class origins. They generally extol the Spanish (not the Mestizo or Indian) heritage, and see the past as a utopia in the pastoral tradition where human beings were integrated with nature. Their perspective was not unique; it was also the prevailing attitude among male writers of the time.

Otero Warren concentrates on quaint folkloric vignettes praising the lost Spanish heritage. Her book *Old Spain in Our Southwest* (~1936) evokes days of gay caballeros, fiestas, and señoritas. The past is greatly romanticized and stylized, yet she also feels

change and loss as she describes the people and the region near Santa Fe: "This southwestern country, explored and settled nearly four hundred years ago by a people who loved nature, worshiped God and feared no evil, is still a region of struggles."⁷ She envisions the Indian as well as the Hispanic shepherd as integrated with nature both in religious belief and in understanding of the land. But she is on the fringe, longing for the sense of integration denied her, in part because she is a woman, but also because she represents a culture and class in a state of transition. Her desire for a utopic integration is expressed when, inside her small adobe house on the top of a hill, she watches a storm's effect on landscape and people:

In the only room of my house, a melancholy candle was flickering as if gasping for breath.... I had a feeling of vastness, of solitude, but never of loneliness.... The night was alive with sounds of creatures less fearful than humans, speaking a language I couldn't understand, but could feel with every sense.

In the night the storm broke, wild and dismal. The wind hissed like a rattler, and as it struck the branches of the trees, it made a weird sound like a musical instrument out of tune. At dawn, the clouds parted as if a curtain were raised, revealing the outline of the mountains. The hush following the storm was tremendous.... As the shepherd was extinguishing the camp fire, there appeared on the top of the hill a form with arms stretched to heaven as though offering himself to the sun. The shepherd from his camp and from my window watched this half-clad figure that seemed to have come from the earth to greet the light. A chant, a hymn—the Indian was offering his prayer to the rising sun. The shepherd, accustomed to his Indian neighbors, went his way slowly, guiding his sheep out of the canyon. The Indian finished his offering of prayer. I, alone, seemed not in complete tune with the instruments of God. I felt a sense of loss that they were closer to nature than I, more understanding of the storm.⁸

Otero Warren begins her book with admiration for these "simple" people who have more understanding of nature than she does, thus communicating her own sense of separation from the landscape, illustrating her feelings of alienation and isolation in a time of transition.

Her work and that of other New Mexican writers has made some contemporary Chicano critics, interested in more political social commentary, shudder. Raymond Paredes, in a generally perceptive study, condemns these early accounts, claiming that **(98)** the writers had a "hacienda" mentality, ignored social concerns, and lacked interest because they were too sappy and genteel:

The Mexican American literature in English that emerged from New Mexico during the 1930s evokes a past that, while largely imaginary, is presented with rigid conviction.... The writers described a culture seemingly locked in time and barricaded against outside forces. Here the New Mexico Hispanos pass their lives in dignity and civility, confronting the harsh environment with a religiosity and resolve reminiscent of the conquistadores themselves.... There is something profoundly disturbing about this body of work. It seems a

*literature created out of fear and intimidation, a defensive response to racial prejudice, particularly the Anglo distaste for miscegenation and ethnocentrism.*⁹

Laredo is one of the few male Chicano critics to deal seriously with early women writers. But he is very harsh toward them, overlooking perceptions that contrast with the "romantic" view. Moreover, he views these writers with the social sensibility of the ~1960s, criticizing them for internalizing the class, sexual, and racial attitudes of their culture. Most Hispanic women had no education and even those who did had little leisure to write. Nor were they encouraged to write; they were confined to fairly rigid gender roles, carefully watched and cared for. It is a wonder they wrote at all.

If in Otero Warren's book most things of value are presented as Spanish in origin, one must look at her work as an early attempt to preserve in literary images a vanishing way of life. All the narratives written by these women are valuable in their preservation not only of accounts of folk life but more particularly of the customs women thought important to record, for accounts of the lives and duties of women were not usually included in male writing. These texts were among the first attempts to make such records against the overwhelming dominance of Anglo culture and language and records against patriarchal norms. This is even more true of *We Fed Them Cactus* by Fabiola Cabeza de Baca and *Romance of a Little Village Girl* by Cleofas Jaramillo. A careful reading of these two texts reveals a concern with the economic and social fortunes of all Hispanic New Mexicans living through the change from Hispanic to Anglo New Mexico. The transformation from the stable society in which they had been born is recalled in their memories and shadowed by their perspective on the landscape. Both : Cabeza de Baca and Jaramillo use landscape to reflect changing cultural values.

The title *We Fed Them Cactus* is itself symbolic. The cactus appears as a central symbol not only for Cabeza de Baca but also for many women writers of today. The cactus holds water in reserve over times of drought and protects itself with thorns. The plant itself can be eaten and its fruit (*la tuna*) is delicious. *We Fed Them Cactus* refers, on one level, to the fact that, in the drought of ~1891-8, Hispanic farmers fed cactus to their cattle to help them survive. On another level, it refers to the Hispanos themselves as survivors able to weather misfortunes. The book, then, is an account "of the struggle of New Mexico Hispanos for existence on the Llano, the Staked Plains." 10

| Fabiola Cabeza de Baca contrasts past tradition and present reality in New Mexico. Her book covers the arrival of the Spaniards in New Mexico in colonial days, buffalo hunts and the Comancheros, her family's establishment on the land upon receiving a (99) land grant near Las Vegas, New Mexico, the loss of the country to the Anglos in 1848, her childhood, the arrival of homesteaders, the destruction of the land through plowing and overgrazing, the loss of the land by the Hispanos, and the loss of a traditional way of life. At the beginning of the book she describes the New Mexico landscape as a rich, nourishing, fruitful Garden of Eden, a varied topography with hills, wooded lands and sweet springs gushing from secluded places even though rain is

scant. It is a land to be appreciated and valued solely by those who possess it spiritually:

From Cañon del Agua Hill to Luciano Mesa, the vegetation includes juniper, piñon, yucca, mesquite, sagebrush, drama and buffalo grasses, as well as lemita, prickly pear, and pitahaya. There are wildflowers in abundance, and when the spring comes rainy, the earth abounds in all colors imaginable. The fields of oregano and cactus, when in full bloom, can compete with the loveliest of gardens.

