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Loss, Rumination, and Narrative: Chicana/o Melancholy as Generative State

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy in Chicana and Chicano Studies

by

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by

Michelle Patricia Baca

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Abstract

Loss, Rumination, and Narrative: Chicana/o Melancholy as Generative State

by

Michelle Patricia Baca

This study examines representations of melancholy in Chicana/o literature. Using theory rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* I contend that, counter to Freud, melancholy is a productive strategy of self-making for Chicana/o subjects. By reading melancholy through a Chicana/o Studies lens I illustrate that there are multiple manifestations of self and subjectivity. Using parallels between several salient images from Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* I trace instances of melancholy in a selection of Chicana/o texts. I begin my study with a brief cultural history of melancholy before discussing the parallels between the energy of melancholy and Anzaldúa's theories. My work is grounded in Chicana/o Studies and I use textual, and historical analysis to illustrate how melancholy is productive rather than pathological.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Melancholia as Affirmation

This dissertation analyzes affective representations of melancholy in selected literary works by Emma Pérez, Arturo Islas, Tomás Rivera, Sandra Cisneros, Rudolfo “Corky” Gonzales, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, as well as in the theoretical works of Gloria Anzaldúa. Utilizing a Chicana/o Studies approach and drawing partially from psychoanalysis, my work conceptualizes melancholy as strategy of self-making for both textual and material Chicanas.

Chicana/o literature is riddled with loss. Most novels begin at, and circle around a lacunae which defines all who occupy the narrative space. The grand tropes of Chicana/o history are centered on loss: loss of land, loss of language, loss of culture, loss of history. Chicana/o history had been erased and Chicana/os have been perpetually inscribed as newcomers, and as interlopers in the United States. Chicana/o Studies has worked to fill in many of the intellectual and ideological gaps left by conquest, broken treaties, oppression and poor scholarship; this action denotes a perpetual backwards glance, a constant rumination on the losses that have shaped our presence, and cultural production in the U.S.

There is no more apt and malleable moniker for loss and its repercussions than melancholia. Lest we imagine Hamlet as the preeminent melancholic, it should be said that Chicana/os are a melancholy people. The back and forth indecision that plagued Hamlet is paralleled with broad strokes by the empowered in between nature of mestiza/o consciousness and border living. By and large within Chicana/o literature melancholia

has functioned as a great creative and generative device. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* signals a desire, not to fill that great breach in our collective past, but to be flung wholly into it and to explore the creative possibility of reflective liminality. By comparison, Freud characterizes melancholia as a refusal to let go of one's loss and it is precisely this refusal that invigorates so much of Chicana/o literature. We are reminded daily of the "*herida abierta*" of the border between the US and Mexico, and our insistence on the return to this wound is part of what makes us melancholy. This constant rumination, the constant picking at the scab of conquest does not result in an infectious fester, rather as we re-visit we re-create and re-imagine such that keeping our losses with us becomes a productive enterprise.

I contend that Chicana/o literature narrates a process of subject making that employs melancholy as a productive strategy for survival and historical continuity. Further, within Chicana/o literature melancholy acts an affective figuration of mestiza/oppositional consciousness. In other words, it is a state that has long been known among Chicana/os and one that has been theorized under different names. Freud associates melancholy with the refusal to relinquish a lost object. Mourning on the other hand is characterized as a forward moving process; grief is a finite period that results in psychic cohesion. Mourning, in the national sense, would signal a desire to forget and move forward. This moving forward happens at the expense of a thorough accounting of what has been lost. Mourning argues that we can and should forget an injury after a certain amount of time. Melancholy counters that some losses simply cannot be healed; or if they can, then they can only be healed by constantly remembering them to avoid repeating them. We cannot ignore how eager the United States is to put discussions of

racism behind itself as the US is narrated as progressive and forward thinking. Current phrasings of the US as post-racial rely on this logic while ignoring the racist foundations of this nation and the troubling racial climate that is constantly threatening to erupt. Further, Freud's discussion of melancholy does not examine the lost object beyond its condition of unknowable loss. As scholars of melancholy and race will explain the melancholia of racialized peoples necessarily includes a consideration of the multidimensionality of the lost object. In racialized melancholia we end up subjectifying these objects as a means of recognizing our losses.

Each of the writers that I have chosen uses representations of loss in their work to discuss loss in a larger, sometimes national context. The losses narrativized by these Chicana writers illustrate how sociopolitical and historical forces have contributed to Chicana subjectivity and strategies for survival. By framing these losses in terms of melancholy and history I can also examine how Chicana/o melancholy can emerge as a meta-discourse within these narratives.

Before launching into my discussion on how these writers utilize and reimagine melancholy, I will provide the reader with an overview of the main theoretical points that contribute to how I am linking melancholy with Chicana/o literature and theory. This introductory chapter is divided into three sections: first, I will provide a brief background of how melancholy has been discussed traditionally in psychoanalysis and more recently in relation to race and gender. This section will also offer a short discussion on how Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" already provides a working model for melancholia as a productive strategy for subject formation. The second part presents a historical background for how melancholy has been present in Chicana/o literature and

history as evidenced by figures such as la llorona and by events such as conquest and annexation. In the third section I introduce the seven writers and the general structure of the following chapters. I would like to begin my discussion with an epigraph from Sandra Cisneros' introduction to the 25th Anniversary of *House on Mango Street*.

Melancholy Background: Psychoanalysis, Race and the Humors

On the weekends, if I can sidestep guilt and avoid my father's demands to come home for Sunday dinner, I'm free to stay home and write. I feel like a bad daughter ignoring my father, but I feel worse when I don't write. Either way, I never feel completely happy.

– Sandra Cisneros

In this epigraph Cisneros describes the rift between familial expectation and her own desire to write. The expectation and desire that frame this feeling are always paradoxically present together. The paradox of melancholy lies in the necessity of this absent presence. Cisneros must sometimes be a good daughter and she must sometimes write, but she always feels melancholy about both. I read this inability to “feel completely happy” as an affirmation to inhabit what becomes the liminal quality of melancholy; a liminality that is of course inherent to Anzaldúa's “mestiza consciousness.” I don't read the lack of complete happiness as a negative, and it is here that my understanding of melancholy diverges from Freud's early discussion of melancholy.

In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud establishes mourning as a process wherein the object that has been lost is grieved for and through this grieving the subject ceases to be attached to the lost object. Note that Freud begins thinking from melancholia, which is the pathological figuration of melancholy. Mourning begins and ends, and the subject and object always remain in a concrete duality. Despite the pain of mourning its outcome is beneficial. Freud writes, “The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is

completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (245). The discourse of mourning is a discourse of healing with an emphasis on letting go and moving forward.

Melancholia, however, possesses neither the neat lines, nor progressive motion of mourning. In melancholia an object is lost, but that loss is recessed into the unconscious of the subject. According to Freud, the loss in melancholia is unknowable to the subject. He adds,

...the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in that sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious. (245)

Melancholy is the refusal of loss, the melancholic subject doesn't consciously acknowledge that what has been lost is indeed gone and so they can never let it go. Freud contends that the unknown/unknowable lost object is merged with the ego so that it become a part of the self and the melancholic subject never has to be without it. This incorporation can be viewed as a defiance of death which Freud views as problematic. In melancholia the subject merges his/her ego with the lost object; since the lost object is unknowable and therefore un-grievable the subject begins to repudiate his or herself. Instead of seeking separation from the lost object, the subject seeks separation from their own ego. According to Freud this functions as a sort of self-cannibalization and puts the melancholic in a state of perpetual pain. Mourning is more psychologically healthy because it helps us to forget and to move past pain whereas melancholy keeps the subject in a state of perpetual pain. In his essay Freud describes the melancholic as possessing a vicious self-awareness and a tendency to catalog and discuss their faults constantly and openly. This is characterized, according to Freud, by immense and undeserved self-

reproach. For Freud, self-loathing (even when the subject is loathsome) is a sign of a pathological mental state. While the subject directs criticism on herself, it can be seen that these criticisms are usually applicable to a person that the subject cannot criticize. These attacks against the ego are really attacks against an/the Other. In the case of melancholy the Other has usurped the ego so the self-recrimination is really evidence of a loss of self. The melancholic has lost something which they do not know and so cannot ever grieve and then relinquish attachment to that loss. They exist in a perpetual state of dejection, feeling that they themselves are missing something that they can never recover. While Freud is very clear about the “work” of mourning, he is less clear about the “work” of melancholia. From Freud we see the stratification of these processes in terms of use. Since mourning signals healing, it is automatically rendered useful, whereas the fester of melancholia is depicted as a slow psychological poison. Melancholy as melancholia abruptly becomes entirely pathological. Freud later revises his opinion on the productivity of melancholia, and he attempts to refocus the energy of melancholy as a way of keeping the past alive in the present. Though Freud initially relies on mourning/melancholy as a binary, his later considerations blur this separation, so that mourning and melancholia function as different, but related methods of ego formation. In the introduction to their collection entitled *Loss* David Eng and Kazanjian observe, “While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects”(4). Perpetual consideration of the lost object allows for a constant remaking of the self. Rather than viewing melancholy as a fester, we can

come to see it as a regenerative, re-creative process. While the psychoanalytic discussion of melancholy begins as pathology it by no means remains that way.

Other scholars such as Anne Anlin Cheng in *The Melancholy of Race*, Rafael Pérez-Torres in *Mestizaje* and José Esteban Muñoz in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* reimagine the psychic potential of melancholia as it relates to race, racial formation and racial relations. Their re-imagining further loosens up the melancholy/melancholia binary so within their work, the terms are often used interchangeably or with more concern for grammar over distinct meaning.

Race and Melancholy

In *The Melancholy of Race* Anne Anlin Cheng employs melancholia as a method for understanding racial relations and formation within the United States. She explains:

The model of melancholia can help us comprehend grief and loss on the part of the aggrieved, not just as a symptom, but also as a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination...racial melancholia serves not as a description of the feeling of a group of people but as a theoretical model of identity that provides a critical framework for analyzing the constitutive role that grief plays in racial/ethnic subject-formation. (xi)

Cheng employs grief as a characteristic of melancholia though Freud's discussion of melancholia links grief to the process of the mourning, thus positioning grief as a productive emotion. Cheng's terminology does not put her at odds with Freud's but instead signals how she will re-conceptualize his model.

Cheng reads melancholia as a necessary step in subject formation. The coherent subject is always formed by an act of repudiating what it deems as other so that it may maintain the duality between self and other. The melancholic loss of this other is this exact excess which it can never avow. That continually repudiated excessive Other is

essential to the maintenance of the fiction of the coherent subject. The irony behind this is that the coherent subject is always incomplete, always living in tension with the incoherent other. The notion of coherent subjectivity rests on melancholic disavowal. The subject can never really be without the repudiated other, but it repudiates it nonetheless. The unknown/unknowable loss of melancholia is the other in relation to the subject. All subjects are inherently melancholy, some are just more conscious of it than others.

Cheng reads U.S. racial formations as a chimera of necessity and disavowal:

On the one side, white American identity and its authority is secured through the melancholic introjection of racial others that it can neither fully relinquish nor accommodate and whose ghostly presence nonetheless guarantees its centrality. On the other side, the racial other (the so-called melancholic object) also suffers from racial melancholia whereby his or her racial identity is imaginatively reinforced through the introjection of a lost, never-possible perfection, an inarticulable loss that comes to inform the individual's sense of his or her own subjectivity. Already we see that these two "sides" are in fact implicated by one another. (xi)

The idea of the chimera is figured as an inextricable link of seemingly incommensurable parts that by their very incommensurability are rendered grotesque. The chimera of racial melancholia is also grotesque, yet, as Cheng argues, is important to see. The racialized subject is caught in the melancholic formation and perpetuation of whiteness and white supremacy, but we cannot simply leave the racialized other as an excess of this formation. Freud's formulation of melancholia only has room for the subject and object, but Cheng asks, what about the subjectivity of the melancholic object? My project seeks to address this question by looking at representations of melancholy in Chicana/o literature. By using Cheng's model of melancholic subject formation, I can explore how Chicana/o literature offers an imagined depiction of the subject. How do Chicana/o

writers imagine Chicana/o subjects as the melancholic excess of mainstream white identity, but also how do we figure our own internal melancholy?

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* José Esteban Muñoz contends that the idea of disidentification parallels the affective energy of melancholy. He invokes Raymond Williams' structures of feeling as a means of paralleling disidentification and melancholy. Muñoz defines disidentification as "...[A] mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (11). The formation of the melancholic Freudian subject operates within a binary of repudiation and assimilation. Muñoz's use of disidentification describes a mode of subject formation that expands beyond this binary. While his use of disidentificatory practices calls upon an expansive intellectual genealogy, Muñoz also credits the contributors of *This Bridge Called My Back* with issuing a collection of Chicana feminist essays that specifically questioned mainstream modes of subjectivity and subject formation. Muñoz de-pathologizes melancholia, as he de-pathologizes disidentification so that both conditions operate as revitalizing and productive. He calls for

...[an] identity-affirming 'melancholia,' a melancholia that individual subjects and different communities in crisis can use to map the ambivalences of identification and the conditions of (im)possibility that shape the minority identities under consideration here. Finally, this melancholia is a productive space of hybridization that uniquely exists between a necessary militancy and indispensable mourning. (74)

Both Cheng and Muñoz emphasize melancholy as an energy that is utilized both in examining subjectivity and in subject formation.

In “Narrative and Loss” from *Mestizaje: Critical Uses of Race in Chicano Culture* Rafael Pérez-Torres cites Muñoz as a proponent for a melancholy “as a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names” (74). Pérez-Torres discusses the trope of loss prevalent in Chicana/o cultural production as evidence of a productive melancholia that also provides a model for mestiza/o consciousness. His argument in favor of a productive melancholia is that keeping our losses with us helps construct a new Chicana/o subjectivity in the face of a society that seeks to oppress us and rob us of our history. For Pérez-Torres, the mestiza/o body in particular and Chicana/o culture in general are imbued with an inherent sense of loss. As Chicana/os we have lost our homeland, our language and ourselves within the U.S. national body and imaginary.

Pérez-Torres emphasizes the motion of loss and recovery of loss in his discussion of Chicano melancholy. Part of the problem of Freudian melancholia is that the sufferer does not know what has been lost. The loss is un-nameable and can be anything from the loss of the maternal center to the loss of ourselves in language as described by Julia Kristeva in her work on melancholy and depression in *Black Sun*. Pérez-Torres accepts the model of Freudian melancholia and unfixes the idea of “loss.” That is, Pérez-Torres examines melancholy in a mestiza/o context by examining what specific losses are inherent to Chicana/o identity and cultural production. Kristeva makes a case for melancholic resolution through artistic production and Pérez-Torres seems to follow this line of thought. He adds, “...Chicana/o narratives emerge from an attempt to overcome the melancholic condition, to name the loss that engenders melancholia, and therefore to address the sense of displacement and absence that informs these texts” (210). I agree

with Pérez-Torres that the Chicana/o novel provides a narrative space which mediates, and meditates upon, painful losses; however, I don't agree with an entirely psychoanalytic approach to Chicana/o melancholy. Such an emphasis on loss and resolution reifies Freudian and other mainstream formulations of subjectivity and mental health. Loss is an important trope in Chicana/o letters, but I don't think resolution of that loss is as much a concern, or even always a possibility.

Pérez-Torres provides an invaluable jumping off point for the relationship between Chicana/o identity and melancholy, but I think there is more to be considered. Loss is not the same for everyone. Indeed loss for certain subjects may not be considered negative at all. The loss that Freud and Pérez-Torres discuss is completely without agency; their considerations of loss imply that outside forces are always at working taking something from the subject. They ignore the possibility that losing some things that are no longer working, or that are damaging can be a willful productive process. Of course this is because within Freudian melancholia the lost object must be unknown, or unknowable. Cheng offers a nuanced vision of this loss by inquiring into the consciousness and subjectivity of the lost object. While Pérez-Torres offers a reading of loss in some Chicana novels, he does not address how different subjects lose differently. There are the big losses of Chicana/o culture: loss of land, loss of nation, loss of language, loss of heritage, etc. However, Chicana subjectivity often expresses agency within loss, willful losses such as loss of innocence, loss of virginity, loss of family, loss of domesticity, loss of nationalism and even loss of children in the form of infanticide per the *la llorona* story.