It is a lonely land because of its immensity, but it lacks nothing for those who enjoy Nature in her full grandeur. The colors of the skies, of the trails, the rocks, the birds and the flowers are soothing to the most troubled heart. It is loneliness without despair. The whole world seems to be there full of promise and gladness. (I-3)

This paradise not only has a plenitude of sweet water, but the plains are seen as "fields" of herbs and cactus, domesticated and accessible. The land thus functions as a place of nourishment and cultivated beauty. Surely the cactus would not have presented the same image to someone not raised in the Southwest. Cabeza de Baca's attitude also reveals adaptation to the flora and fauna of the region. In the not too distant past, the area had been savage wilderness. In "the days of the buffalo and the Comanche, the Llano was uninhabited and dangerous" (3-4).

The houses of the early Spanish settlers in north central New Mexico were built as fortresses to protect both people and animals. In 1821, when Mexico gained its independence from Spain, protection from the Indians was no longer available, and the lands around the settlements became depleted from overgrazing. The ranchers then moved eastward with their sheep and cattle to the Llano and Cola country (near Las Vegas) and found the "promised land":

There, where the mountains end and the plains begin, they found drama and buffalo grass proving as tall as the cattle. The best pastures were on the Ceja, the Cap Rock areas at the top of the Staked Plains.... To one living on the American plains of the Middle West, so level and flat, the land on the bluffs of the Staked Plains, with its rocky hills, juniper, mesquite, and piñon may not seem a Llano, but to New Mexicans, because of the drop of two or three thousand feet from the peaks, it is not the Sierras, and they have called it the Llano—the wide open spaces. (I)

Cabeza de Baca is careful to contrast the Anglo perception of "plains" with the Hispanic perception. She describes in detail the houses, the ranching, the relationships among the people. Throughout her narrative it is clear that her family, once settled, depends upon the land and that the relationship to the land, weather, and landscape is all important: **(100)**

Money in our lives was not important; rain was important. We never counted our money; we counted the weeks and months between rains. I could always tell anyone exactly to the day and hour since the last rain, and I knew how many snowfalls we had in winter and

how many rains in spring. We would remember an unusually wet year for a lifetime; we enjoyed recalling it during dry spells.

Rain for us made history. It brought to our minds days of plenty, of happiness and security, and in recalling past events, if they fell on rainy years, we never failed to stress that fact. The droughts were as impressed on our souls as the rains. When we spoke of the Armistice of World War I, we always said, "The drought of 1918 when the Armistice was signed." (Ir-12)

Storms were welcomed by people and animals alike: the thunder, lightning, and particularly the rain are envisioned as a symphonic rapture: "A storm on the Llano is beautiful. The lightning comes down like arrows of fire and buries itself on the ground. At the pealing of thunder, the bellowing of cattle fills the heart of the listeners with music. A feeling of gladness comes over one as the heavens open in downpour to bathe Mother Earth" (~4--5).

Cabeza de Baca then describes what is left of a vanishing people as she traces the arrival of the American homesteaders who plow and ruin the land and the loss of land grants. Bitterness over lost land and nostalgia over lost culture are implicit in her description of a barren wasteland in what had once been paradise:

The land, between the years 1932-1935, became a dust bowl. The droughts, erosion of the land, the unprotected soil and overgrazing of pastures had no power over the winds... Gradually the grass and other vegetation disappeared and the stock began to perish. There was not a day of respite from the wind. The houses were not protection against it. In the mornings upon rising from bed, one's body was imprinted on the sheets which were covered with sand... One forgot how it felt to touch a smooth surface or a clean dish how food without grit tasted, and how clear water may have appeared. The whole world around us was a thick cloud of dust. The sun was invisible and one would scarcely venture into the outdoors for fear of breathing the foul grit. The winds blew all day and they blew all night, until every plant which had survived was covered by hills of sand. (177)

The tragedy of the New Mexico Hispanos is reflected in the interrelationship between the land and Cabeza de Baca's father. The loss of his land parallels the losses of all Hispanos. The land is gone to Hispanos forever, passed into the hands of Anglos:

The land which he loved had sucked the last bit of strength which so long kept him enduring ailments and sometime successes but never of one tenor. Life so cruel and at times so sweet is a continuous struggle for existence—yet one so uncertain of what is beyond fights and fights for survival.

He is gone, but the land which he loved is there. It has come back. The grass is growing again and those living on his land are wiser. They are following practices of soil and water conservation which were not available to papa. But each generation must profit by the trials and errors of those before them; otherwise eventually they would perish. (178)

(101)

We Fed Them Cactus is an extraordinary account by a woman who expressed the evolution and change suffered by her people through landscape and their connection to the land. A sense of place and belonging can also be connoted by such mundane activities as regional food traditions. Cabeza de Baca also published a cookbook of

New Mexican recipes called *The Good Life*. 11 Recipes are integrated with accounts of folk life, as if the female sense of rootedness and place is passed down through the distinctive foods nature offers. The cookbook, like her narrative writings, preserves these traditions.

Another New Mexican woman, Cleofas M. Jaramillo, also wrote a cookbook: *The Genuine New Mexico Tasty Recipes: Old and Quaint Formulas for the Preparation of Seventy-Five Delicious Spanish Dishes* (1939). The preface claims, "In this collection of Spanish recipes only those used in New Mexico for centuries are given, excepting one or two Old Mexico recipes."¹² Jaramillo, born in 1877, also wrote *Cuentos del Hogar* (1939), which is a collection of folktales mainly told to her by her mother, *Shadows of the Past* (1941), and her autobiography, *Romance of a Little Village Girl*.

The autobiography is based on the Spanish ballad tradition, a *romance*, which tells a story. Stanzas of poetry frame the narrative sections. Her story begins with a nostalgic, romanticized description of a wilderness gradually controlled by the brave Spaniards. She wrote the book, she states, because "writing and art are contagious in this old town (Santa Fe). We have caught the fever from our famous 'cinco pintores' and author Mary Austin, and some of us have the courage to try. It is only by trying that we learn what we can do."¹³ Writing in English, at the beginning of the story she expresses her feeling of being a foreigner in her own land:

Under the apparent deadness of our New Mexico villages there runs a romantic current invisible to the stranger and understood only by their inhabitants. This quiet romance I will try to describe in the following pages of my autobiography, although I feel an appalling shortage of words' not being a writer, and writing in a language almost foreign to me. May I offer an apology for my want of continued expression in some parts of my story. (vii)

Early in her tale, like Cabeza de Baca, she describes the effect of the change from Mexican to American government on the inhabitants of her region. For Jaramillo, change meant that the New Mexican families (especially the women) retreated behind their walls and enclosed placitas. Women and girls were not encouraged to go outside the walls. On a rare day as a child out in the country, she writes, "I can still see myself, like a wild bird set free of a cage, running from one berry bush to another, filling my little play basket, my heart beating with delight at the sights of beautiful mariposa lilies, blue bells, yellow daisies, feathery ferns" (10). The boys of the family, however, roam freely and are allowed to hunt.

In Jaramillo's nostalgic view, the land held abundance for all and a religious, spiritual significance:

Everyone was happy in those days. How could people be otherwise, living according to God's Has and close to the good earth and the natural beauties of nature? Beauties were there (102) that not even the most gifted artist can copy. The real tints of allowing sunset, when the sky seems on fire or is suffused in delicate rose and gold. Those autumn colors on trees and shrubs covering mountains, and on wooded rivers. The crystal-like sheen in the

river water, and the murmur as it splashes on its way. What sweeter music is there to soothe tired minds and nerves of hard-working people? (14)

The desert is seen not as a waste of wilderness but as a landscape where people are integrated with nature. The landscape is pure and clean, no social disorders jar the sensibilities—the rivers are crystal-clear and fresh, nature is tranquil and soothing. Early in the book, describing her return home from boarding school, Jaramillo says:

I climbed up on the seat by my father and rode along inhaling the fresh fragrance of the newly-awakened sage and wildflowers. The desert plain seemed turned into a fairy-land. Ice winter had given place to warm summer, melting snow and filling rivers and causing ditches to overflow. Here and there we dropped into a verdant little valley, the sparkling river fringed with new green plants and drooping willows. From the edge of the highest ridge we looked down into the Awayo Hondo sunken valley, which in its rich verdure seemed to lie asleep, the deep silence enveloping the valley broken only by the rattling of our carriage wheels or the distant barking of the dog. Happy in letting my tongue loose in my fond Spanish, I had chatted all the way. (41-42)

Jaramillo lives a protected, sheltered life and marries under protest, stating that she would have preferred another year with her mother or even "a year at one of those fine colleges I saw advertised in my *Home Journal* magazine." But her suitor comes from an old New Mexico landed family and is wealthy and good-looking, so she marries in 1898. She experiences wrenching homesickness when she first moves to live with her husband some miles away, and she is delighted when she can return home to visit: "A hymn of gladness sang in my heart as we came in sight of the villages nestling in their natural setting at the foot of the high ridges of hills that shelter the green bowl of the valley. It appeared like an oasis in a desert after the ride across the plain" (87). Later she and her husband lead the active life of the wealthy, traveling and visiting the East. However when her first baby dies, she turns to nature and a comfortable sense of place for revitalization:

That summer I busied myself in my garden with my flowers to drown my sorrow. There is a romance in gardening. The mere word makes me think of bright sunshine, of flowerscented air. To bury a dry seed in the ground and see it burst through the earth as a green sprout, watch it grow, spread its branches and be covered with exquisite flowers is a magic wand. (109)

The garden's fertility is a positive counterpoint to her own inability to engender a living child. Her autobiography continues as her second baby dies, her third child is born, her husband is elected to the state legislature and later dies. She discovers that their grand life has been led at a great cost; their property is heavily mortgaged. She moves to Santa Fe and becomes a businesswoman to support her family. But there savage civilization takes over and her daughter, Angelina, is brutally murdered. She writes, (103) some weeks after, when I took courage to go out for a walk, the sun seemed to have lost its bright rays and the whole world to be in an eclipse" (164).

The book is a lament for life and times lost, a desire to return to a better and simpler world where humanity and nature are in harmony. Jaramillo describes the sadness of a trip back to the home that is home no more:

After dinner, my nephew took me in his car for a visit to my old house at Arroyo Hondo. In fifteen minutes I found myself tiding down the once steep hills, now almost level and I was surprised to see before me the little sunken green vatted. What a different aspect it now presented! High pitched roofs, a new modern looking schoolhouse with nothing left but memories of our once tively-happy home, now in melting ruins . . . With a sigh, I turned away from this sad sight. (187)

Each section of Jaramillo's autobiography is framed by a ballad stanza detailing the rise and fall of the Spanish people: a history mirrored in her life. The romance is pieced together as the ballad form mirrors the content of the autobiography, both, in turn, reflecting the sense of nostalgia and cultural loss.

*The first white speck on the Western sea was made by a Spanish salt,
And the first toney-grave on the plains was dug by a Spanish trait.*

They left their toyed abodes
To tempt new seas and stretched their salts
Futt-blown before the driving gate—
Theirs to be submissive to fate
Self-sentenced' yet elate,
Fearless o'er trackless waste to fy
To sands unsettled to habitate. ()
Let the old houses their secrets keep
Leave them alone in their quiet steep;
They are like oldfolks who nod by Refire,
Glad with their dreams of youth and desire. (IIc9)
Life has its Spring—
The rosy years of youth,
Its summer of achievement;
Then autumn with its piece of work well done,
Brings rest and understanding of the whole.

(104) Landscape here contains metaphors of change, a tragic sense of loss of place, loss of culture, and loss of language. Jaramillo's native tongue, like that of Otero Warren and Cabeza de Baca, is Spanish. Nevertheless, to communicate with the dominant culture they write in English. Jaramillo is always conscious of the "foreignness" of communicating in a language that is not hers, of being unable to "chat" in her "fond" Spanish.