For the Chicana and the queer Chicana/o there is much that can and should be lost from mainstream, nationalist ideas or manifestations of Chicana/o identity. These willful losses and the inevitable carrying around of these losses form a unique Chicana/o figuration of melancholy. His argument in terms of loss is that Chicana/os live with a persistent and perpetual sense of loss and that we have developed creative strategies around these deficiencies. We lost both Mexico and the U.S. as a homeland so we construct Aztlán as a way of covering that loss. In this model Aztlán becomes the fictive coherent identity barely concealing previous losses and forcing us to elide the nuances of indigenous presence. Pérez-Torres's book discusses mestizaje as a critical race strategy. So the inherently melancholic mestiza/o body becomes a vehicle for understanding other aspects of identity and discourse. Melancholia for him is an important aspect of this critical mestizaje, but he does not proffer a critical melancholia. For him melancholia still connotes anxiety and lack of agency.

Any thorough discussion of melancholy must necessarily include a discussion of psychoanalysis. Cheng explains that psychoanalysis is useful in questions of race because it makes the connection between the psychic and socio-political. I think that Pérez-Torres favors Freud and Kristeva's figurations of the psyche too much, and consequently reifies Western psychoanalytical theory. While my discussion heretofore has focused primarily on race and nation, questions of gender are equally important to this discussion. In *The Gendering of Melancholy*, Juliana Schiesari traces the gendered distinction between masculine and feminine melancholy. Schiesari argues that qualities ascribed to male melancholy include genius and creativity – even though, thanks to Freud they may also imply neurosis. Female melancholy, on the other hand, takes on the aspect of hand

wringing and fretting. Modern discourses of melancholy outside of the psychoanalytical realm lament the loss of some political ideology. In a time of posts- the loss that is often at the center of that melancholy is ideological. Schiesari's goal is to recover a usable sense of melancholy without reifying the sexist nature of earlier melancholy discourse. Schiesari's work examines how melancholy is represented in Renaissance artistic production and so draws on both the psychoanalytic discourse of melancholy, and its early discourse within medieval theories of the humors

Black Bile: Discussions of Melancholy before Freud

Before there was Freud there was Aristotle, and before there were neuroses, there were disturbances in black bile. Melancholy emerges from the Greek "melan" meaning black and "cholie" meaning bile. At its earliest and most basic meaning it is a condition of blood that results from physical imbalance. Based on the theory of the four humors melancholy stands as an intrinsic aspect of human nature. Melancholia is the condition of melancholy as a disease, as the imbalance of the humors which presents itself with symptoms as divergent as listless sadness and creative mania. Melancholia is pathological melancholy, like a mood that lasts too long and disrupts daily life. Aristotle and others after him, consider melancholy as a necessary state for creative genius. Early considerations of melancholy and melancholia associated it with affective mood and gastric distress. Black bile, believed to have been secreted by the kidneys was the sediment of the blood. In *The Nature of Melancholy* Jennifer Radden notes,

Normal black bile is defined as the sediment, or heavier constituents, of blood. It is necessary for health. All abnormalities of the black bile, such as those that account for the disease of melancholia, result from combustion and a process of sedimentation allowing overheated vapors to interfere with bodily and brain functioning. (76)

Melancholia's early emphasis on the inability to digest and properly remove certain substances from the body presage how Freud will, centuries later figure melancholia as a psychic condition that demonstrates a failure to properly evacuate grief and loss. The split in discussion about melancholy centers on the separation between the behavioral and the subjective. The melancholy ascribed to poets and artists was seen as subjective, and both a passing mood and an essential part of the artistic nature. It is this usage that spawned the idea of melancholy as an adjective, and later a metaphor. Radden explains,

This poetic melancholy contrasts with the notions of melancholy as both a disease and as a temperament. The poetic notion of melancholy as a temporary mood of sadness and distress came partially to eclipse these earlier meanings.... [T]he word *melancholy* lost the meaning of a quality and acquired instead the meaning of a "mood" that could be transferred to inanimate objects. Now we find references not only to melancholy attitudes but also melancholy scenes, moods and states of affairs (30).

Hippocrates' fifth century B.C.E. theory of the four humors did not, according to Radden, include a systematic discussion of melancholy. Hippocrates did, however, discuss melancholy as a disorder of unbalanced black bile. Excess of black bile could also include "epilepsy, apoplexy, despondency or fear, and overconfidence" (56) cites Radden. Radden points out the blackness of black bile is a metaphorical description; bile is not actually black.

Blackness at the time corresponded with metaphors of madness and sadness. One has only to turn to Toni Morrison's *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* to understand how and what blackness has come to mean in the US/Western imagination. Part of recovering melancholia as a productive psychic state means re-signifying the metaphor of blackness. Melancholy as a condition of black bile has been viewed negatively because of Western constructions of blackness as negative. Morrison looks at black bodies in

literature but also at representations of blackness in terms of shadow and general darkness. If blackness didn't stand in our imaginations as an automatic signifier of something negative, then the ambivalent potential of melancholy would not have been lost.

Looking backwards into the etiology of melancholy lays the foundation for tying it to an experience of the body, rather just a frenzy of the mind. The earliest accounts of melancholy discuss its lack of reason. Melancholy was a sadness that occurred without explanation, this will of course be figured later by Freud as unknowable loss.

While melancholy could happen without a discernible cause, it was a mood that was associated with creativity. For Aristotle, melancholy was a characteristic shared by geniuses. The unexpected fits of melancholy could produce great works of thought and art. Black bile can be either hot or cold, and these temperatures produce differing temperaments. Cold bile, according to Aristotle, makes for sadness and lethargy, whereas overheating the bile produces a mania of creative energy. For Aristotle, melancholy is part of human nature for some people and only produces an effect when it is rendered either too hot, or too cold. He says, "...all melancholic persons are abnormal, not owing to disease but by nature" (60). In these early writings melancholy and melancholia both are intrinsic to individual personalities.

Melancholy presents itself more as diversity within humanity than disease. There are ways in which this characteristic can go wrong, and Galen of Pergamum in 165 C.E. examines melancholia as melancholy gone wrong. Melancholy becomes disruptive and problematic only when it is out of balance with other aspects of the body. Melancholy is also different depending on what part of the body it affects: blood, brain or bowels.

Galen suggests that treatment for melancholy varies from phlebotomy to a change in diet. Even when the melancholy is located within the brain, the cure has to do with the body. The body must be balanced in order for the brain and body to work together. Galen also identifies fear and despondency as symptoms of melancholy, both these states are often accompanied by the desire for and fear of death. These early discourses on melancholy suggest that imbalances in the body cause imbalances in the brain.

By the 15th century medical thinkers begin to associate melancholy with certain temperaments. Aristotle had already associated melancholy with artistic talent and Marsilio Ficino further develops the connection between melancholy and genius. For Ficino, melancholy has three causes that are celestial, natural and human. He explains:

All these things characteristically make the spirit melancholy and the soul sad and fearful—since, indeed, interior darkness much more than exterior overcomes the soul with sadness and terrifies it. But of all learned people, those especially are oppressed by black bile, who, being sedulously devoted to the study of philosophy, recall their mind from the body and corporeal things and apply it to incorporeal things. The cause is, first, that the more difficult the work, the greater concentration of mind it requires; and second, that the more they apply their mind to incorporeal truth, the more they are compelled to disjoin it from the body. (90)

So, the intellectual throws his or her bile out of balance by thinking too much. A lack of attention to the body causes the mind to separate from the body. Melancholia does not cause brilliance. Extreme intelligence excites normal melancholy and so all creative and intelligent people are ostensibly imbalanced. All genius are melancholy, but not all melancholics are geniuses.

Humoral science and medicine which dominates early discussions of melancholy is outdated and largely regarded as pseudoscience, however these considerations offer productive metaphors for melancholy in terms of corporeal expression and cultural

production. Early writings on melancholy are located within a Western European context, so my research will make a bridge between these modes of consciousness and Chicana/o consciousness and identity.

Chicana/os experience Chicana/o melancholia in multiple ways: one melancholy as an affect, literally feeling sadness and longing. Chicana/o literature gives us plenty of sad Chicana/os. This melancholy subjectivity is quite prevalent and I argue functions as a specific trop within Chicana/o literature. The second way Chicana/os experience melancholy is when we function, as Cheng elucidates, as the melancholic other of the subject making process of some other group. In Chapter 2 I discuss the ways in which Gloria Anzaldúa's writings present Chicana melancholia as a form of a uniquely Chicana/o subject formation. It is my intention to explore how a Chicana/o sense of melancholy is constituted within Chicana/o literature. This is not simply a matter of changing the shade of the discussion. I am not taking the Freudian idea of melancholy or the Aristotelian idea of melancholy and plugging in a brown subject. These thinkers offer an interesting logic that I believe is worth consideration. My task is to examine how this logic functions within particular Chicana/o paradigms.

In "Melancholia as Resistance in Contemporary African American Literature," Eva Tettenborn offers a discussion of how melancholia functions within a specific African American paradigm. Black melancholia is distinct because it is rooted in a specific US Black American historical experience. White supremacy positions all people of color as the object/excess of white melancholic subjectivity. While this symbolic (and sometimes literal) annihilation is a shared experience we all experience it in a different way. So, while Tettenborn discusses Black melancholia within the context of US slavery

this melancholia is different than the Chicana/o melancholia that I will discuss in the context of the US-Mexico war and the creation of the Border, for example.

While affirming the specificity of different racial and ethnic experiences of melancholia, we can still say that the shared experience of white supremacy creates some commonalities between Black and Chicana/o melancholia. The driving argument of Tettenborn's article is that within the US American Black experience melancholia is productive and resistant, not pathological. In African American literature melancholia experienced by Black slaves disrupts their objectification by white slave owners. Melancholia signals that the slaves are subjects experiencing loss and sadness. Indeed their melancholia is multiple because as commodities which were bought and sold and ripped from their families Black slaves both experience loss and constitute a loss for some other Black subject. Experiencing melancholy insists on the subjectivity and personhood of Black slaves, and so disrupts the social construction created by white slave owners that slaves were something other than human. In fact this disruption of white objectification of Black slaves casts a critical eye on the humanity of the white slave owners. Who are these supposedly civilized and Christian men who can so brutally treat fellow human beings? Tettenborn's article is of particular use to my discussion because she isolates the usefulness of Freud's logic of melancholy. She says, "...we must not simply abandon Freud-based approaches to the process of mourning or the state of melancholia, but rather rethink their evaluations of these psychic developments and the privileging of one over the other" (116). This point is illustrated by her point that Black melancholia inverts the hierarchy of subject and object within melancholy. She does this by using the slave auction block to illustrate how the Black slave can occupy both

positions at the same time. Tettenborn reminds us that though Freud has been problematic for communities of color there is still some knowledge value that can be bent to our particular needs. She asks the question, “How can we use these insights into disability studies, trauma theory and traditional western evaluations of melancholia to analyze aesthetic use of melancholia in contemporary African American literature? (116)” This question opens up the wide applicability of melancholia and also reminds us of the fruit that is born out of fully interrogating the norms these western psychic figurations have wrought.

Melancholy in our national consciousness

In *Precarious Life* Judith Butler marks September 11th as a national moment of melancholy. It was a day of profound loss, and a day that we as a nation refuse to forget. Butler’s purpose in *Precarious Life* is to examine how and what the US chooses to remember, and what constitutes a national loss. Butler is not the only scholar concerned with framing melancholy as a national affect; this millennium is an era of posts. The election of President Barack Obama inspired many to articulate that we were living in a post-racial America. Advances in sex and gender equality inspire many to argue that we live in a post-Feminist era. As a nation the US articulates itself as both mournful and melancholic. Participating in these affects requires one to ask as Butler does, “what counts as a grievable loss?” Melancholy and mourning are psychic acts of subject formation. By selectively mourning some losses and not others, the US creates a sense of subjectivity that is based on the elision of Others who simply do not count. Melancholy as a subjectifying process gives an additional means to interrogate how subjects and objects are rendered within the US. In the Introduction to *Loss*, David L. Eng and David

Kazanjian discuss the productive nature of melancholia and how it "...raises the question of what makes a world of new objects, places, and ideals possible. At the same time, what are the psychic mechanisms—the modes of being and the affective registers—that make investment in that new world imaginable and thinkable." (4) Chicana/o literary productions are examples of imaginary strategies for being in the world. Reading Chicana/o melancholy within and against a larger US sense of melancholy offers a vehicle for understanding how Chicana/o subjectivity is formed within a US border sensibility and a Chicana/o border sensibility. As Chicana/os we have been forged via the creation of US national borders and policy, and as Chicana/os we have understood ourselves as cultural remainders/reminders and worked to create our own sense of subjectivity via our sense of ourselves as a borderlands people. Using melancholy to read Chicana/o subject formation within Chicana/o literature shows that we can use melancholy as a vehicle for other subjectivities. The new world that Eng and Kazanjian envision could be one where race privilege, gender privilege and sexuality privilege become lost objects. Understanding the productive means by which Chicana/os have dealt with and built around loss offers a strategy for mainstream whites to re-construct themselves around lost privilege.

Disturbances in the Blood and the Borderlands: Anzaldúa and melancholy

Melancholia as a subject is well-suited for interdisciplinary analysis. A thorough examination of melancholia requires some understanding of history, early medicine, art, psychology and discourse. Most current studies of melancholia begin with Freud's seminal "Mourning and Melancholia," and work in two directions to analyze both melancholia's roots in humoral medicine and its present figuration within psychology as

depression. Julia Scherisari posits in studying melancholia that it becomes a matter of analyzing the discourses that surround it. Since its roots lay in what is now generally considered pseudo-science we can't really trace an originary sense of melancholia. The "original" melancholy was more of a study in temperament that relied on the balancing of biles. No matter what one feels about Freud one has to start with his treatment of melancholia. His work on melancholia is complex, contradictory and based as much on science as on the interpretation of melancholic imagery.

There is no originary science from which to return, no original melancholia that has been perverted by discourse. Rather, it has always inhabited a number of discourses. We can, however return to an originary logic, a sense of melancholia that pervaded the mind and was rooted in the belly. We can trace the numerous ways that this logic has been interpreted and used by numerous thinkers. Whether or not Freud's melancholia is at the center of a discussion of melancholia depends on the discipline.

The intellectual legacy of Freud is always the significant point wherein a discussion of melancholy begins to look backward and forward; however, we must be able to depart from him enough to imagine different types of psyches. For instance, Schiesari observes, "The very nature of the melancholic was to be that of a self split against itself, fleeing the social into a perpetual dialogue with its own Imaginary, to use Lacan's term" (iv). This split while viewed by modern psychoanalysis as problematic is essential to mestiza consciousness as figured by Anzaldúa. In order to explore what Chicana/o melancholy is, and how it might be used, we must make use of productive models of Chicana/o subjectivity. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* offers a flexible model for Chicana/o subjectivity that allows us to explore the unique ways in

which melancholy acts upon Chicana/o subjects. While melancholia may mean one thing for a certain type of subjectivity, what does it mean for other subjects who construct themselves differently?

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* discusses the ambivalent/ambiguous nature of mestiza consciousness, and I contend that her essays "The Homeland, Aztlán/El otro Mexico," "La herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State," and "Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink" reflect the shifting nature of melancholia as it relates to Chicana/o subjectivity and poetics. Her essays reflect the productive, creative nature of melancholia as well as its mania and pain as this psychic state relates to borderland identities. Furthermore, her discussion of the border offers a unique platform from which to discuss the melancholia of national spaces.