Within the narrative histories and folk accounts of these writers appears a singular folldoric" figure: that of the "herb woman" or the "medicine woman," the curandera. Active in both Hispanic and Indian communal lives, she was a woman of wisdom and Knowledge of the natural world. In Hispanic folklore the curandera has always had |

core freedom of movement than other women. Cabeza de Baca saw the herb woman as not only freer but clearly outside the confines of society. Although she could not write, she stored her knowledge in her incredible memory: "The medicine woman seemed so old and wrinkled to Doria Paula and she wondered how old she was. No one remembered when she was born. She had been a slave in the Garcia family for two generations and that was all anyone knew. She had not wanted her freedom, yet she had always been free. She had never married, but she had several sons and daughters."~4

This curandera is the keeper of secrets: some that women need to know and that men inadvertently destroy. Thus men are the destroyers of landscape, women the preservers. [It is evident as Doña Paula says to the medicine woman in *The Good Life*: "But there is still more herbs you have not told me about in that neat pile there. And the curandera replies, "These are getting so scarce that I only brought you a few leaves: the men pull them up as weeds."~5 The curandera has been an important social and cultural figure in Hispanic tradition since the colonial period and continues to play a strong role in daily life as well as in folklore and myth.

Within Cabeza de Baca's and Jaramillo's accounts, one finds social commentary, concern for the poor, and discussions of life and customs. Although in many ways their books are wrapped in romantic, idealized notions of a fantasy life, their writings also reveal that they suffered great losses and leave us detailed accounts of their lives. A longing for the land is central to their vision of paradise found and paradise lost. 16

But if we look at these writers as seen to be elite, not in touch with the common people, they foresaw the loss of their culture. Oral histories of common women and men coming out of the same tradition reflect a similar sense of loss and set the stage for the (105) radically changed landscape of the period after World War II. This perspective of loss can be seen in such recent oral histories as *Del Rancho al Bawio* from the Mexican Heritage project in Tucson, Arizona, and in *Images and Conversations: Mexican Americans Recall a Southwestern Past*.¹⁷ Patricia Preciado Martin, for example, evokes the image of a fig tree to symbolize the vanishing cultural landscape:

In 1858 José M. Sosa built a small residence for his family on Main Street—Tucson's old Camino Real. . . . In 1878 the property was sold to Leopoldo Carrillo. . . . In time he dug a well, built corrals and chicken houses, planted herbs and flowers—and a fig tree. The fig tree, nourished by the sweet water drawn from the well, flourished in that desert garden. Through the years it grew, its spreading branches finally embracing the garden walls. On warm summer nights, the family would path outdoors to enjoy the cool evening breeze. Undisturbed by the noise or concerns of modern urbanites, they would count the stars and fall asleep beneath the protective canopy of the sky and the fig tree.

Through the years the fig tree continued to grow and give fruit to succeeding generations. In the twentieth century a bustling Mexican neighborhood grew up around the house of the fig tree. It was a community of vitality and culture and tradition, built with the love and labor of those who dwelled there. But the laughter and songs of the descendants of those early Mexican pioneers would in time be silenced by the bulldozers of progress and urban renewal. Only the Sosa-Cawillo house would be spared, standing alone in a wilderness of asphalt, brick, and glass—mute evidence of the past. And miraculously that same fig tree still branched and

*flowered in stubborn Affirmation of those families who gave it root, greening forth in solitude—
a symbol of history and nostalgia in a modern wasteland of concrete, an inheritance which
still lives sustenance to those of us who pass this way.*

After the early books were published in the Egos, Ages and pesos, the Hispanic women writers of the Southwest lapsed into a Sleeping Beauty silence. They continued to write, but little was published and even less distributed. It was not until after the Chicano civil rights movement and the accompanying literary renaissance of the late 60s that Hispanic (now Chicana) women writers once again found their voices. In the intervening period many things had changed in Hispanic/Chicano culture. Recognition of the value of the intermixture of races, pride in the Indian as well as the Spanish past, desire to retain culture in the form of language, recognition of the richness of bilingualism and biculturalism, and pride in the legacy of history left to the Mexican-American resulted in a literary outpouring. Women after 1968 wrote of social and political issues and struggled with who they were. They searched for meaning in the past and took as role models revolutionary heroines such as La Adelita. They resuscitated Aztec goddesses who represented power and authority, found old myths, created new ones, and reinterpreted the ones they did not like, such as the one of La Malinche.¹⁹ They discussed relationships with men, women, and families. In this literary movement toward definition they talked about their daily lives and their environment. Landscape and their perceptions of the world around them were a focus of their evaluation. An early poem, "The Knowing Earth" by Gina Valdés, illustrates the Chicana writer's continued connection with the land: **(106)** *In this, my own land, I stand an alien*

*Mistreated, oppressed, unwanted, at best ignored
But this knowing earth recognizes me
Like a mother recognizes her child
This earth welcomes me, it opens to me
I caressed this earth with songs, whispers, and sighs
I broke and turned this earth with my dancing feet
I moistened this earth with hard rainfalls of tears
I nourished this earth with my rich, warm, faithful blood
I fertilized this earth with my salty sweat
I cursed this earth with miseries, pain, and fears
Maddened, I spit poetry over it.
They scow me, turn me away from this, my land
But this knowing earth recognizes me
Like a dog recognizes its master
This earth welcomes me, it kisses my feet.²⁰*

Contemporary Chicana writings have centered on two distinct perceptions of landscape: the urban situation and the urge to return to the middle landscape that integrates human beings and nature. As we have seen in "The House of the Fig Tree," as Chicanos lost political and economic power they also lost social stability. Their neighborhoods

declined until today the word *barrio* (neighborhood) to some signifies a slum. In the Southwest as well as in California and Texas, the continuous waves of new immigrants from Mexico often crowded Spanish-speaking neighborhoods. The immigrants maintained their connections with Mexico and reinforced bonds with its language and culture, but at the same time they strained the social and economic fabric of the neighborhoods. In many barrios life became an increasing struggle, and the city evolved into a labyrinth of social ills and alienation. Chaos reigned. The Chicanos had become a minority in what they considered their own land, rejected because of their language and race, exploited and unrepresented in the midst of the myth of democracy: such is the signature of urban environments that the Chicana writer sees and reflects in her choice of landscape.

The Chicanos' struggle to make order out of chaos continues. The move to the city in some senses breaks down regional ties and many of the responses to this landscape are the same whether the writers live in Albuquerque or in Los Angeles. Angela de Hoyos' poems of the late ~g60s, for instance "Hermano" and "La gran ciudad," established the bilingual, bicultural feeling by writing interlingually in Spanish, English, and Caló (Chicano slang). These poems are about two cities; one San Antonio, Texas, the other abstract—representing any large city. The cities are signatures for cultural perceptions of rejection and alienation. In "Hermano," de Hoyos chooses the American seizure of the Alamo and of San Antonio as a metaphor of loss: **(107)**

blind-folded they led you
to a marriage of meanwhile your Spanish blood
smoldered within you!

The sky, the land, the Spanish missions now belong "to a pilgrim who arrived only yesterday / whose racist tongue says to me. I hate / Meskins. You're a Meskin. Why don't you / go back to where you came from?" The poet points out that they are all pilgrims, and says:

I was born too late

or perhaps I was born too soon;

It is not yet my time;

this is not yet my home.

I must wait for the conquering barbarian

to learn the Spanish word for love:

HERMANO2 1

"La gran ciudad" details the struggle of a single mother who has arrived in the city looking for a job; racial prejudice and lack of opportunity threaten her survival. The poet reveals contradictions between racist behaviors, including stereotyping of "Mexican's" linguistic abilities, and the promise of an urban paradise, and ends with an ironic comment on the democratic ideal:

No one told me. So how was I to know that in the paradise of crisp white cities snakes still walk upright?

when I couldn't pay the rent the landlord came to see me.

.....

Ain't you Meskin? How come you speak such good English? Yyo le contesto Because I'm Spanglo, that's why.

So where is the Paradise? In the land of the mighty where is the shining —THE EQUAL—opportunity>22

The ambivalent attitude evoked by the city is also echoed by Xelina, another Chicana writer of this period: **(108)**

tia juana u glisten by night

sequined by dazzin`' city light

s by day we are shrouded with misery

*groping for a bite to eat.*²³

The glittering, shining white paradise, the land of opportunity promised by the city, means despair and hunger for Chicanos. Cities originally settled by the Spanish take on in the eyes of the prejudiced Anglos attributes of the Chicanos who live there. In "San Antonio" by Carmen Tafolla, this anthropomorphic stereotyping is clearly evident. San Antonio is portrayed as a woman toiling, yet always seen as indolent.

San Antonio

They called you ¿any.

They saw your silent, subtle, screaming eyes,

And called you ¿any.

They saw your ¿can bronzed workmaid's arms,

And called you ¿any.

They saw your centuries-secret sweet-night song,

And called you ¿any.

San Antonio

San Antonio

They saw your skybirth and suna¿tar, Your corn-dirt soul and mute be¿¿-tol¿, Your river-ripp¿e heart, soft with ¿ife, Your ancient shawl of sigh on strife, And didn't see. Clearly, for Tafolla, San Antonio holds more complex meaning than that read into it by Anglos—while on the one hand life there is difficult and degrading for many contemporary Chicanos, San Antonio also contains a valuable past offering much positive meaning.

Rina Garcia Rocha, in "North Avenue/600 North," also images the city as a woman. In contrast to Tafolla, Garcia Rocha's city is ragged, indifferent, and wicked. But even this city connotes belonging in spite of the poet's desire to reject it: "North Avenue, why do you wrap your arms / so thick around my neck / and refuse to let me go." In Garcia Rocha's "The Truth in My Eyes," the city becomes a savage place of corruption and filth:

(109)

and the currency exchange with the sign "Se HablaEspañol" Ah, Latino Barrio Is this the ghetto?

...

Two boys down the block been shooting rats with

their B-B guns behind a capitalist back door restaurant Wild game available and plenty
Came up close enough to a dead body of one of the rats

Came up close enough to see how the shiny little bodies of the flies nested
Disgust

As I smash the maggots on the cobble stone alley²⁵

The truth is, of course, that these "savage civilizations" are the result of oppression and lack of opportunity which allows rats and maggots to breed. Such disintegration of the landscape affects the social and economic situation of the Chicano/Spanish-speaking minority who live in the barrios. The mental oppression in the barrio is directly addressed by Irene Thea in "spaces like the barrio":

spaces are the things you know exist the talents that~go unrecognized because the fear of failing while grasping opportunity that exists elsewhere is much too overwhelmingly
These Chicana writers, like the early Hispanic writers, express mixed emotions about

it's safe there in the barrio you can handle it no one expects their city
anything all you have to do is stay alive and keep out of trouble environment:

both a sense of
alienation and one of fond
memories. The early writers tended to look to the past when life was more secure and stable; the more modern writers see *today's* reality, with or without a sense of nostalgia. Beverly Silva, in her urban *The Second St. Poems*, echoes many of the feelings of alienation and despair already discussed, but also chronicles her struggles with some sense of humor culminating in ultimate survival. In "The roaches came from everywhere," the wild beasts threatening a sense of security and protection in the wilderness of the city are the cucarachas. Like early pioneers, woman is on the frontier; her weapon now becomes a spray can! **(110)**

At night they crawled from all the cracks to cover our walls like some grotesque canvas painted by a madman.

To move wasn't possible, we had to fight..