Anzaldúa's theories of the border add a spatial dimension to the concept of melancholy. She reflects how the Chicana/o subject battles with its own internal alterity and ungrievable loss, so that the image of the Borderlands becomes a site of melancholic subject production. Her concept of Borderlands and border inhabitants function as a spatial, psychic and corporeal figuration of the movement and work of melancholy. She writes, "The U.S Mexican border *es una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (25). Border subjectivity is figured as an open wound, a place that never heals, because its constant bleeding constitutes and reconstitutes its subjects. Freud uses similar imagery in "Mourning and Melancholia" and writes, "The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound drawing to itself cathectic energies..." (253). Cheng describes racialized

subjects as the melancholic excess of white melancholy, which despite this perspective on formation requires consideration as subjects in their own right. Anzaldúa is concerned with this as well, and describes this formation as such: “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue on an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition”(25). Acknowledging the subjectivity of racialized subjects/border inhabitants calls into questions the dominant paradigm of subject formation, in our case whiteness and the U.S.-Mexican border. While Anzaldúa provides an abstract metaphor of the border as an ambivalent space, we can see concrete representations of this same ambivalence in early US maps and the discourse surrounding the Mexican-American War, including the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Melancholy in the Chicana/o Historical Imagination

Since the Mexican-American War, Mexicanidad in the US, as in the sense of being Mexican, and later Chicanidad, as in the sense of being Chicana/o, have been characterized by a sense of loss and longing. At its most concrete, this loss is figured as the loss of land that occurred with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This broken treaty brought with it other losses including language, religion, citizenship and a general sense of cultural belonging. Chicana/o literary production in the US has been narrating this loss for over one hundred years. We are an identity forged by loss, and desire for reclamation. We as Chicana/os are infused with a deep melancholy. The losses that Chicana/os have suffered in the United States were deemed necessary to build the nation during the 19th century, and are necessary today as hatred of immigrants from Mexico informs a new sense of “patriotism.” While Chicana/o literature perpetually recounts its losses, mainstream US discourse and history seeks to un-remember its past repressions. National

memory and senses of loss are wrapped up in a cycle that parallels Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."

Chicana/o employment of melancholy is a productive strategy of survival and subject making, that challenges mainstream narratives of nation and national subjects. Furthermore, the concept of melancholy is already built into concept of Chicana/o thought specifically as formulated by Gloria Anzaldúa. Examining Chicana/o melancholy illustrates the ways in which Chicana/o philosophies are always/already present in larger discourse. This dissertation is intended to show how Chicana/o literature is participating in and transforming this prevalent category of Western affect. Instead of an endless spiral of lost objects we end up with an endless spiral of lost subjects, their losses, and the losses of their losses. In Chicana/o representations of melancholy the subject and the object are loose and interchangeable positions. While one subject may lose an object, that initial subject may be someone else's lost object. Chicanidad as a category of identity calls into question notions of fixed positions and identities, and it is the same with melancholia. Chicana/o identity introduces an aspect of play into melancholia.

The famed Grito de Dolores was the battle cry that rallied Mexico in the War of Independence. This cry, however, is not the only significant cry of Mexican or Chicana/o cultural history. We must not forget that other side of a masculine cry is a melancholy (often associated with the feminine) wail. The type of wail embodied by La Llorona, our wailing woman. The story of La Llorona varies with every telling, but it traditionally functions as a cautionary tale warning women away from bad path and warning men away from bad women. At its heart the story of La Llorona is a story of unending loss; depending on the variation she has lost her children, her lover, her nation and/or her life.

She is doomed to wander the earth wailing her litany of loss forced to remember, and forcing whoever hears her (or hears of her) to be reminded of loss. The incessant recounting of loss is a major aspect of Freudian melancholy. The melancholic possesses a need to narrate without ceasing, so that their pain is never forgotten. The figure of La Llorona is characterized by an incessant wail and the constant retelling of the story gives it a sense of meta-melancholy. Most Chicana/o narratives can be characterized as internally melancholic and meta-melancholic. As La Llorona cries forever, so do the tellers of her tale. La Llorona offers a perfect example of Chicana/o melancholia that is a productive mode of making meaning and self. In *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* Domino Pérez writes,

To those who participate in the transmission of the lore, either through storytelling or as interlocutors, La Llorona is alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, a person, legend, ghost, goddess, metaphor, story, and/or symbol. In an attempt to account for all these views, I speak about her as a legend, spirit, symbol, and living entity (2).

As Pérez figures it the story of La Llorona is an example of complex and perpetual regeneration. The story lives because it continues to be told, and it gets new life when re-imagined in more positive and progressive forms. The Llorona story is important to the discussion of melancholy because the wailing woman is an important and prevalent symbol in Chicana/o literature. She is constantly reinvented in an effort to rescue Chicanas from the limiting virgin/whore dichotomy that continues to haunt Chicana/o narrative. Why keep her around at all? The story in its nascent form is problematic at best. Pérez expands this concept further,

The tale teaches boys to see women as temptresses, embodiments of a malevolent sexuality that could cause them to lose their souls and control of their bodies, placing them in utterly passive relationships with more powerful, dominant partners. The cuento, therefore affirms the sexual agency of women, while at the

same time coding the behavior as dangerous to men because it threatens male access to and control over women's bodies. Girls are taught that sexuality, when acted on, can lead to despair and eternal punishment. (28)

Freud is initially critical of melancholy because he contends that it is an affect that does not allow people to heal; furthermore, it is psychically damaging for the melancholic to hold on to their past. Chicana/o writers relate to their past pain in a way more reminiscent of Faulkner's famous line, "the past is never dead, it's not even past." The melancholy sensibility in Chicana/o literature and culture functions as a strategy of keeping the past alive in an era of historical amnesia and erasure. La Llorona may be a painful story, and a painful reminder of how our culture can continue to code female agency as dangerous, but she is still one of our own. She deserves to be held on to, and if we don't remember our past injuries we have no means by which to reinvent them.

She is an image that haunts the Chicana/o literary and cultural imagination.

Domino Pérez explores how Chicana writers like Helena María Viramontes and Sandra Cisneros have used the figure of La Llorona as a symbol of resistance in the short stories, "The Cariboo Café" and "Woman Hollering Creek," respectively. Pérez's analysis of La Llorona as a symbol of resistance makes use of the figure of a wailing woman and major symbolic elements of the traditional story. In Cisneros' story what starts as a sad wail and an ominous river turns into a grito of independence and positions the river as fluid symbol of freedom

Chicanas Writing about Melancholy

I have tried to demonstrate the varied nature of melancholy in relation to Chicana/o subjectivity and literature. My goal is to provide a discussion of how Chicana/o literature both represents and narrates melancholy. What are the further

implications of Chicana/o melancholy? What are the strategies of self that melancholy has to offer us as Chicana/os, and what might be the further implications of such strategies? As such the following chapters will each examine a specific manifestation of melancholy within Chicana/o literature.

In Chapter 2 I offer a more specific discussion of melancholia in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*. Anzaldúa's text provides the foundation for my connection between melancholy and the Chicana/o mind/body. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* offers the depiction of Chicana/o psychic, creative and spatial melancholy. Anzaldúa casts the border as a melancholy space and Chicana/os as its melancholy inhabitants, yet her discussion of art and creativity hinges more on melancholia as a painful mania that can only be cured with creativity. Her figuration of melancholia reflects the humoral idea of melancholia as an imbalance of the blood. Melancholy once stood as an aspect of nature, problematic only when disturbed or out of balance. "Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink" can be used to describe a Chicana poetics and can be used to understand the psychic and corporeal nature of Chicana artistic production.

I round out this chapter by discussing Sandra Cisneros' novel *Caramelo*, and Arturo Islas' novel *The Rain God*. Cisneros offers a novel in which no one ever gets over anything. Physical and psychic wounds do not heal and, in fact, the process of scabbing over or forgetting is tantamount to both actual death and social death. *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* dramatizes the melancholic need to tell. Freud contends that the melancholic subject will speak endlessly about their melancholia as way of keeping the wound open; in *Caramelo* this is represented as the need for stories to remain in constant discourse in order for the Reyes family to survive. It is not important, per the "puro cuento" part of the

title that these stories be retold faithfully, but only that they are re-told. There is no grand originating story in *Caramelo* as the multi-vocal text draws upon numerous interpretations of various family events. Even photographs are not to be trusted as they can represent alteration, but this alteration gives way for other stories. *The Rain God* features a narrator similar to the one in Cisneros' novel and both novels ruminate on painful familial history. As narrators, Cisneros' Celaya and Islas' Miguel Chico both tell and re-tell stories that they have been told and re-told. This constant re-telling relates back to the constant transition of everything that emerges from the border. In this chapter I argue that Chicana/o storytelling which relies on the past is inherently melancholic. These novels provide textual examples of the subjectivizing potential of incessant narration.

In Chapter 3 I will explore how melancholy manifests itself within the Chicana/o historical consciousness as evidenced by Emma Pérez's novel *Forgetting the Alamo, Or Blood Memory*. In this novel Pérez subverts traditional notions of the border hero and offers a more expansive view of the formation of Texas and the US.

I conclude by drawing together two complex Chicana/o texts that may not have been read together before. "Assessing our losses" departs from the 20th century to examine contentious figures of Chicana/ literature. This chapter examines two texts that might seem unlikely company. Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales' 1967 epic poem, *I Am Joaquín*, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* both offer backward glances that seek to articulate a present sense of subjectivity. Gonzales' poem narrates a return to an indigenous past that is meant to educate modern Chicanos about whom they are and where they have come from. *Who Would Have Thought It?*, like Ruiz de Burton's

other works, combines politics and romance into a critique of US imperialism. Like Gonzales, Ruiz de Burton's backwards glance is meant to educate her readers as to the nature of Mexican/Californio subjectivity. Both authors also demonstrate the validity of Mexican presence in the US which counters narratives of all Mexicans as recent immigrants. Ruiz de Burton, however, emphasizes a European past in order to demonstrate the links that displaced Californios have to an original Spanish heritage. Though Ruiz de Burton would like to have landed Californios recognized as, and accorded the privileges of whites, her idea of whiteness deviates from the whiteness practiced by her Yankee counterparts in the 19th century.

Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales occupy seminal spots in Chicana/o literary history. Early critics were quick (too quick) to identify Ruiz de Burton as an early example of Chicana/o literary resistance. Later critics explored the complexity of her seemingly contradictory impulses. Gonzales's *I am Joaquín* was the call to Chicanos during the movement to remember their history and use this knowledge to preserve themselves in the present moment. While Gonzales does acknowledge the Spanish roots that contribute to Chicana/os, he does not acknowledge that Chicana/o history includes a serious investment in and attachment to whiteness. Although Ruiz de Burton argues for a different kind of whiteness (one based more on class than strict bloodline) her elision of the indigenous aspect of her own ethnic and racial past allies her with a certain type of white supremacy. Both authors work to validate history and presence, and combat Mexican/Mexican American invisibility in the US, and both elide critical aspects of their own history and identity to do so.

This elision is problematic. *I am Joaquín* presents an idealized indigenous past, which is impressive considering the dearth of knowledge on this matter at the time. Gonzales' poem is distinctly masculine and relegates Chicanas to supporting roles and makes no mention of queer Chicana/os. This may have been typical for the time, but it warrants discussion now.

What current scholars and new methods of thinking bring to these two complex writers, these complicated ancestors of modern Chicana/o literature and thought is the ability to grapple with their complexity in its entirety. Neither Gonzales nor Ruiz de Burton could have seen beyond the others problematic politics. One empowers us to be Brown, and the other empowers us to take our seat at the table of Whiteness. And, yet there remains a similarity of logic in both their backward glances. They're melancholy; melancholy in the Freudian sense of melancholy. Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzalez are lamenting losses of which they are not fully conscious of. Both lament the loss of land and history that US imperialism and continued racism have wrought upon Chicana/os. Yet, by eliding critical aspects of their history, they create an element of their loss of which they are not conscious. The melancholic person characteristically, according to Freud, "knows who they have lost, but not what they have lost in him." Since there is an element of the loss that is unconscious, the melancholic can never resolve the loss. Whereas in mourning the world is impoverished because of what has been lost, for the melancholic they themselves come to embody the lack of what is missing. The melancholic can never be whole until what has been lost has been returned, but they don't know precisely what has been lost. The oppositional tone of *I am Joaquín* and *Who Would Have Thought It?* both attempt to protest the idea that Chicanos and Californios

are inferior. Each work is singularly oppositional, and though they both articulate the classic twain of being caught between two worlds neither one of them knows how to successfully occupy this in between space. Both seek to create a unified identity, but any such identity will always have to leave somebody out. Freud's initial discussion separated mourning and melancholia as different processes, one healthy and one not. His later work, and the work of other scholars (Eng and Han) repositioned mourning and melancholia as a spectrum, along which a subject moved constantly rather than being fixed at one point.

Also, within this chapter I will examine the melancholic manner in which Ruiz de Burton has been recovered by Chicana/o literary historians and critics. Chicana/o literary history and criticism has sought to articulate a defining characteristic of Chicana/o literature. While resistance may be present in many texts, the parameters of that resistance can make parallels problematic. Gonzales's Joaquín resists the assimilating forces of the modern US that would seek to erase him. Ruiz de Burton's Lola struggles to maintain herself in the face of conflicts that would seek to compromise her, yet, can we responsibly hold up Lola and Joaquín as similarly resistant subjects? No. We can, however, look at these two distant relatives as subjects grappling with the complexities of mestizaje in a world that best understands and recognizes binaries and discrete units of self. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Aztlán as contentious origin symbol and melancholy homeland.

Chapter 2 – Anzaldúa and Melancholy

In this chapter I explore the theme of melancholy within Gloria Anzaldúa's writing. I argue that melancholy is an ever present emotional/psychic state for Chicanas. As one of the primary theorists of Chicana consciousness, I examine how melancholy is woven into some of her major writings. I seek to contextualize Anzaldúa within the larger framework of Third World/Women of Color feminism to underscore how these movements are also riven with melancholy. The last part of the chapter looks at Anzaldúa's theories on art and writing. I use Sandra Cisneros' novel *Caramelo* and Arturo Islas' novel *The Rain God* to demonstrate how Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State/melancholy operate within a narrative. I use these texts to discuss corporeal metaphors of melancholy in order to demonstrate the connection between the psychic and physical life that is so central to Anzaldúa. In this chapter I connect melancholy as a necessary and productive state, melancholy in third world feminism, melancholic subject formation and the benefits of internal alterity, melancholy as the Coatlicue State, melancholy in Chicana art and writing, and melancholy and the theme of difference.

Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* functions as the definitive statement of the Chicana mestiza experience. The way that Anzaldúa uses the border both metaphorically and literally has shaped the way many scholars apprehend mestiza consciousness and the construction of the Chicana self. Her text is theoretical, historical, autobiographical, fictional and poetic. It is a work whose form embodies the mestizaje that it seeks to explicate. It is a text that is at once meant to be taken personally and understood rigorously. Anzaldúa asks us to rethink our traditional dualistic categories, and the mixed quality of her text refuses to be read or understood within a

single discipline. It is both a text to be read, and a task to be undertaken. Published in 1987, *Borderlands* remains a constant generator of new ideas, and new ways of inhabiting the world. It is for these reasons that I instinctively, and intellectually, turn to Anzaldúa and to *Borderlands* in order to reframe the discussion of melancholy within a Chicana/o context. Anzaldúa's writing allows us to understand melancholy as something productive like the Coatlicue State, or the Shadow Beast that will ultimately culminate in a new consciousness unlike Freud who describes melancholy thusly:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (243)

The play in *Borderlands* between metaphor and materiality is something that I see as connected to my understanding of melancholy. Melancholia has long since passed its usage as a real medical condition and so has primarily functioned as metaphor for the psyche, for genius, or for hysteria, but in older texts melancholy has been a condition of the body. I mean to invoke the play between metaphor and materiality in my discussion of melancholy. In relation to understanding representations of melancholy in Chicana/o literature, I examine how sites of melancholia in various narratives signal growth, or self-making.

Third World Feminism Background & *This Bridge Called My Back*

While Anzaldúa's text should be read within the specific context of Chicana/o studies, her wide reaching influence into disciplines is undeniable. In order to fully explore the ways in which melancholy works in Anzaldúa, I'd like to trace her influence in feminist studies in general and Chicana/o Studies in particular. In "Mestizaje a

Method: Feminists-of-Color Challenge the Canon,” Chela Sandoval offers a historical context for the third world feminist movement and highlights the explicit ways in which third world feminism is linked to mestiza consciousness. She writes:

This ‘borderlands’ feminism many argue, calls up a syncretic form of consciousness made up of transversions and crossings; its recognition makes possible another kind of critical apparatus and political operation in which mestiza feminism comes to function as working chiasmus (a mobile crossing) between races, genders, sexes, cultures, languages, and nations. Thus conceived, *La conciencia de la mestiza* makes visible the operation of another metaform of consciousness that insists upon polymodal forms of poetics, ethics, identities, and politics not only for Chicana/os but for any constituency resisting the old and new hierarchies of the coming millennium. (Sandoval 352)

For Chicanas, mestiza consciousness and the border provide the guiding metaphors and parameters of our identity. Our feminism is forged within the specific fires of our current and historical existence in the United States. The larger concept of US Third World Feminism offers a broader scope that encompasses multiple feminisms. Furthermore, Sandoval argues that US third world feminism should be “...understood as critical apparatus, theory, and method” (353). Third world feminism maps the experiences of women of color, and provides a new epistemology for understanding and utilizing these experiences. We need to understand Anzaldúa’s writing as both emerging from out of the context of US third world feminism and seeking to define US third world feminism.

Third world feminism broadened the scope of traditional feminism, and tasked feminists to consider the intricacies of intersectionality. Early feminists of color tackled issues of visibility within feminist communities, their own communities and the world at large. The most basic form of visibility appeals to, of course, literally being seen with one’s eyes – being recognized as a woman of color and as a person, and understanding that these categories were not mutually exclusive. In “Talking Back,” bell hooks

discusses being heard as another form of visibility. She highlights the lack of voices of color within the feminist movement, and how women within the Black community were encouraged to remain silent and not commit the transgression of talking back. Through this lens, both white feminist spaces and patriarchal Black spaces become sites of erasure and silence for women of color. Yet, bell hooks points out the tension between speech and silence is different for white women and black women. She explains:

Within feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist ‘right speech of womanhood’—the sign of women’s submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on women’s silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but in black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard. (hooks 208)

Certainly within black patriarchal spaces the voices of black women did not carry weight or import. Women spoke to each other, but did not command attention. Within white feminist spaces, black women might be encouraged to “speak out,” but the concept of speaking out or speaking up ignores the fact that black women were already speaking. Also within white feminist spaces black women were encouraged to speak until they wanted to turn the conversation to race or class. With this nuanced discussion of speech and silence, critic bell hooks highlights the necessarily varied struggles of women of color and white women. The concept of talking back, and speaking outside of the confines of “the right speech of womanhood” is later echoed in Anzaldúa’s discussions of the *holicona*, the woman who speaks out of turn and tells community secrets, literally means “big mouth.” The primary intervention that hooks makes here is to begin a discussion of intersectionality that calls on feminists to account for how race, class and sexuality affect women’s lived experiences and their feminism. She also articulates the

act of talking back as an act of self-making and subjectivity. She concludes with this point:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of ‘talking back,’ that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (hooks 211)

By considering how intersectionality shapes our identities and lived experiences, we necessarily begin to think of our identities and experiences beyond simplistic binary modes. We free ourselves from the narrow corridor of dualistic thinking and begin to redefine how we see identity and difference. In “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” Audre Lorde roots the tendency toward dualistic thinking within a specific Western European tradition. She contends that we are taught to see ourselves “...in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior” (114). Within this framework women of color typically occupy the lower stratum of the binary. These binaries are not limiting just because they do not account for the multiple categories of identity that each of us possesses, they are limiting because they don’t allow for a meaningful conversation between the various categories.

Lorde adds:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human difference as equals. As a result those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion. (Lorde 115)

Difference is viewed either as something to be eradicated or assimilated. There is no way for that which is different to be allowed to thrive on its own, or to affect meaningful change on the dominant culture. Difference is not viewed as a “springboard for creative change,” but rather as a mark of deviance that is subsequently pathologized.

We must remember that discussions of intersectionality and difference are multi-layered. Lorde is speaking to multiple systems of dominance that seek to pathologize and oppress women of color, so she addresses the white dominant world at large, the myopic white feminist movement, and patriarchy within communities of color. White feminism becomes particularly insulting because one would expect a movement rooted in dismantling patriarchy to also consider other modes of oppression related to patriarchy. While women of color may have sought community in the Second Wave feminist movement, they were quickly alienated by the refusal of early white feminists to examine their own privilege. Women of color who wanted the feminist movement to pay attention to race and class were accused of derailing feminist efforts. In this case their race and class were viewed as differences that either needed to be ignored or assimilated. There was no question of expanding the motivations of movement, or of using these differences to spark an introspection of white privilege. Lorde elucidates, “As white women ignore their built-in privilege of whiteness and define woman in terms of their own experience alone, then women of Color become ‘other,’ the outsider whose experience and tradition is too ‘alien’ to comprehend” (117). This question of comprehension and relatability extends from the presence of women of color within the early feminist movement to the literature of women of color being ignored by early Women’s Studies courses. If white

womanhood was established as the norm, as the universal womanhood, then the experiences or narratives of women of color was outside of that universality.

If middle-class white womanhood was established as the universal norm, then poor women of color were even further alienated. Lorde recounts a women's magazine that organized a prose only issue based on the contention that prose was more artistically and intellectually rigorous than poetry. Lorde counters that,

Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper.... A room of one's own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reams of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time. The actual requirements to produce the visual arts also help determine, along class lines, whose art is whose.... When we speak of a broadly based women's culture, we need to be aware of the effect of class and economic difference on the supplies available for producing art. (Lorde 116)

Both Lorde and hooks offer compelling explanations of intersectionality and the diffuse oppressions that it is meant to address. Lorde's point about the role of class in the creative production of women of color illustrates yet another vector along which the voices of women of color are silenced. Women of color identified the need for more inclusive movements, and then implemented movements that could provide solidarity and address their needs. The nature of these movements necessarily deconstructs the other normative movements, and the concept of the norm itself.

Melancholy emerges easily in this discussion of women of color feminism. The critics hooks and Lorde both explain how the desire for a unitary white, female, feminist subject excises the experiences and physical presence of women of color in the mainstream feminist movement. White feminism cannot fully comprehend what has been

lost and only notes the absence of women of color as it detracts from their desire to create a unitary feminist subject. They would be an example of the type of pathological melancholy initially theorized by Freud. Their refusal to examine their own privilege, or redefine their own subjectivity places them in a holding pattern of decrying the absence of women of color, but not doing anything about it. Within this white feminist melancholia, women of color become the unknowable lost object. When, however, women of color are allowed to be the subjects of their melancholy, we see that the losses are manifold, knowable, and perpetual.

Lorde and hooks articulate the losses women of color endure at the hands of patriarchy and white feminism. There is loss of agency, freedom, recognition, representation, community, sovereignty, safety, and voice to name a few. There is at the root of this melancholy a loss of personhood and subjectivity. I contend that the endemic element of the unknowable in this loss comes from the fact that women of color have not been automatically accorded personhood and subjectivity in public life. This is not to say that we are not people or subjects, but that we have not been recognized as such; at worst we have been left out of these categories and at best we have been made to prove that we are worthy of them. We are melancholy for the recognition of our subjectivity. Where melancholy for women of color diverges from Freudian wheel spinning is that loss prompts women of color to action. This action does not mean that women of color have moved from melancholy to mourning – first, that is a false dichotomy, and second women of color will experience this same loss every time we are denied subjectivity by the mainstream white world. (For Freud, melancholy is devoid of action and agency and he takes a sort of bootstraps perspective about moving from one state to the other.) So, in

one sense women of color are forced into a state of melancholy because of the experiences of racism and sexism. I will return to a more fleshed out discussion of the perpetual return to melancholy when I begin my examination of Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State.

The Epoch of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*

The 1981 volume *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga is a textual representation of women of color responding to the state of melancholy brought on by multi-layered oppressions. The text responds in various ways: by providing a space for the writing of women of color; a space for women of color to recognize each other and be recognized by each other; a space to articulate the specific oppressions and concerns faced by women of color; a space for women of color to theorize and radically re-conceptualize what they want a social justice movement to look like; a space for women of color to theorize and radically re-conceptualize subjectivity and consciousness; and, finally, the radical, and strategic metaphor of the bridge which will be joined later by Anzaldúa's powerful border metaphor.

In her forward to the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Moraga frames her feminism as Third World feminism which both captures the Third World existence of people within a First World nation, and allows for solidarity between women across national delineations. Her concerns for Third World feminism reflect how U.S. international policy in the 1980's affected Third World people abroad and within our country. She posits,

How has the special circumstance of her [woman of color] pain been overlooked by Third World movements, solidarity groups, ‘international feminists?’ How have the children suffered? How do we organize ourselves to survive this war? To keep our families, our bodies, our spirits intact?

These questions are meant to address the concerns of Third World feminists, but they also address the melancholy brought on by various losses. They reflect loss, suffering, and survival, key components to how women of color experience melancholy. Moraga also addresses the desire, and perhaps impossibility of a unified Third World feminist movement. She observes, “There *are* many issues that divide us; and recognizing that fact can make the dream at times seem quite remote”. Unlike the white feminist movement, Moraga does not seek to eradicate difference to gain cohesion; instead, she acknowledges that our differences make things difficult and that women of color feminists need to question what “unified” might mean, and also thoroughly interrogate their own subject positions and how they respond to difference:

If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences, then we must build from the inside/out, not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own. And we must look deeply. We must acknowledge that to change the world, we have to change ourselves—even sometimes our most cherished block-hard convictions.

Moraga’s vision of difference, like Lorde’s, calls for recognition, introspection and a willingness to change. *This Bridge Called My Back* as a volume really embodies the movement it represents. I am quoting from the Foreword of the 1983 Second Edition, and Moraga is explicitly conscious of the fact that a new printing even just two years later means something different in a different time. The text is deeply contextualized by the editor’s consciousness about change. There are three Forewords to the Second Edition, and then once the text begins there is a Foreword, a Preface, a poem and an Introduction. While the interior of the text may not change from printing to printing Moraga, Anzaldúa

and Toni Cade Bambara carefully articulate the frames of the text to account for change and to provide elasticity. Moraga writes, “As *This Bridge Called My Back* is not written in stone, neither is our political vision. It is subject to change”. There is a clever play here in Moraga’s phrasing as “subject to change” encompasses both the text and its subjects. It is clear that our movements, our texts and our-selves must be prepared to change in order for real work to be done.

Anzaldúa’s brief Foreword opens with an indictment of melancholy:

Perhaps like me you are tired of suffering and talking about suffering, estás hasta el pescuezo de sufrimiento, de contar las lluvias de sangre pero no las lluvias de flores (up to your neck with suffering, of counting the rains of blood, but not the rains of flowers). Like me you may be tired of making a tragedy of our lives. A abandonar ese autocanibalismo: coraje, tristeza, miedo (let’s abandon this autocannibalism: rage, sadness, fear).

Her bilingual tirade seems to specifically address Freud’s list of why melancholy is unproductive. Anzaldúa emphasizes the need to act over enumerating and narrating experiences of suffering, yet this is not to discount the meaning that is found in remembering pain, or recalling grievance. Anzaldúa’s point is that women of color must not stop there, we must progress to action, but that we must not stop there either – beyond external action lies the need for introspection. For Anzaldúa, difference reveals profound interconnectedness, “We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we – white black straight queer female male –are connected and interdependent”. This interconnectedness should not be confused with the white feminist unity because it is a connection born of difference, not the erasure of difference. Further, interconnectedness is not the same as unity. The acting group that emerges from a Third World feminist melancholy does not represent a unitary organism, but rather a sutured community. Again, there is the bridge metaphor: we are connected

but we are not a monolith. I would argue that Anzaldúa's Foreword stresses the value of melancholy and the value of emerging from melancholy. One does not emerge as a whole, unitary subject but as radically interconnected and multiple.

Included in *This Bridge Called My Back* are two iconic pieces by Audre Lorde. In one, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" the letter directly addresses the pain of white feminism's exclusion of women of color vis- á-vis the literal exclusion of Black woman's perspective in Daly's 1979 anthology *Gyn/Ecology*. By writing in an epistolary form and choosing a personal address, Lorde deftly exemplifies not just that the personal is political, but the political is personal as well. Lorde begins by explaining her reluctance to reach out to Daly – for not only is the confrontation less than desirable; the interaction between feminists of color and white feminists is fraught and painful. Lorde states:

The history of white women who are unable to hear black women's words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But for me to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering. I hope. (Lorde 94)

Here we see the extension of the bridge metaphor that guides the anthology. Note the dual nature of Lorde's trepidation. It is both based in history, but also potentially limiting to future forward movement. Making note of the pain, but agreeing to move through it and live within in it during the moment of this letter illustrates a melancholic engagement. Despite a painful past, Lorde agrees to move forward, and to address the racism of Daly's text.

Lorde moves on to critique Daly's exclusion of African or any non-Western goddesses from her discussion of ancient female power. She consents to the fact that maybe Daly excluded non-Western goddesses to limit the focus of her study. This,

however, is disproven by Daly's inclusion of a discussion of female genital mutilation in Africa. According to Lorde,

Your inclusion of African genital mutilation was an important and necessary piece in any consideration of female ecology, and too little has been written about it. But to imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women, is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other. (Lorde 95)

It is clear from this quote that Daly included a discussion of genital mutilation not as a legitimate expression of the diversity of women's experience, but to flatten out and erase the differences between women. Rather than being discussed in its own right, Daly appropriates the experience of African women to further her discussion of white feminism, as we can see in Lorde's observation:

As an African American woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal experience distorted and trivialized but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so much matches my own. As women identified women, we cannot afford to repeat these same old destructive, wasteful errors of recognition. (Lorde 95)

The type of appropriation is painful for Lorde on multiple levels. There is the pain of exclusion of once more being relegated to the role of Other/unknowable lost object and there is the pain of being rejected by someone from whom you expected solidarity. With the pain comes the larger damage of the narrowing field of feminism. The chance for real inclusion and confrontation of difference was given up in favor of the pursuit of the unitary feminist subject. Lorde notes, "What you excluded from *Gyn/Ecology* dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other non-European women, and denied the real connections that exist between all of us" (95). We see yet again another missed opportunity for connection. By refusing to embrace difference, the white feminist

movement in general and Daly in particular move further away from the type of unity they claim to desire and articulate.

Lorde goes on to explain the real world consequences of this continued division. Erasure from the feminist movement of the time mirrors erasure from public life, and shows how white women become complicit in the racial oppression of Black women.

Lorde references the murder of 12 Black women in Boston that occurred in 1979:

I ask that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of black women, and how it devalues your own words. This dismissal does not essentially differ from the specialized devaluations that make black women prey, for instance, to the murders even now happening in your own city. When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise. (Lorde 96)

The dismissal of Daly and other feminist scholars like her perpetuates and supports the victimization of Black woman, and poisons their own well in a manner of speaking.

Where the inclusion of women of color could add to and deepen the feminist discussion, the continued exclusion of women of color damages the entire project. Both exclusion and inclusion are exercises in melancholy, but with clearly different outcomes. Exclusion, as I've stated before casts women of color as unknowable lost objects in the pursuit of the unitary (white) female subject. This is painful. Inclusion, is also painful because it necessitates the acknowledgment of a painful history. It would cause guilt and sadness but like Lorde's letter would forge a path for the future. Lorde begins this letter with melancholy and trepidation as an appeal to Daly to be receptive to Lorde's words and to rethink her feminist projects. Shortly before meeting Daly for the first time, Lorde considers the following:

I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy, because of their destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because

whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another, at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. This letter attempts to break this silence. (97)

Though Lorde's letter is a sharp critique, she offers it as a gift and as an effort to create a bridge. A discussion like this which takes intellectual energy as well as the courage to share a vulnerability, comes at a great cost. I interpret this effort as Lorde's conscious engagement with melancholy. It expresses her willingness to sit in the pain and anger of remembered history and problematic presence in an effort to move forward.