The roaches became my nemesis. Sharing these vermin bound me forever to my neighbors. The temporariness of our situations became enhanced ~ rejections of our mutual suffering, pretense of waiting lists for better apartments, or savings for deposit money. Easier to live with roaches when:

We're going to move from here any time now.²⁷

| 0 ultimate threat on the edge of chaos is fear of complete extermination: that too is
Ichnicled by Silva in "Always close to death on Second St." where annihilation is as | clc
e as a pane of glass: **(111)**

an unidentified body

the police always link to dope or passion or prostitution.²⁸

Yet not all is grim in the Chicana portrayal of the urban landscape. For Evanglina Vigil, the city of her childhood holds fond memories:

barefoot is how I always used to be running barefoot like on that hot summer in the San Juan Projects they spray-painted all the buildings pastel pink, blue, green, pale yellow, gray
no sooner than had the building wall canvases been painted clean
did barrio kids take to carving new inspirations
and chuco hieroglyphics
and new figure drawings of naked women
and their parts
and messages for all
"la Diana es puta"
"el Lalo es joto"
y que "la Chelo se deja"
decorated by hearts and crosses
and war communication
among rivaling gangs
El Circle
La India
pretty soon kids took to just plain peeling plastic pastel paint
to unveil historical murals
of immediate past well-remembered:
más monks encueradas
and "Lupe loves Tony"
"always and forever"
"Con Safos"
y "Sin Safos"
y que "El Chuy es relaje"
and other innocent desmadres de la juventud
secret pear in every child
que su nombre apareciera allied

Surely this writing of names in Pachuco hieroglyphics on urban buildings is a literal signature of the Chicano landscape which is then preserved with the poem. Such writing evidences ownership and control of a landscape otherwise threatening and overpowering.

Thus, as seen by the contemporary Chicana writer, the city is not the land of hope and **(112)**opportunity. To survive and to grow, these writers search for a new connection, a sense of home, place, and belonging. Lorna Dee Cervantes' poem "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway" signals the need for connectedness to family heritage (particularly through the female family members) and tradition: by respect for your self and for who you are. Through the contrasting discourse of her mother and grandmother in the poem, the lyric speaker finds her own voice and identity. She learns to survive in the city by trusting in human relations (which her mother warned her against) and by trusting in herself (which her grandmother advocated). It is significant also that she learns her direction *below* the freeway:

Across the street—the freeway, blind worm, wrapping the valley up from Los Altos to Sal Si Puedes. I watched it from my porch unwinding. Every day at dusk as Grandma watered geraniums the shadow of the freeway lengthened.

I tie up my hair into loose braids, and trust what I have built with my own hands.³⁰

The discourse in this long poem contrasts the "old" traditions (her grandmother's potted plants) and the "new" traditions (her mother and the freeway). The poet creates, by means of her writing (translations, meaning the going back and forth between two cultures), a bridge between the two landscapes, thus forging her own individual identity or signature: "I trust only what I have built with my own hands." Significantly, she does not have to return to agrarian landscapes of the past to make this reconciliation, but can find a meaningful life "Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway" with only minimal reminders of the older natural world.

This link with old traditions and a sense of survival in landscape is also revealed in a short story by Patricia Preciado Martin, "The Journey." The story is structured on the glaring contrast between old and new Tucson; the disappearance of the old barrio stands as the central metaphor. The elderly aunt, "tea", lives in the "Martin Luther King Jr. Apartments, Low Cost Housing for the Elderly," an ironic comment on the success of the black civil rights movement and the relative lack of advancement for the Chicanos, since almost all those who live there are Hispanic *viejitos*. The young Chicana in the story takes her aunt shopping and their route is always the same, past the landmarks and signatures of old Hispanic Tucson. Each building, each house, is peopled by memories of those who lived there. Each signature is also sharply connected to an ironic voice of the present:

On Ochoa Street we turn west again and walk toward the gleaming white towers of the Cathedral. San Agustín. The Dove of the Desert. The pigeons flutter over our heads when the noon bells chime. Sr. Fnnquez, the old bell chimer, died long ago. He climbed the rickety stairs to the bell towers three times a day for more years than anyone could remember. One day he climbed up and played the Noon Angelus and never climbed down again. They found him with the hell rope still in his hands. Now the angelus is a recorded announcement. 31

The Freeway cutting through the center of the Spanish-speaking barrio is a symbol of the destruction wrought by modern civilization, particularly by those planners who looked upon the barrios as slums and, therefore, appropriate places to build freeways or urban renewal projects. Preciado Martin says: "The Freeway has cut the river from the people. The Freeway blocks the sunshine. The drone of the traffic buzzes like a giant unsleeping bee. A new music in the barrio."³² The aunt's journey always leads to the same place: the house of her parents, the house where she was born.

The pace of tea quickens now. If allow her, carrying the straw hag laden with groceries. We walk past the Concert Hall to the vast parking lot of the Community Center Complex. A billboard reads: CONCERT TONIGHT. ALICE COOPER. SOLD OUT. We stop in the

middle of the parking lot. The winter sun is wane. The heat rises from the black asphalt. The roar of the Freeway is even more distinct. It is the end of the journey. I know what tea will say.

"Aquí estaba mi casita. It was my father's house. And his father's house before that. They built it with their own hands with adobes made from the mud of the river. All their children were born here. I was born here. It was a good house, a strong house. When it rained, the adobes smelled like the good clean earth.... See here! I had a fig tree growing. In the summer I ~aveffgs to the neighbors and birds.... I had a bougainvillea: it was so beautiful! Brilliant red. And I had roses and a little garden. Right here where I am standing my comadres and I would sit and visit in the evenings."33

As they turn to go, the niece/narrator (who has become the recipient of the cultural heritage) for the first time sees something new.

"Tía. The." I call. 'even.' She tunes and comes toward me.

"Look!»I say excitedly. "There is a flower that has pushed its way through the asphalt! It is blooming."/

"Ah, mihijita, nshe says at last. Her eyes are shining. 'You have found out the secret of our journeys.'"

"what secret, TíaP"

"Que las flores siempre ganan. The flowers always win."