It is a unique address in that it is an open letter because as such it is for Mary Daly as well as for any other white woman who would care to listen. Though, as readers, we are not direct recipients of this address, the letter provides women of color an example of how to engage with white feminism, and also validates why some women of color may not want to engage at all. In this letter Lorde articulates the need to acknowledge difference, and to be open to the radical change that real acceptance of difference will necessitate. We must agree to be undone, and to confront who we are in the face of new people, and information.

This willingness to be undone as a subject is a cornerstone for my discussion of Chicana/o melancholy. It allows us to understand melancholy as a tool of self-making, and to understand self-making as an ongoing, reiterative process. Melancholy as a tool is most effective in the face of dealing with intersecting oppressions. To continue this metaphor, we can think of difference as a tool, and as Lorde pointed out in the previous piece, a tool that is lacking from the white feminist tool box.

In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," Lorde again critiques the exclusionary tactics of white feminism, and she emphasizes the need to

engage meaningfully with difference. Refusing to acknowledge difference and refusing to include women who are different weakens the feminist movement as a whole and as Lorde says, “For the absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and political” (98). This piece is written as Lorde’s comments to the Second Sex Conference in 1979, a conference which again had a dearth of women of color participation and marginalized those women of color who did participate. Lorde notes that the black and lesbian women who did participate were ghettoized into panels specific to their concerns. She observes, “To read this program is to assume that lesbian and black women have nothing to say of existentialism, the erotic, women’s culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power” (98). The organization of the conference represents the impulse to allow women of color and queer women to comment on their own matters, but not to comment on, or contribute to, the larger concerns of feminism and culture. It is a gross intellectual segregation and indicative of a lack of commitment to real change. This lack of commitment to radical change is at the heart of Lorde’s critique because what is the point of intellectual work that only replicates the oppressive patterns on which it was built? She asks, “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (98). For white feminists to commit to ending the patriarchy but nothing else, illustrates their unwillingness to examine and dismantle their privilege. Racial, class, and sexual privilege stand in here for unitary feminist subject that appeared so desirable to the movement. Single issue feminism negates the importance and experience of non-white women, and ultimately upholds more oppression than it topples. The exclusionary tactics of white

feminists are all too reminiscent of the racial and class segregation faced by women of color in the US. To this end Lorde utters the iconic,

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (99)

A refusal to engage meaningfully with difference lays bare the continued investment that white women hold in a white supremacist patriarchy. Lorde's critique eviscerates a movement that only makes a show at fighting oppression, or affecting change.

Meaningful engagement with difference is a tool that cannot be found in the master's toolbox. Divorcing one-self from the national myth of self-determination and viewing oneself as interdependent with other women is a tool that is not in the master's tool box. Lorde writes, "Interdependency between women is the only way to the freedom which allows the 'I' to 'be', not in order to be used, but in order to be creative. This is the difference between the passive 'be' and the active 'being'" (99). Lorde here is arguing to for a reconceptualization of the feminist self that is not tied to a national mythos rooted in the oppression of other people. It is an argument for an identity that is not built on the backs of anyone else, or gained by the labor of anyone else. Allowing difference to meaningfully enter a movement and change the nature of movement constitutes a meaningful engagement with difference, as Lorde stipulates:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. For difference must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. (99)

Difference is necessary for creativity, and engaging with difference will allow for radical and creative change within any movement. Lorde's description of the creative potential

of difference works on an interior level as well. By following Anzaldúan theory, if we understand ourselves as multiple, there is a great creative potential in our own internal alterity.

Borderlands & Melancholy

Anzaldúa's writings in *Borderlands* offer a tempting metaphor with which many have tried to describe their personal internal and external liminality. Broad readings, however, grossly ignore the specificity of Anzaldúa's discussion and excise the material – both physical and geographic – concerns of her work. Anzaldúa's writing must be examined within the specific milieu of the Chicana/o body and the US-Mexico border. By extending her discussions I do not seek to unmoor her from her materiality; rather, I seek to present a specific understanding of mestiza/o melancholy. Anzaldúa explains the many states and stages that one must travel through along the mestiza way and it is my contention that these states reflect melancholia. When we read melancholia in a narrative, we are actually being alerted to how the text or character is engaging with mestiza consciousness. Anzaldúa's discussions illustrate how the multiple faces of Chicana/o melancholia have different but vital outcomes.

Melancholia as a decolonial process is especially necessary in a nation that combines cultural amnesia with selective remembrance and nostalgia. Freud argues that melancholia represents a psychic stasis where one is stuck ruminating on their pain; however, when we examine melancholia in tandem with Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State we see that the shared characteristic between the two psychic states imply change and productivity. Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State should be in conversation with the ideas of melancholy. To a large degree, this puts Anzaldúa into a transcultural dialogue with

Freud and with other authors who have sought to elucidate how melancholy functions, in multiple ways, as a pervasive subject making affect.

There are many parallels between Anzaldúa's concept of the border in *Borderlands* and the concept of melancholy. I am talking about a holistic concept of melancholy that encompasses its early figurations as well as its later Freudian ones. Anzaldúa's description of the border as "*una herida abierta*" is distinctly resonant with Freud's description of melancholia as an open wound: "The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound...." For both writers this open wound connotes danger, but for Anzaldúa it also implies an inescapable state of being. According to Anzaldúa, the mestiza is always caught between worlds, the experience of being mixed race and bi-cultural in a nation that can't recognize what forces the mestiza subject into a psychic state of multiplicity. The type of psychic ambivalence that is figured by Freud as detrimental to a cohesive self is figured by Anzaldúa as necessary to existence as a mestiza. Of course, one of the most impactful things about Anzaldúa's writing is that while she begins her theories with mestizas, the implications of her thoughts on subjectivity are varied and wide ranging. Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness seeks to transcend the type of dualistic thinking that separates us into self/other, mind/body, male/female, American/Other, queer/not queer:

The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, or culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence and war. (102)

The whole that she is seeking is not to be understood as some sort of melting pot ideal where the valences of our selves are melted into one undifferentiated whole; rather, it is a whole comprised of sutured pieces – a whole wherein the different pieces can be seen in their difference and in their contradiction. So, while it may seem as if Anzaldúa and Freud are arguing for a whole self/psyche, their ideas of wholeness are rooted in entirely different traditions. Anzaldúa's thinking illustrates the inadequacy of Western concepts of mind and self while still referring to them. Like Freud she calls upon ancient discourse in order to comprehend and explain the world around her. Unlike Freud she doesn't entirely squeeze all the life out of these discourses. Freud uses melancholia as a metaphor in order to explain a state that is counter to mourning. Anzaldúa draws on ancient indigenous thought, because for one thing it is in her blood, but for another those ancient concepts have real current resonance for her. Freud can pathologize melancholia because he strips it of all its previous complexity of meaning and puts it into a duality. Reading melancholia in tandem with Anzaldúa's theories of mestiza consciousness rescues a complex affect from simple duality and reinstates its complexity and relevance. In her 1992 essay, "On Borderlands/La Frontera: An Interpretive Essay," María Lugones discusses *Borderlands* as a text that grapples with the psychological nature of resistance. Lugones is concerned with how Anzaldúa discusses liberation of the psyche, as well as physical and material liberation. Lugones also contends that *Borderlands* as a concept creates a space for this psychic and physical resistance. She adds:

Work on oppressed subjectivity focuses on the subject at the 'moment' of oppression and as oppressed. Oppression theory may have as its intent to depict the effects of oppression (alienation, ossification, arrogation, psychological oppression. etc.), without an intention to rule out resistance. But within the logical framework of the theory, resistance to oppression appears unintelligible because it

lacks a theoretical base. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* is a work creating a theoretical space for resistance. (31)

So, if according to Lugones, *Borderlands* is a text that offers a strategy of resistance, then reading melancholia as a parallel to the *Borderlands* allows me to view melancholia as resistant. The parenthetical in the Lugones quote that describes the effects of oppression describes the symptoms of melancholy as Freud lists them. Viewed in this vein, melancholia is a logical psychological response to oppression. The problem lies not with the melancholic person, but with whatever is oppressing them. Perhaps melancholy appears initially as unintelligibly productive because it does not have a properly specific theoretical base. By grounding it with Anzaldúa's theories of mestiza consciousness, I hope to render it intelligible as a mode of/or path to resistance that is relevant to Chicana/o subjectivity. The question of intelligibility is actually central toward an understanding of melancholy. Perhaps, rather than understanding the road to psychic health as rooted in a path to wholeness, mestiza melancholy shows that we should be moving between unintelligibility and intelligibility. Further, we can beg the question as to what a re-figuration of melancholy renders intelligible that was previously unintelligible.

Lugones understands the *Borderlands* as a space of resistance, and the Coatlicue State as a state of creation. For example, she proposes:

The Coatlicue State is a state of creation. The self being oppressed the self-in-between, *la terca*, *la hocicona*, the against-the-grain storyteller pushes against the limits of oppression. Caught in-between two harmful worlds of sense that deny her ability to respond, the self-in-between fashions herself in a quiet state. Anzaldúa recognizes here that the possibility of resistance depends on this creation of a new identity, a new world of sense, in the borders. (33)

The *hocicona* and storyteller images parallel the incessant narrating that Freud considers a part of melancholia. The storyteller telling the same story over and over again, or the *hocicona* retelling gossip is stasis as resistance. Everything that Freud reads as static or

circular within melancholia is reflected in this idea of stasis. So melancholy, when viewed through an Anzaldúan lens, resists. Reading it through her work renders the work of melancholy intelligible as a productive strategy of subjectivity.

The figure of the *hocicona*, or the woman who talks “too much,” figures largely in *Borderlands*. Talking back, as a central tenet of woman of color feminism, can mean arguing, gossiping, telling secrets, being critical of one’s culture and telling stories. Anzaldúa identifies each of these activities as resistance, and subsequently engages in them. This female talking is a feminist narration of the wounds of sexism and misogyny. In Chapter 2 of *Borderlands*, “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan,” Anzaldúa traces the genealogy of mestizo misogyny back to our indigenous roots. Though Malinali often figures as the ultimate traitor to her people, Anzaldúa says, “Not me sold out my people but they me (44).” This phrase is repeated throughout the chapter as a refrain of revelation. According to Anzaldúa, it is not Malinali as translator/speaking woman who sold out our culture. It is narrating her as a traitor and thus damning all speaking women that has been the greatest betrayal. Hence the incessant narration, the talking back that Freud frames as pathological, is a resistant act that is answering back to years of forced silence. As Anzaldúa says, “For 300 years she was invisible, she was not heard. Many times she wished to speak, to act, to protest, to challenge... She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame” (45). Talking back, or incessant narration in its various forms, is the key toward rendering the Chicana visible and intelligible. In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa uses the figures of the *hocicona*, the historian, the artist, and the storyteller to show how women who narrate and create are resisting oppression and working toward something new. The path of

resistance, the path of creating art is necessarily bound to the path of creating self, as she explores in the chapters that follow: specifically “Entering the Serpent,” “*La Herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State*” and “Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink.” Her final chapter in the prose section of *Borderlands*, “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness,” is the culmination of these paths.

The Coatlicue State

In “*La Herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State*” Anzaldúa explains that the average Chicana is daily subjected to oppression and repression from both within and outside of her culture and gender. This oppression can take the form of internalized racism and other types of internalized inadequacies. It can result in denial of self, or in general anger and hate. She writes, “As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong’ (67). Note that this internalization of repression parallels the Freudian melancholic self-repudiation. He contends that ruminating on an unknowable loss causes one to turn the loss inward so that it is the ego that becomes impoverished. Both states are problematic because of the lack of awareness they imply. The psychic blindness that brings on this stasis is what causes the self-repudiation. But where Freud would urge someone out of a melancholic state, Anzaldúa urges one further into such a state.

Anzaldúa then explains that the brain’s response to this type of onslaught is to go numb, to close off to the awareness of how awful life is in order to continue to survive. This numbness is helped along by engaging in repetitive tasks and possibly drugs or

alcohol. The Coatlicue State comes along to shake one out their stasis. With “From within Germinative Stasis: Creating Active Subjectivity, Resistant Agency,” I turn once again to María Lugones to understand Anzaldúa. Lugones begins her “personal engagement” with Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* by taking the text as both a guide and example of how to “block the effectiveness of oppressive meanings and logics” (85). She is quick to point out that she is not appropriating Anzaldúa’s journey, but using her words as guide for her own journey. Lugones offers the following:

To work with her strategies is to come to understand the inadequacy of the western notion of agency. I dismiss the modern western notion of agency—the ground of individual responsibility—in favor of a more contained more inward sense of activity of the self in metamorphosis. Like in a cocoon, the changes are not directed outward, at least not toward those domains permeated by the logics of dominations. The western conception of agency stands in the way both of understanding Anzaldúa’s journey and of the possibility of creative activity under conditions fertile for resistance to multiple oppressions. (86)

Though Lugones is talking about agency versus liberation, here her model for inward metamorphosis is a distinct spin on Freud’s melancholic self-repudiation. Freud’s melancholia must be understood as a larger concern of the psyche, not just an idiosyncratic malady. For Freud, melancholia seriously interrupts the mind’s ability to be cohesive and coherent; so we can say that losses – knowable or otherwise – instigate a serious interruption in mental well-being. Freud emphasizes the outward tending practice of mourning with the intention of getting an individual back into society. Anzaldúa emphasizes that turn inward specifically to exit a repressive society that is the cause of the pain in the first place. With Lugones and Anzaldúa, the stasis of melancholy can be recognized as a germinative period from which real growth can occur, i.e. melancholia becomes a productive state, necessary for raising/shifting consciousness. As such, agency or gaining control (as one may do after engaging in a successful mourning period) of

oneself only to continue successfully existing in a problematic reality is no real freedom at all. Lugones' point is this: "I do not think agency in the modern western sense is desirable as a liberatory goal since it requires a univocity of meaning" (86). In her quest for liberation Lugones adopts a "resistant sense of agency" which she terms "active subjectivity" (86). Active subjectivity has to do with eschewing the constraints and choices of western subjectivity in favor of an unmoored sense of self that is based on inward reflection rather than outward (in)validation. Anzaldúa and Lugones argue that "Women of color are not allowed to make sense or choices outside the domain where they are dominated" (86). So the place where we may be free to make choices, to be liberated, to participate in active subjectivity, is within. For Anzaldúa this journey within takes the form of her encounter with Coatlicue.

Lugones describes active subjectivity as a multiply authored self. While those who hold privilege and power fetishize the concept of the singularly identified individual, those less fortunate understand that this is a fantasy. Through Anzaldúa, we understand that Chicana identity is made up of multiple identities; many of these valences come as a result of being fractured by oppression. Lugones explains: "The subjected see more clearly through this fantasy of individual agency as a face of power. But living against the grain of this fantasy, commits us to an awareness of intimate terror. It commits us to struggle within intimate terror" (88). This awareness brought on my trauma, loss and repression will come to inform what Anzaldúa will term 'La Facultad.'

According to Lugones, by delving inward one is exposed to both the self that is being oppressed and the self that is resisting oppression. The process of resisting

oppression in its early stages follows this process which Lugones outlines according to Anzaldúa:

1. The state of intimate terrorism
2. The use of rage to drive others away
3. Reciprocating with contempt for those who have aroused shame in us
4. Internalizing rage and contempt
5. The Coatlicue State (Lugones 88-89)

These are not strategies that can affect outward change in a meaningful way, since some of them reproduce the conditions that they are resisting, but they do represent an important psychological process toward creating space for germination. For the purposes of my work, I read these stages as stages of melancholy. What Freud can only recognize as pathological is in actuality, when viewed through the right lens, a liberatory process. Freud is not the last word in melancholia. He is important because his essay influenced the discursive construction of melancholy in modern society and also presaged discussions of melancholy as depression. Melancholy as an enduring affect is much larger than Freud. It is a unique condition which always ignored the separation of mind and body and when taken in conversation with Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State it has enormous productive potential.

Lugones' active subjectivity necessitates a multiple self, as there is always one who is resisting and one who is oppressed. She explains:

The one resisting and the one oppressed exist within very different logics, within very different worlds of sense. She is multiple as reality is multiple. Resistance and liberation are alive always within multiplicitous meaning. As one de-emphasizes agency, the subject appears too multiplicitous: at once terrorized and resistant; at once paralyzed in stasis and brooding her own liberation. (90)

If we are to read this process as melancholic, then we need to understand that Chicana/o melancholy is multiplicitous. It no longer functions along its previous Freudian binary of stasis and motion. The stasis is split by recognizing oppression and is both paralyzed and brooding, in the transitive sense. The use of rage to drive others away and to feel contemptuous of those who have caused personal pain is another step toward the Coatlicue State. This angry lashing out also resonates with melancholia in that the melancholic will read loss in everything and everyone with whom they interact. For this discussion, the central loss is the loss of self, or sense of self. The Chicana self is lost; perhaps even "...Lost in a world of confusion" and the journey to and through the Coatlicue State is an act of recovering that loss. Even through recovery there is still the sense that the Chicana self remains lost because the spheres of oppression that we inhabit. According to Lugones' interpretation of Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State, there are two moments of loss. There is the moment where the Chicana realizes that by undergoing this transformation something will be lost and that such a drastic change to the psyche may render her forever out of sync with the outside Western world. Then there is the moment where Coatlicue comes in and devours the self and fear of loss within the self:

In the Coatlicue state the fear is provoked by the very prospect of liberation. She is not yet living up to her potentialities; rather, she is fomenting her potential self, the creation of a counter-universe of sense in which she can engage her potentially fully. This self and this counter-universe of sense are what the germination in the Coatlicue state is all about." (95)

First there is paralysis and then Coatlicue devours the fear, and then stasis becomes germinative. Lugones concludes by emphasizing that this germinative stasis is not a onetime occurrence; rather, it is a perpetual state of being as the self comes into consciousness and relates to the world around it. If we are to reject the Western notion of

the singular, cohesive self, then we must continue to recognize and embrace our internal splits. In this vein Chicana/o melancholy becomes a permanent condition, because it is a psychic state of perpetual inward looking and growth. The losses that constitute Chicana/o culture are present and active in nearly every aspect of Chicana/o life and so they remain fresh, but ruminating on these losses is what allows us to grow and move forward.

Narrating the Coatlicue State: Melancholy in Chicana/o narrative

I turn now to a discussion of Anzaldúa that uses specific literary texts to show how her theories appear when fleshed out in a narrative. Her work resonates deeply with both old and new understandings of melancholy, and I contend that melancholy moments in Chicana/o literature signal Anzaldúan moments of consciousness. In the essay, “On Complex Communication,” Lugones explores the boundaries of communication within liminal space.

She opens by explaining the productive though often ignored potential of liminal space, “This essay examines liminality as a space of which dominant groups are largely ignorant. The limen is at the edge of hardened structures, a place where transgression of the reigning order is possible” (75). Melancholy is a liminal space that has been ignored, and written off as pathological. Where we see melancholy represented in Chicana/o literature, we can look for productive liminality, and vice versa. Lugones continues:

As such, it both offers communicative openings and presents communicative impasses to liminal beings. For the limen to be a coalitional space, complex communication is required. This requires praxical awareness of one’s own multiplicity and a recognition of the other’s opacity that does not attempt to assimilate it into one’s own familiar meanings. (75)

The melancholic space offers a space for communication with self, and with other liminal beings. The conditions of this communication are that one must acknowledge their own multiplicity – their own situated and multiple identity, and that the other person is opaque and potentially untranslatable. So the meaning from the other must be understood in the terms of the other and assimilated into our worldview. In other words, we must not expect to understand the experiences of another in terms of ourselves. The state of melancholia reflects an acceptance of complexity, and an understanding that resolution isn't always possible/desirable. We needn't be the same to get along, or to be productive social actors. What is possible, what is desirable is this complex communication between disparate entities, which Lugones sees as essentially for building coalitions. In the examples from literature that I have chosen, characters are often communicating from places of deep sadness and loss. The movement in the text is not necessarily from unresolved to resolved, but often from illegible to legible. Through narrating the aspects and origins of their melancholy, characters are able to communicate to each other, and build community around loss.

One of the best literary examples of the movement between unintelligibility and intelligibility occurs in Tomás Rivera's "*...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him.*" The novel about the lives of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. offers fragmented form and content to reflect the disjointed nature of migrant life. The experiences of the characters in the text occur within the liminal space of the migrant, and indeed the text seems to perform what Héctor Calderón, in "The Novel and the Community of Readers: Rereading Tomás Rivera's *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*," terms "...a mediatory function..." (Loc 1889). The text narrates the tension between two worlds while also inhabiting the space

between the Anglo literary world, and the burgeoning Chicana/o literary world. For Calderón, these early novels were about transformation. He explains:

The Chicano narratives that I know, especially those written in the seventies, represent the vast transformations that “el norte de Mexico” or the American West has undergone from Native American nomadic life, to Spanish and Mexican agricultural and ranching stages, to migrant worker culture of this century. Viewed from this dual perspective, Chicano literature is not simply a “minority” or marginal literature, it is one of the latest chapters of the Western tradition, or perhaps, with an eye to the future of the Americas, it is indicative of new, alternative cultural tradition (Calderón, “The Novel and the Community of Readers: Rereading Tomás Rivera’s *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*”).

Rivera’s novel is thematically suited for a discussion of narrating melancholy, but it is also historically positioned as a text that mediates between changing worlds. Calderón argues that the text is as much about communicating the experience of migrant Mexicans to Mexican Americans, as it is about communicating these experiences to Anglo reading audiences, and that the text “...should be read as a reinvention of the formal and ideological possibilities of the novel to present a Third World Chicano Culture” (Calderón, “The Novel and the Community of Readers: Rereading Tomás Rivera’s *Y no se lo tragó la tierra*”). The novel is a contact zone of experience and narrative embodiment of a segment of the population that often goes unrecognized and unread.

The book opens with “The Lost Year,” wherein the unnamed narrator/protagonist is lost, and disoriented. He is lost in time, in space and he is lost to himself, and to others. Rivera writes, “That year was lost to him. At times he tried to remember and, just about when he thought everything was clearing up some, he would be at a loss for words” (83). He cannot place himself in time, and he cannot articulate what has happened to him. His experiences are unintelligible to him, and not only can he not articulate them he cannot even recall if they really happened.

It always began when he would hear someone calling him by his name but when he turned his head to see who was calling, he would make a complete turn and there he would end up—in the same place. This was why he could never discover who was calling him nor why. And then he even forgot the name he had been called. (83)

His unintelligibility extends into a failure of interpolation. He literally cannot be hailed, and thus identified. In one sense he is free, in another he is lost. He is caught in the liminality that Lugones refers to as both a "...communicative opening and a communicative impasse" (76). Rivera's multi-voiced narrative is a total engagement with complex communication, and it all starts with a loss. In "The Lost Year" the boy is lost to himself, but he also recognizes his self as multiple. "One time he stopped at mid-turn and fear suddenly set in. He realized that he had called himself. And thus the lost year began" (83). By recognizing that he has called himself, he becomes the hailer and the hailed and he recognizes himself as multiple. In the midst of profound un-recognition, he has recognized that he is multiple, and so begins the lost year – so begins the descent into the limen.

Lugones writes, "In each of these journeys, the key that opens the door to the limen is not resistance to oppression per se, but rather resistance to particular forms of oppression at particular times in particular spaces" (77). "*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him...*" is an intensely resistant text. Of course it seeks to rectify the dehumanization of Mexican migrants, but it also seeks to create an intense empathy for their experience as the reader experiences the fragmented and often disturbing text. How is the "Lost Year" a part of this resistance? The boy in this vignette cannot be hailed; he cannot be hailed as a faceless migrant, part of a horde of working bodies and hungry children, but by defying external identification he is, for the moment, without any identity at all. So, in resisting

the oppression of interpolation he is thrust into the limen where he is momentarily unrecognizable, but gains the potential to defining himself. If he is unrecognizable to himself, he is also unrecognizable to the reader. We don't really know who is, but Rivera offers the rest of the text to find out.

The novel culminates with "Under the House." By the end of the novel, the boy is placed in a recognizable place. "He was under a house. He had been there for several hours, or so it seemed to him, hiding" (148). It is under the house, and he is hiding which is counter to being purposely visible, or inside of the house but we know where he is and he knows how long he has been there. There is a distinct difference between hiding and being lost. In this final story Rivera offers first-person narration from the boy, so we become aware of his interiority as he sees it. The liminal space of being under a house is different from the unrecognizable psychic scape of the first story. Instead of being confused about himself, it is the other people who now appear fragmented. He thinks, "*The children look funny, all I can see are their legs running. It's not bad here...I can think in peace*" (148: italics in the original). This final story is a microcosm of all the previous stories. The previous stories were fragmented, but discrete; this story however unfolds as a cacophonous stream of consciousness collection of all the previous stories. The italicized "I" of the boy becomes meshed with every other "I" of the text as he recounts the year. The boy has hidden under the house to ruminate on the past, because it is only through this rumination that he finds himself and makes sense of things. The roughly two pages of italicized interior monologue represent the boy's melancholic narration. To put it back into the terms of Lugones' piece, the boy has become intelligible and his world is likewise intelligible.

Lugones reads her concept of the limen onto Anzaldúa's concept of the Borderlands and she contends that "...the borderlands is also constituted *culturally* and *historically* in Anzaldúa as a recovery of memory,..." (80). This recovery of memory is how the boy under the house is experiencing his current limen. Of the way in which Anzaldúa recovers memory Lugones says, "Her writing his image-full, pictographic. It is a writing of stories that are not textual. They are encapsulated in time" (80). These are the stories that the boy offers in his final recall. It is a montage of images that are located in the once lost year, and he knows that he can recall other years if he is given the space to think, or allowed to occupy the limen in peace. It is through this recall that both Anzaldúa and the boy find themselves. While others still may not call him by name, he is recognizable to himself because he has absorbed and been able to recall the collection of stories. All of this is vastly important to Lugones because she believes that complex communication will aid in the creation of coalitions for social justice. The willingness to defy external identification and be lost, the willingness to occupy the limen in search of both self and other and the willingness to sift through the losses and stories of others all represent for Lugones

...a willingness to traverse each other's collective memories as not quite separate from each other and as containing the stuff that she may incorporate into her own recreation. The new mestiza is a scavenger of collective memories, memories that she does not see as completely discontinuous with her own. (80-1)

The path toward intelligibility is a path toward collectivity and the recognition of the self as multiple. What is apt for Anzaldúa as "the new mestiza" is apt for the boy as a new mestizo.

At the end of the story the boy is discovered, but he is not a boy any longer. When the story starts, he is a boy on his way to school, and when it ends he is a man hiding

under the house. A woman says, “He’s losing track of the years” (152). Yet in his time under the house, he has regained what is important about the years. In my reading of melancholy those who do not understand why it was important to hide under the house represent those who do not understand that melancholy is necessary, useful and regenerative. Ruminating on the past even if it is painful is ultimately positive. “He immediately felt happy because, as he thought over what the woman had said, he realized that in reality he hadn’t lost anything. He had made a discovery. To discover and rediscover and piece things together. This to this, that to that, all with all. That was it. That was everything” (152). The novel ends with a grand statement of collectivity and recognition. As the man climbs the tree he imagines that someone is off in the distance looking at him. He is seen, he imagines himself as recognized and he waves “...so that the other could see that he knew he was there” (152). He sees and is seen, and that is everything. This everything is made possible by the melancholy that initiated the novel. What is seen by Freud as a singular and narcissistic pathology actually has applications toward productive collectivity. By understanding melancholia as a border sensibility, we can read melancholic moments in Chicana/o literature as movements toward collectivity, towards coalition building and towards greater understanding in general. Melancholy asks us to take stock of our losses so that we may know them, and ourselves and each other.

Rivera’s text provides an ideally shifting ground from which to examine the Anzaldúa’s insistence on complexity, and the role of the narrator in articulating that complexity. We have seen from the brief background on woman of color feminism that this insistence on complexity is deeply rooted. I’d like to turn now to a discussion of

Anzaldúa's theory on writing and aesthetic production. This discussion will include examples from Sandra Cisneros' novel *Caramelo*, and Arturo Islas' novel *The Rain God*. I use both novels to illustrate Anzaldúa's melancholy poetics.

Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red & Black Ink

*Out of poverty, poetry;
out of suffering, song.
--a Mexican Saying*

Borderlands is a text that radically re-conceptualizes many of the tropes that we have used to organize our psyches. In "Tlilli, Tlapalli/The Path of the Red and Black Ink" Anzaldúa tackles the tropes of aesthetic virtuosity, the Cartesian split, and lightness and darkness in an effort to offer up her own concept of shamanistic poetics. This section of Anzaldúa's text provides the framework for a melancholy Chicana theory of aesthetic production. I will be using this section to illustrate how Anzaldúa articulates this theory, and how this theory plays out in a selection of literary texts.

Like Third World Chicana feminism, Chicana writing is rooted in the intersecting oppressions of everyday life. Out of our painful experiences comes a desire to tell our own stories, but also to imagine a different world. Anzaldúa's theory of poetics begins with an epigraph about the roots of pain in artistic production.

Anzaldúa layers autobiographical detail about telling stories, her grandmother told stories, her father told stories, and she in turn told stories to her younger sister. The tales she hints at are fantastic in nature, and for her presage a psychic linking between image and writing. This is not to describe her storytelling as our well known metaphor for language. She is not using writing to describe or call into being the images that she sees;

rather, she is using transforming image and feeling into language. Among the multiple things this does is unseat “the word” as the root and seat of meaning. She moves from listening to the stories of her family, to telling stories, and then finally to writing stories; she moves from orality to literacy but I don’t think this is meant to show an evolution – just a transformation.

Transformation versus evolution is a key concept in this discussion. There isn’t a hierarchical separation between art and reality in the indigenous past from which she draws: “In the ethnopoetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined” (88).

Anzaldúa draws upon the history and imagery of the shaman to emphasize the transformative nature of aesthetic production. The experience of storytelling and story writing is collective. Writer/teller and reader/listener all contribute to the creation of the story, and “The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic The writer as shape-changer, is a *nahual*, a shaman” (88). Narration and narrative are transformative and collective, so the incessant narration described in Freud’s melancholy signals the potential for incessant transformation and collectivity.

Rivera’s novel lent itself well to a discussion of the movement between the intelligible and unintelligible. In this vein Cisneros’ *Caramelo, or Puro Cuento* and Islas’ *The Rain God* offer themselves up as ideal texts for the transformative energy of the melancholy narrative. Though separated by 18 years, with *The Rain God* published in 1984, and *Caramelo* published in 2002 the novels possess many similarities. They both

feature a protagonist who is most strongly identified as a grandchild of an overbearing grandmother. That each protagonist is situated so generationally specifically within their family illustrates a strong current of genealogy. Celaya, or Lala, Cisneros' narrator/protagonist and Miguel Chico, Islas' narrator/protagonist are both burdened with their familial histories by their patriarchal grandmothers. Lala, and Miguel Chico represent a failure of traditional familial continuity; Lala as a woman cannot continue the family name and Miguel Chico as a queer, unmarried character will not provide more generations of the Angel family. As such, they have been tasked with continuing their family legacies through narrative. Both novels move in and out of linear time, and play notions of narrative authority. Both novels begin with a photograph that captures a moment of loss. For Lala it is the family photograph from which she is absent, and for Miguel Chico it is a photograph thought to be lost, of him and Mama Chona, holding hands in mid-step across the border. Each narrator is tasked by their respective matriarch to right the misconceptions of the past by telling an accurate story. What they find is that an accurate story is impossible, and that the past will always be misconceived by those outside of it. Ultimately each character finds resolution in the continued transformation and re-telling of the family story.