And the story ends with a refrain: "ABUELITA, ABUELITA / ABUELITA. NO LLORES. / TE

TRAIGO. TE TRAIGO. TE TRAIGO. / UNA RAMITA DE FLORES. 34

The first ambivalent response of Chicana writers to the urban environment with its social, economic, and cultural problems is thus contrasted to the sense of hope and regeneration exemplified by the flower breaking through the asphalt as seen in this second, more positive, response of contemporary Chicana writers. They return to a sense of integration with the land, with nature, with the cosmos seen in their landscape. The desire for integration is strongly present in contemporary southwestern Chicana poetry and is in some ways a direct link to the earlier traditions exemplified by Otero Warren, Jaramillo, and Cabeza de Baca. Rather than rejecting the city and relying on memories of a rural past for images of integration, however, the contemporary writers feel connected with the humble, ephemeral aspects of the natural world still surviving in the cities. The geranium on the windowsill carries as much landscape meaning for Cervantes as the Llano carries for Cabeza de Baca.

Furthermore, where the older writers turn to Spanish traditions to help maintain a connection with the changing landscape, many of the new authors look to Mexican and pre-Columbian culture. Estela Portillo Trambley, a poet and playwright, was among the first writers after the Chicano Renaissance to formulate a cosmic system integrating Aztec and Mayan mythology, a sense of the land, and female forces. In *Rain of Scorpions and Other Writings*, Portillo Trambley's characters search for a paradise lost but instead find destruction. In her mythic structures, struggle "paradoxically" achieves wholeness. Following the Nahuatl myth cycle of destruction/regeneration, Portillo Trambley creates a successful social order based on a vital balance, not on static harmony.³⁵ She differs from male Chicano writers in that she also uses these myths in an attempt to

integrate the power of women into an equal social structure in an even more vital **(115)** balance. Portillo Trambley provides a link between the early and contemporary writers, because she incorporates both Christian and Nahuatl myths into her work. She is also among the first to portray strong women in a vital and equal balance with men, and to do so through the metaphor of landscape.

Although Portillo Trambley's work on Aztec myth and women is exceptional, other contemporary writers, such as Pat Mora, use Aztec and Mayan mythology in even more complex ways to point to new directions. Poets like Mora, Rebecca González of Texas, and Denise Chávez of New Mexico use the link with nature and the desert landscape to define self. Distinctive signatures in the landscape of these Chicana writers are their perceptions of the desert and its plants (particularly the cactus), domesticated flowers and gardens (wherever they may appear), and, as mediator between nature and human beings, the figure of the curandera.

In "South Texas Summer Rain" by Rebecca González, the desert landscape contains three strongly integrated images: the rock as a symbol of strength and endurance, the cactus as an image of woman, and the rain as the instrument of change. The enigmatic cactus is a wicked woman who blossoms long enough to enjoy the pain of her metaphoric "sin":

Dust cools easily with the lightest summer rain. Not rocks. In the midst of dry brush, they hold the sun like matchheads, a threat against the water that would wear them out.

Dust becomes clay, cups rain like an innocent offering. Not rocks. They round their backs to the rain, channel it down the street where children play, feeling the rocks they walk on, sharp as ever under the water, streaming away.

If rocks hold water at all' it's only long enough for a cactus to grow gaudy flowers hoard a cheap drink f ash it like a sin worth the pain.³⁶ (poetry)

This connection between female sexuality and the desert landscape was perhaps latent in Cleofas Jaramillo's discovery of solace in the fertility of her garden when she herself seemed infertile. The contemporary writers, however, seem more interested in the sensuality and sexuality of the female forces in the desert than in its fertility. Pat Mora illustrates how the desert unveils her sensuality: **(116)**

.....

The relationship between sexuality and the land is explicitly detailed in another poem by González, titled "Obsession," in which the woman/land becomes the taker/possessor, distracting man away from the sky and toward an intuitive integration with the earth. Here sexuality is closely tied to fertility by use of the polyvalent "YIELD." The landscape is a field cultivated in order to nourish:

Tou would work me and I would yield season after season of nights when you would think nothing of the starlight you would lose at daybreak, only of the darkfields waiting for you.

Tou would work me until you would lose yourself in me, feeding hunger, face down in the ground' your back to the untouched sky.³⁸ (poetry)

In an essay on her play, "Mario and the Room Maria," Denise Chávez comments on the power of one's natural universe. She says: "the characters have a land inside and outside that is still uncharted, unpredictable and disquieting.... Each character becomes as an object in nature, as outwardly different as a rock or a tree."³⁹ It is the objectification of personality, the abstraction of vitality that gives Chávez's poetry the distance that the reader feels. One of the more striking features of her poetry is that nature seen, the objects personified, are often female. Her landscape is vibrant with eroticism engendered through images of the land as sensual woman. A description of a cloud skyscape illustrates this:**(118)**

.....

Cloud: crablike drags her swollen moonless thighs across the sky

Jangled of air, not flesh writhe elongated stars in space

The colloidal blue~rease is beaded, broken

The clouds open crablike the moon rises.⁴⁰

In "Progression from Water to the Absence," the landscape is again seen as female.

VIII Purple red secret labial skies

IX Stone breasts of horizon dear and moving

X Tufted with a brown down razored hair of earth clad and fibrous (poetry)

New Mexico, the Southwest, the desert and its rivers have seeped into Chávez's images: the landscape is clearly personified as a woman's body. The sexuality of the landscape seen as female, the female body, female response stand as a central metaphor for union, integration of woman, land, and man. The landscape becomes for Chávez an all-surrounding female force. The desert, its heat, and the scarce water that flows through it are anthropomorphized into a living person with arteries and pores. But most of all, the landscape has the accrued memories and sensibilities that signal a sense of place and of belonging: **(118)**

Artery of land the water fecks quench certain desert thirsts

Your pore-red valleys wander sun-paths along the vision line of that New Mexico heat

Small children remembering afternoons pricking them

Feigning sleep

In airless rooms

They recall tiny beads of sweat: Home.⁴² (poetry)

In the poetry of Pat Mora, the mythology of integration reaches its most complete expression. A woman is usually present and the landscape is always portrayed as female, often as a wise woman with knowledge to impart to the narrator/lyric speaker. The figure in the landscape is sometimes old, full of intuitive knowledge she has received from nature. In "Puesta del Sol" we see and feel the intense pleasure the old woman has in viewing the beauty of a sunset. The larger view of nature is then encapsulated in the more specific cultivation of her "garden" of plants growing in tin cans (paralleling Cervantes' image of the freeway versus the geraniums):

The gray-haired woman wiped her hands on her apron, lightly touched the worn wood counters of her kitchen as cars sped on the dirt road outside her window, cars of young men hot for Saturday night, beer and laughter.