Both Cisneros and Islas offer novels in which no one ever gets over anything. Physical and psychic wounds do not heal and, in fact, the process of scabbing over or forgetting is tantamount to both actual death and social death. *Caramelo* dramatizes the melancholic need to tell. Freud contends that the melancholic subject will speak endlessly about their melancholia as a way of keeping the wound open; in *Caramelo* this is represented as the need for stories to remain in constant discourse in order for the Reyes

family to survive. It is not important, per the “puro cuento” part of the title that these stories be retold faithfully, but only that they are re-told. There is no grand originating story in *Caramelo* as the multi-vocal text draws upon numerous interpretations of various family events. Even photographs are not to be trusted as they can represent alteration, but this alteration gives way for other stories. This constant re-telling relates back to the constant transition of everything that emerges from the border.

Caramelo in the novel signifies a candy, a colored rebozo and the skin color of Celaya’s disavowed half-sister. Each of these caramelos represents a past that can neither be fully assimilated, nor fully dissimulated from family life. In *The Melancholy of Race* Anne Anlin Cheng discusses the ambivalence of melancholy, and the way the ego incorporates in terms of consumption. She says, “The melancholic eats the lost object—feeds on it, as it were.... By taking in the other-made-ghostly, the melancholic subject fortifies him- or herself and grows rich in impoverishment” (8). The caramelo as a sweet sticky candy is an object to be consumed slowly, to be sucked on and later picked out of one’s teeth. The experience of eating a caramelo is not cut and dry, and can signify a lack of, or delayed digestion. In addition both Celaya and the Awful Grandmother suck on the fringe of the caramelo rebozo. When Celaya first sees Candelaria who she cannot yet recognize as her sister, but who she can remember as having skin like a caramel, she writes,

The girl Candelaria has skin bright as a copper *veinte* centavos coin after you’ve sucked it. Not transparent as an ear like Aunty Light-Skin’s. Not shark-belly pale like Father and the Grandmother. Not the red river-clay color of Mother and her family. Not the coffee-with-too-much-milk color like me, nor the fried-*tortilla* color of the washerwoman Amparo, her mother. Not like anybody. Smooth as peanut butter, deep as burnt-milk candy. (34)

Candelaria's body and the others described in this passage are figured as both digestible and indigestible objects. Later, when Celaya has been forbidden to play with Candelaria she will figure her skin again as sweet, but painful. Cisneros adds, "Her skin a *caramelo*. A color so sweet, it hurts to even look at her" (36). Candelaria is both candy and copper penny. Celaya will consume Candelaria in this moment, but Candelaria like a penny will return. Memories in *Caramelo* are called up through a Proustian moment of consumption that signals both consumption and regurgitation. The journey to Mexico is marked by consumption and elimination; the children gorge themselves on flavored sodas and mark crossing the border by the shift in flavors; the vomit that arises when they get to Mexico is an amalgam of sodas from both sides of the border.

Celaya's relationship with Candelaria will constantly be one of digestion and elimination. This first encounter is marked by misrecognition, but soon Celaya possesses the knowledge to recognize Candelaria as her sister despite the fact that Candelaria has been, quite literally lost for many years. This forever displaced knowledge/recognition of Candelaria marks Celaya's knowledge/recognition of her father. Candelaria, like a bad penny, or like a swallowed penny returns to call the subject of her father into question for Celaya. The latter's primary experience in the text is about loss; she is left out of the family photograph, she loses her long hair, loses the flower Candelaria makes her, loses Candelaria, loses her boyfriend and almost loses her father. The recovery of her father is bound up with the Awful Grandmother's charge that Celaya must relate the stories of the past. If Celaya does not re-tell the past, then her father will be consumed by the ghost of the Awful Grandmother. The Awful Grandmother wants Celaya to tell her story so that

the people she has hurt will forgive her, but although the phantasmal grandmother may move on, Celaya's telling will maintain una herida abierta.

The price of this role of storyteller is that Celaya feels the rip of the scab every time it is pulled back anew. By the end of the novel Celaya's father is alive and her parents celebrate their wedding anniversary. Her father returns her lost braids which have been woven into a hairpiece. Like truly melancholic objects they are distant and unrecognizable. Celaya describes her now defamiliarized hair and says, "The hair is a strange light brown color my hair isn't now. It's been styled so that it curls into a spiral a bit, or maybe that was once my natural wave, who knows (426)?" The braids removed as an excess of childhood come back to Celaya affecting both the memory of her childhood self and the image of her present self. While her father promises that the return of her hair will signal adulthood, he follows the return by assuring her that she will always be his little girl. Of course his assurance is built on their mutual loss of both Celaya's childhood and Candelaria; knowing the object of the loss moves Celaya into adulthood, and further away from her father. The novel has its first closing with Celaya's father making her promise that she will not reveal the stories of her family. She lies, and promises that she won't and this lie becomes one of the fictions necessary for her father to maintain his sense of subjectivity. Celaya develops into a melancholic subject through this loss, and the rash of stories that comprise the final chapter sets forth the buffet of lost objects that she will consume and retell; this ending (one of the endings) bookends the disclaimer at the beginning positioning the story as the narrative remainder of the truth which has been lost.

Cheng's figuration of a melancholic methodology implies knowledge of the circularity of subject formation. The subject if formed through melancholy creates an object-loss and then that melancholic object requires examination. Celaya is begat by a long series of melancholy storytellers, she is their excess and the novel is her excess, and they are all subsequently consumptive and constitutive. For Anzaldúa, writing takes on multiple metaphors; her writing is like weaving, painting and adding flesh to bone. It is text, image, textile and flesh:

I see a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions, though I believe in an ordered, structured universe where all phenomena are interrelated and imbued with spirit. This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. (88)

What I see here is the aesthetic manifestation of the social theory espoused by early woman of color feminist writers, and the writers of *This Bridge Called My Back*. I also think that while melancholy may function pathologically for the singular, Western, Enlightenment subject, it can be psychically as well as aesthetically productive for Chicanas. The incessant narration in Freud is a litany of unresolved and unknowable losses and repudiations of self, but in a mestiza context it can become an unceasing performance; a continually renewed experience since with each new utterance and audience the created experience is different. Anzaldúa describes this kind of constantly performative work as invoked art:

Some works exist forever invoked, always in performance. I'm thinking of totem poles, cave paintings. Invoked art is communal and speaks of everyday life. It is dedicated to the validation of humans; that is, it makes people hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative effects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation. (89)

Anzaldúa draw her living, continual works in contrast with Western ideas of art that view the object as inert unless acted upon by an audience. She is also critical of artistic virtuosity that valorizes the position of a singular creator. Within her framework art is created by a collective, and it is best when it bridges the everyday with the sublime. Art for Anzaldúa emerges from the experiences of the people and is not something reserved for the elite to enjoy in sanctified spaces. This initial critique of and distinction from Western aesthetics gets us to Anzaldúa's larger point about the marriage of art and the self. Chicanas in the borderlands must work to reclaim their ability to create art, and to create themselves.

Anzaldúa proposes: "Let's all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent" (90). This statement questions the trope of the mind/body split, and it asks us to root ourselves in our own indigenous mythology. She is shrugging off the idea of the Cartesian split, and the idea that we should import a sense of antiquity from Western European colonizers. The borderlands are a space of both rupture and confluence, and the mestiza consciousness is formed from these ruptures which we cannot control. I don't think that it is possible to heal the ruptures that have been forced upon us, but I do think that in this chapter Anzaldúa is asking why we don't refuse the fractures when we have the option to refuse them.

For most of us this is an exercise in decolonization, since we have already been influenced and structured by these splits but there is definite opportunity for future freedom. She also notes that Western artists have appropriated indigenous art and assimilated it into the Western canon as "...cubism, surrealism, symbolism" (90). There

is literal and psychic colonization at work in the tradition of Western aesthetics, and Anzaldúa would like to address both,

Ethnocentrism is the tyranny of Western aesthetics. An Indian mask in an American museum is transposed into an alien aesthetic system where what is missing is the presence of power invoked through performance ritual. It has become a conquered thing, a dead ‘thing’ separated from nature and, therefore, its power. (90)

Through appropriation and assimilation, the tradition of Western aesthetics splits indigenous art against itself. This in turn splits the self against itself and supports a damaging binary system.

The “tlilli tlapalli” of Anzaldúa’s title refers to the red and black ink of Aztec writing. According to Anzaldúa, these colors symbolized writing and wisdom, tools that were used to bridge the divine with the dead. Of course Anzaldúa is not the only writer to discuss these symbols, nor is she necessarily a primary source on this matter. Her work does, however, make an important intervention in that she applies these symbols of transformation to the mestiza subject:

They believed that through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry and truth, communication with the Divine could be attained, and topan (that which is above—the gods and spirit world) could be bridged with mictlan (that which is below—the underworld and the region of the dead) (91).

For Anzaldúa, the power in creativity lies in the image. Her writing process includes going within to access the images that play in her unconscious mind: She descends into a quiet space in order to find the images that will lend meaning to her words. Writing becomes a bridge between the conscious and unconscious mind. This differs from some Western conceptions of language that view words as naming the images – or calling the images into linguistic being. Anzaldúa’s relationship to writing and images privileges neither, since they are both necessary to bridge the spans between multiple selves.

The willingness to delve into painful and traumatic imagery, to basically inhabit them in order to understand them, reads very clearly as a melancholic act. Anzaldúa voluntarily feels her pain, and then transforms it with a story. There is not the sense of mourning, or moving past something. Anzaldúa sits in her pain, and turns it into a piece of living art so that her pain is no longer only internal but exists in the world as a living entity. The metaphor of the red and black ink parallels historical imagery of melancholy as an imbalance in black bile, and a disturbance in the blood. Early writers would argue that melancholy was necessary for artistic production. I see two layers of melancholic aesthetic production here; I see that revisiting trauma in a melancholic manner produces art and I see that the act of producing art can be traumatic or painful. Anzaldúa describes her process thusly,

When I don't write the images down for several days or weeks or months, I get physically ill. Because writing invokes images from my unconscious, and because some of the images are residues of trauma which I then have to reconstruct, I get sick when I do write. I can't stomach it, become nauseous, or burn with fever, worsen. But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images, I make "sense" of them, and once that writing heals me, brings me great joy. (92)

Whether a Chicana writer is writing out of an historical injury, or just writing, the act is melancholic because of the conscious willingness to engage in and with the pain. If we look at Anzaldúa's above description with an older description of melancholy, we see that there are striking similarities. Early conceptions of melancholia understood it as a psychic and physical affliction. In "On the Signs of Melancholy's Appearance," from *On Black Bile and Melancholy*, from *Canon of Medicine* (ca. 1170-87 C.E) Avicenna, a Persian medical writer who theorized on the four humors, described melancholy like this,

The first signs of melancholy are bad judgment, fear without cause, quick anger, delight in solitude, shaking, vertigo, inner clamor, tingling, especially in the abdomen... Melancholy's signs, which are in the brain, are especially an

overflowing of thought and a constant melancholic anxiety, and a constant looking at only one thing, and at the earth... There is also an antecedent sleeplessness, meditation, sluggishness in the sun and such things similar to these... (77)

Anzaldúa describes her writing in this manner,

Writing produces anxiety. Looking inside myself and my experience, looking at my conflicts, engenders anxiety in me. Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer—a lot of squirming coming up against all sorts of walls. Or its opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless, floating, state of limbo where I kick my heels, brood, percolate, hibernate and wait for something to happen. (94)

Early melancholy was viewed as a disease of the mind that manifested physical symptoms. Avicenna would have advocated a balancing of bile, blood, and phlegm for optimal health. In a move that shares the Aztec metaphor of mixing the red and the black, Avicenna hypothesizes: “We say above that black bile makes the disease of melancholy. When black bile is mixed with blood, there is happiness and laughter, and strong sadness does not share in it” (78). The metaphors of early melancholy parallel Anzaldúa’s metaphors, the experiences of Anzaldúa’s melancholy and early melancholy share a definite mind body connection. Her refusal to engage in the binary splits of Western subjectivity forge a connection between body and mind, the conscious and the unconscious, and life and art. The mixing of the red and black results in connection and happiness.

One of the early arguments of melancholy as a disease is that it emerges from a troubled mind. The problem with most discussion of melancholy from the pre-Modern to Freud is that they assume that there is one kind of healthy mind, they also assume that unhealthy minds are necessarily fleeting. Existing as a Chicana in the current oppressive and colonized world lends itself to a fitful psyche. As Anzaldúa says, “Living in a state of

psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create” (95). Along these lines, then, for Chicanas the mind is always already in a state of unrest, always already primed for melancholy. Like Avicenna, Anzaldúa’s engagement with melancholy is psychic and corporeal. The unrest of her mind is figured as a wound to the body:

It is like a cactus needle embedded in the flesh. It worries itself deeper and deeper, and I keep aggravating it by poking at it. When it begins to fester I have to do something to put an end to the aggravation, and to figure out why I have it. I get deep down into the place where it’s rooted in my skin and pluck away at it, playing it like a musical instrument –the fingers pressing, making the pain worse before it can get better. (95)

This pain of the needle will happen until Anzaldúa is able to work it out, and then it will happen again when, “...another needle pierces the skin. That’s what writing is for me, an endless cycle of making it worse, making it better, but always making meaning out the experience, whatever it may be” (95).

Like *Caramelo*, *The Rain God* begins with a photograph of mysterious origins. The photograph depicts Miguel Chico, the protagonist of the novel, and Mama Chona, the matriarch of the melancholy Angel family. As a scholar and writer Miguel Chico, like Celaya will be the keeper and teller of family stories and secrets. This photograph taken by a wandering photographer is a lost object, as Islas observes: “No one knows how it found its way back to them, for Miguel Chico’s grandmother never spoke to strangers” (3). The photograph freezes grandmother and grandson as they are moving, capturing “...them in flight from this world to the next” (4). Both of these figures are the authors of the family, Mama Chona as matriarch who directs the family as she lives in El Paso, and Miguel Chico who edits the family from his desk in San Francisco. Islas writes,

He, Miguel Chico, was the family analyst, interested in the past for psychological, not historical reasons. Like Mama Chona, he preferred to ignore the facts in favor

of motives, which were always and endlessly open to question and interpretation. Yet unlike his grandmother and María, Miguel Chico wanted to look at motives and at people from an earthly, rather than otherworldly, point of view. (28)

While she lives, Mama Chona wants only to be removed from her body, and Miguel Chico, despite his bouts with death can never forget his.

The medication given to Miguel Chico for a commonplace bladder infection aggravates an intestinal disorder that he has had since childhood. His new affliction disintegrates his intestines and he is forced to wear colostomy bag for the rest of his life. The bag saves his life and this medical defamiliarization of his body ironically never allows him to forget that he has one. Mama Chona, however, "...denied the existence of all parts of her body below the neck, with the exception of her hands" (164). Whereas Mama Chona can isolate her face and hands and ignore the rest of her physicality, one of Miguel's most necessary and internal systems has been rendered external so he is turned inside out and he can never (until death) be free of his body. Mama Chona's disavowal of her body and Miguel Chico's forced avowal isolate them from human contact. Mama Chona and Miguel Chico are bodies that exist uncomfortably in the liminality between life and death. The action of the novel, set in an unnamed border town, occurs in a geographical border space, and the entire Angel family is the epitome of "*los atravesados*" (25) that Anzaldúa delineates as border inhabitants. These inhabitants are specifically defined as "...the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (25). Both Miguel Chico and Mama Chona function as half-dead: Mama Chona because of her sheer desire to leave this world and live in the next, and Miguel Chico for both his disability and his brushes with death.

Their life cycles parallel the cycle of melancholy subject formation, so that they in their constant state of transition are both the melancholic excesses of their histories, and the melancholic subjects of their own lives.