"Curandera" by Mora is a poem clearly showing the kinship between the landscape, the mediator who gathers wild plants and herbs for healing use, and the powers of magic. Once again the Chicana writer picks up the myths and folkloric figures of the

early Hispanic writers, but they are transformed to include much more complex roles. A

gatherer and an impartor of nature's secrets, the curandera represents both intuition and rational knowledge. She can harness nature's secrets and is in harmony with both order and disorder. She is the alchemist who transforms simple, ordinary things into the knowledge of life and death—the mysteries. In her especially rests the knowledge of female tradition. If witches are a force for total chaos and are closely associated with other wild forces or manifestations of chaos such as dark nights, wild animals, wild bush country (such as the desert), mountains, and stormy weather, then the curandera is both a witch and not a witch. She has the power to control those forces but she has chosen to heal rather than choosing the negative way of a *bruja* (witch). Thus she is both at the center and on the edge.

In Mora's poem, the curandera is associated with both the owl and the coyote. She eats chopped cactus and brushes the sand from her bed, both reminiscent of Cabeza de Baca's cactus and sandstorm. Like Cabeza de Baca's "Herb Woman," this curandera has **(119)** intuitive as well as learned knowledge; she is free to come and go and is feared as well as respected by the townspeople. Desert inhabitants learn to value water and to fear sandstorms. Mora's curandera has learned how to live with both the desert's harshness and its bounty:

They think she lives alone on the edge of town in a two-room house where she moved when her husband died at thirty-five of a gunshot wound in the bed of another woman. The curander~ and house have aged together to the rhythm of the desert.

She wakes early, lights candles before her sacred statues, brews tea of yerbabuena. She moves down her porch steps, rubs cool morning sand into her hands, into her awns. Like a large black bird, she feeds on the desert, gathering herbs for her basket.

Her days are slow, days of grinding dried snake into powder, of crushing wild bees to mix with white wine. And the townspeople come, hoping to be touched by her ointments, her hands, her prayers, her eyes. She listens to their stories, and she listens to the desert, always, to the desert.

By sunset she is tired. The wind strokes the strands of long, gray, hair, the smell of drying plants drifts into her blood, the sun seeps into her bones. She dozes on her back porch. Rocking, rocking.

At night she cooks chopped cactus and brews more tea. She brushes a layer of sand from her bed, sand which covers the table, stove, floor. She blows the statues clean, the candles out. Before sleeping, she listens to the message of the

The wo
leisurely
watered
her sma
of day, l
The abu
ageranit
Saturda

owl and the coyote. She doses her eyes and breathes with the mice and snakes and wind.⁴⁴

This healer listens: to the desert, to people, to animals. The wilderness is not threatening in this mythical world. **(120)**

The curandera is not a figure of the past for contemporary Chicanos because today curanderas still thrive. Yet she is in some senses the repository of past learning, of history. She is also an integral part of the utopic pastoral tradition so strongly evident in early Hispanic literature. Mora plays upon nostalgia for the archetypal, integrated world and on the nourishment and enrichment that magic, utopia, and fantasy offer. This unity of magic and myth is illustrated in "Leyenda" with its use of oral history and legend and images of fertility linked to landscape. The Toltecs who inhabited Tula in Mexico were known among the Nahuatl speaking peoples as the great artisans, the great creators:

This knowledge of stories and myth is deposited into the hands of the inheritors of culture, those who remain in contact with nature and tradition. For Mora, as for Chávez, the natural landscape becomes personified, and she transforms the desert into the mother/teacher and the narrator into the mediator:

I say feed me.

She serves red prickly pear on a spiked cactus

I say sing to me. She chants lonely women's songs offemaleness.

She: the desert

She: strong mother.⁴⁶

The magic passes from the hands of the curandera into those of the narrator/poet. The narrator then passes the knowledge on to the reader, through the act of writing. The power to write comes from the landscape, nature integrated, magic and myth together. This is even more directly stated in "Offering":

Silent morning coolness, silence ended by the scratching of rough fingertips dinging in the desert, turquoise threads buried by the Indian woman, buried to bribe the Earth.

Come, Mother. Guide my hands to weave singing birds, flowers rocking in the wind, to trap them on my cloth with a web of thin threads.

Secretly I scratch a hole in the desert by my home. I bury a ballpoint pen and lined yellow paper. Like the Indian I ask the Earth to smile on me, to croon softly, to help me catch her music with words.⁴⁷

The landscape myth for Pat Mora, as for Portillo Trambley, is intimately related to Aztec, Nahuatl, and Mayan mythology, and she uses rituals, folk customs, and nature to interpret modern life. Contemporary women are reflected in age-old customs. Mora uses these myths and rituals to emphasize connections between past and present, but also, unlike Portillo Trambley, to criticize the hold these old traditions have on contemporary women's lives. The life of a young Aztec woman was closely circumscribed, illustrated by the speeches of the elders to female babies when they were born:

Tou must be in the house like the heart in the body. You must not leave the house.... Tou must be like the ashes and the hearth.... Nowyou have come into the world where your parents live amidst cares of toil, wherelighting heat, cold and winds prevail, where there is neither realjoy nor satisfactionfor it is aplace of work, cares and wants.... You must not sigh, nor weep to have come. Tour arrival has been longedfor. Of et there will be work and toilfor you, because this is the wish of our master and his decision that we shall obtain all that is neededfor life only through sweat, only through work.⁴⁸

In "Aztec Princess," Mora explores the socialization process in Aztec society (which continues in contemporary Chicano society) that limited a girl's life—exemplified by the ritual of burying the girl's umbilical cord inside the house. For Mora such traditions need readjustment so that they free, rather than cage, her heroines: **(122)**

Her mother would say, "Look in the home for happiness. Why do you stare out often with such lon~in,?" One day

almost in desperation, her mother said, "Here. See here. We buried your umbilical cord here, in the house, a sign that you, our girl-child, would nest inside."