Miguel Chico's colostomy bag provides the overarching symbol for the melancholic body in the novel. Miguel Chico's body blends both nature and science in a melancholic chimera that connotes the grotesque that is associated with the idea of the chimera. Since Miguel Chico's intestines have failed, he has no means of processing the waste that is harmful to him. The bag is the repository of his literal waste, but it is also literally a bag which cannot be "naturally" disposed. In *Caramelo* the trope of the caramelo signifies a slow consumption of the object loss, which is always regurgitated as a story; Islas takes the image of melancholic consumption a step further by using the colostomy bag to illustrate how for Chicano/a melancholic subjects the past is never simply absorbed and eliminated. Both Celaya and Miguel Chico expel the stories they consume through other stories of their own creation. Storytelling in both of these texts becomes a way to refigure, but not assuage the melancholic wound. In *Caramelo* the inundations of stories are like scabs that are constantly being pulled; in *The Rain God* Miguel Chico's body will never be healed no matter how many stories he expels. In "Sexuality, Repression, and Death" Erlinda Gonzales-Berry draws a sharp contrast between the resentfully embodied Mama Chona, and the deeply sensual characters of the rest of the text. Berry notes that Mama Chona is characterized as anesthetizing her body to any experiences of the flesh, "Perennially donning mourning clothes and protecting her skin from the vital rays of the sun, the proud matriarch instills in her clan a strong sense of Catholic sin, guilt, and repression of all things associated with the body" (16). By

comparison, each of the Angels indulges in various experiences of the flesh. Miguel Chico's unhealthy body, mediates between these poles. His insides are literally on the outside of his body marking him as vulnerable to the world, but the nature of this vulnerability makes unmediated physical contact impossible. The skin around where his colostomy bag attaches to his body is prone to infection, affirming his corporeal vulnerability. Islas describes Miguel Chico's Sunday cleansing ritual thusly:

It was a weekly ritual which took him an hour, or a little more if the skin around the piece of intestine sticking out from his right side was irritated. Without the appliance and the bags he attached to it and changed periodically throughout each day, he knew he could not live. He had forgotten what it was like to be able to hold someone, naked, without having a plastic device between them. (25)

His extreme permeability makes it impossible for him to shield himself from the world and impossible to experience it fully. He can neither wrap himself in black, woolen dresses to protect himself like his grandmother, nor can he freely experience the pleasures of flesh wantonly like his father. Islas's description of Miguel Chico's appliance is bracketed by a remembrance of the past and description of his present life, far away from the desert of his childhood. The bag of waste that must be changed throughout the day is a strident metaphor for his role in digesting his familial past via narration. He can neither deny, nor indulge his body but his awareness of its alterity is constant. This bag, upon which he relies to live, signifies a constant carrying around of that which would normally be disposed.

Furthermore, though it is never specifically avowed, Miguel Chico's half-dead body is also queer. The novel gestures at his queerness by describing his childhood spent playing with dolls, and dressing in women's clothes. In addition, he is unmarried and lives in San Francisco. When he is questioned as to why he isn't married, he blames his

disability, so that both he and the text sidestep a direct avowal of homosexuality. As a queer storyteller though, his re-narration will carry more significance than the romance novels that his mother Juanita reads. Every story that passes through him will be queered, and thus possess the revelatory nature of a queer text. In *Bodies that Matter* Judith Butler draws upon this definition of queer: “As a term for betraying what ought to remain concealed, ‘queering’ works as the exposure within language—an exposure that disrupts the repressive surface of language...” (176). The colostomy bag and the waste within becomes a metaphor for what passes through and is exposed by Miguel Chico.

Tears, as opposed to human waste, as the traditional metaphor for expelling grief accomplish little within the novel. Juanita, Miguel Chico’s mother, cries easily and is always prompting others to cry. While she may be read as the classic long suffering wife, an alternate reading of Juanita would cast her as the person most successfully utilizing her melancholy. Juanita feels her sadness, cries, and broods for a little while but never remains in stasis. She longs for a past that can never be re-created, and she longs for a past that she knows was not what it seems. Miguel Grande, her husband and Miguel Chico’s father, betrays Juanita by sleeping with her best friend Lola. Despite everything that has happened, Juanita misses Lola, and the good times they used to have. She misses the time with Lola and Lola’s dead husband El Compa and she even misses the times when Lola was a part of her life even though she was sleeping with her husband. Juanita makes her peace with these betrayals and moves forward with her life.

At the end of their story Juanita receives a Christmas card from Lola. Lola’s card references a Christmas card from Juanita that is absent from the text of the novel. Lola writes: “Someday I hope I can get everything off my chest. I know it’s going to hurt, but

we've all been hurt so much before, maybe it won't be that bad" (109). The trope of getting things off one's chest is a trope of exposure, a desire to expose the past hurt to literally air it and acknowledge it. While Lola seeks an exchange to resolve her of past wrongs, Juanita has already made her resolutions. The scenes of Juanita alone in her house agonizing over Miguel Grande represent her own passing through the Coatlicue State. She is transformed by her melancholia about her husband.

Though consistently narrated as naïve, Juanita is more realized than any of the men in her family give her credit for. An exchange between Miguel Chico and Juanita finds Miguel Chico commenting on how happy his mother seems this Christmas, as opposed to last Christmas when she found out about the affair:

"It's good to know you're happier now. Remember last Christmas?"

"Don't remind me. That's all over and I am happy now." She stopped setting the table. "Except."

"Except what?"

"I wish El Compa were alive and that he and Lola were here with us. Remember those times?"

"Oh Mother, you are impossible. Didn't you ever feel like telling her to go to hell?"

"No."

"You're too good to be true." (110)

Juanita feigns not to remember what her card to Juanita said, and Lola's card expresses the desire to talk about what has occurred. Miguel Chico reads his mother's desire for the past as nostalgia, as a simple repression of bad times and desire to avoid pain. Unlike most of the characters in the novel, Juanita experiences the fullness of losses and is transformed by them. Their inability to navigate melancholy in such a manner renders her ability unreadable. It is also notable that *Islas* privileges the loss of female friendship in

Juanita's sadness. Juanita chooses her husband over her friendship with Lola, as such she is an agent in her loss. This agency carries through into how she will process the past.

While the text is riddled with loss from suicide to natural deaths, the primary un-avowable loss of the text is the death of Uncle Felix, who is murdered by a young soldier he was trying to pick up in a bar. While the family can mourn Felix's death in terms of him as their son, brother, father and uncle, they cannot avow the role that his homosexuality played in his murder. The investigating policeman deters the family from seeking justice, threatening them with the scandal of outing Felix. Only Felix's daughter is outraged at the lack of justice. The family will not fully mourn Felix and so they can never know fully what they have lost in losing him. *Islas* offers Felix's death through multiple lenses but only the reader is ever aware, through the narration of Miguel Chico, of the full events leading up to his violent and tragic end. The task of mourning Felix is left to Miguel Chico who has picked up the mantle of disavowed queerness in the Angel family.

It is in the final chapter of the text that Miguel Chico is charged with the task of the melancholy storyteller. He awakes from a dream of a monster that holds him and speaks a litany of chiasmic qualities. This litany recalls the ambivalence of melancholy and the simultaneous holding onto and repudiation of that which accompanies the object loss. Indeed the dream ends with Miguel Chico taking hold of the monster and leaping into the abyss. He wakes and writes down the dream:

He needed very much to make peace with his dead, to prepare a feast for them so that they would stop haunting him. He would feed them words and make his candied skulls out of paper. He looked once again, at that old photograph of himself and Mama Chona. The white daises in her hat no longer frightened him; now that she was gone, the child in the picture held only a ghost by the hand and was free to tell the family secrets. (160)

Miguel's Chico's writing here is cast as an offering to the dead, and this passage blends storytelling with Mexican practices of honoring the dead by keeping them always with the living. As the half-dead body of the text, Miguel Chico is always linked to the past, and as the queer body his task is to narrate and expose the secrets of the past. This process is without end and without beginning. Every generation of Angels produces a melancholic storyteller who resumes narrating the infinity of motives that Miguel Chico describes early in the novel. In "Ideological Discourses in Arturo Islas' *The Rain God*," Rosaura Sánchez explains that she reads the novel as "...a literary text made up of a multiplicity of discourses which dialogue with past and present signifying practices in society while at the same time providing a textualization of extradiscursive social practices" (Loc 2221). The text is multi-voiced, and while Miguel Chico may be the ultimate narrator, we find him narrating events that he could have no idea about, like Felix's death. By highlighting the multiplicity of the discourses in the text Sánchez effectively notes that there is no central discourse. In fact, Miguel Chico, as one in a line of a melancholy family scribes, is emblematic of the continuity of the story but not the individual. The first Miguel Angel, the first son of Mama Chona, who dies tragically and suddenly, leaves a poem:

Rivers, rivulets, fountains and waters flow,
but never return to their joyful beginnings;
anxiously they hasten on to the vast realms
of the Rain God. (162)

The poem dramatizes a lack of origins for the great rivers which symbolize the flow of story through different generations. The rivers and stories move into the unknown realms

of the eponymous Rain God. As a child, Felix would dance in the rain, and throughout the text Felix symbolizes the Rain God and is accompanied by the smell of fresh rain. This imagery is reinforced by his dislike of the dry desert dust, and the emphasis on dryness, and dirt in his death scene. As the persistent and un-avowable loss, Felix/Rain God will exist in perpetuity, and the final line of the poem reads: “Nothing recalls them but the written page” (162). When Mama Chona dies, it is Felix who comes to receive her, taking her so that she will also occupy the position of the lost object that must be recovered through narration.

Conclusion

Freud’s delineation of mourning as productive and melancholy as pathological elides the damage that the trope of healing has visited upon racialized subjects. Furthermore, defining melancholy as pathological damages the psychic potential of the Chicana/o whose subjectivity is built upon loss. A subject model of healing implies a timeline for “getting over” historical grievances that is static and does not allow for that important infinity of motives that is constantly shifting and refiguring itself.

Cheng’s reworking of melancholy and loss as sites of production rescue racialized subjects from the excess of dominant white melancholia. Both *Caramelo* and *The Rain God* dramatize Chicana/o melancholia through melancholic characters. For these novels, storytelling is the function of the melancholic that also maintains and nurtures history. Cisneros and Islas offer a view of Chicana/o history that is distinctly melancholic and rooted in the Chicana/o body. While Chicana/o history and literary production necessarily draw and rely upon mainstream influences and conventions, it is at the same time always striving to reinvent and differentiate itself from the oppression of the mainstream. Both

Caramelo and *The Rain God* offer narrators who receive a charge to tell their stories and while these narrators may, for the reader, signal the beginning of the story they are really adding their bend to the figurative river of Islas's poem. Their form of melancholic storytelling will inevitably create melancholic excess outside of their text, but using Cheng's methodology we have a means for examining and acknowledging that excess.

In *Caramelo*, Sandra Cisneros crafts a protagonist who struggles with singular subjectivity, until she accepts that she is forged by the collective identities of her family and thus, is herself a collective self. By situating Celaya as a melancholy narrator, Cisneros offers a text that illustrates how mestiza melancholy and the multiple Chicana self are inextricably linked. Celaya shifts identities as she transitions out of girlhood, but her role of narrator/keeper of stories necessitates a shift in subjectivity. The text moves from a distinct first-person narration to the cacophony of multivocal stories. In other words, Celaya acts as bridge between the story collective and the collective of the reading public. Her engagement with the past and with story shifts her into a more collective sense of self.

In "Arturo Islas' *The Rain God*: An Alternative Tradition," Marta E Sánchez discusses the narrative interventions made by Islas' groundbreaking, melancholy text. She identifies how Islas disrupts traditional conceptions of genre by offering a novel that challenges the bounds of ethnography, autobiography, and even the novel itself. Such a text calls for a narrator who is self-aware: "This self-conscious feature of a narrator who calls attention to himself as both subject and object opens up new possibilities for questioning traditional hierarchal relationships with both a Mexican-Chicano culture and a 'dominant' literary tradition" (287). Like Celaya, Miguel Chico represents a new kind

of subjectivity that challenges traditional western notions and makes productive use of melancholy.

One of Anzaldúa's final points on writing is that it is an act of self-creation.

Anzaldúa explains,

When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body, it is this learning to live with La Coatlicue that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else. (95)

For Chicana/os melancholy is a way to use the losses of the past to transform the self in the present. By reading Freud's discussion of melancholy with Anzaldúa's discussion of mestiza consciousness and artistic production we see that conceptually melancholy is well-woven into Chicana sensibility. Tomás Rivera, Sandra Cisneros, and Arturo Islas offer stories and characters who illustrate the multiple facets of Chicana/o melancholy. Most importantly melancholy is revealed as an important means to subjectivity.

Positioning subjects as narrators, as agents in their own stories decenters ideas of traditional narratives, and traditionally singular subjects. Subjectivity takes many forms, and I have sought to contextualize Anzaldúa's discussion of the mestiza/o subject through a larger genealogy of women of color feminism, early Chicana feminism, and literary analysis. In "The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism," Norma Alarcón traces the creation of Chicana subject.

The importance and influence of *This Bridge Called My Back* extends across multiple disciplinary positions. The text offers a critical redress of historical and theoretical wrongs, and it articulates potential frameworks for more productive feminist movements. It also articulates a new woman of color subjectivity, born out of melancholy

and defined by material reality and intersectionality. In this essay Alarcón looks back on the “Subject(s)” forged in *This Bridge*:

As speaking subjects of a new discursive formation, many of Bridge’s writers were aware of the displacement of their subjectivity across a multiplicity of discourses: feminist/lesbian, nationalist, racial, socioeconomic, historical, etc. The peculiarity of their displacement implies a multiplicity of positions from which they are driven to grasp or understand themselves and their relations with the real, in the Althusserian sense of the word. (356)

Alarcón notes that subject positions drawn across such varied axes resulted in complicated and even contradictory identity positions. The result of examining difference between various women was to find that differences also resided inside a singular self; a discovery that complicated the notion of a singular self. Alarcón contextualizes Bridge within the white feminist theory that followed its publication. She notes that while woman of color feminism seeks to grapple with this internal alterity created by the contradictions of our identity, white feminism flattens out difference in favor of adherence to the valorized enlightenment individual subject. This flattening is notable within their own context, but it also stands out in the white feminist willingness to reference the writing in *Bridge* while not appearing to learn any of its lessons.

Indeed, *Bridge* presents an interesting primer on woman color of subjectivity, via theoretical essays and creative writing. Alarcón points out that despite how frequently it is referenced the ideal subject of feminist literature remains a traditional western individual:

Thus, the most popular subject of Anglo-American feminism is an autonomous, self-making, self-determining subject who first proceeds according to the logic of identification with regard to the subject of consciousness, a notion usually viewed as the purview of man, but now claimed for women. Believing that in this respect she is the same as man, she now claims the right to pursue her own identity, to name herself, to pursue self-knowledge.... (357)

It is clear that woman of color feminism is not moored to the concept of a singular equality with man. Alarcón's plural/singular articulation of "Subject(s)" illustrates that the theoretical subjects are indeed both singular and multiple and, thus in comparison with the white feminist subject something completely different.

Chapter 3 – Forgetting the Alamo: Expanding the Origin Story

“There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories—many stories.”

Emma Pérez (xv)

“I write fiction not only because I have a passion for literature, but also because I am frustrated by history’s texts and archives. I’ve always wanted to find in the archives a queer vaquero from the mid-nineteenth century whose adventures include fighting Anglo squatters and seducing willing señoritas.”

Emma Pérez, “Queering the Borderlands: The Challenge of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard.”

Emma Pérez’s 2009 novel *Forgetting the Alamo, or Blood Memory* offers a melancholy queer feminist take on the traditional border hero/revenge story. It embodies the type of decolonial history that Pérez theorizes in *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* and complicates our notions of genre and borderlands history. We know from Freud that the melancholic subject is given to endless narrative and is pre-disposed to endlessly re-telling the wrongs, perceived or actual, that have been perpetuated against them. Rather than viewing this constant re-narration as pathological or pointlessly narcissistic, as Freud does, we should understand that re-telling is important because it can result in re-signification of old events. Melancholic re-telling should not be misunderstood as an attempt to correct past wrongs; the re-telling is intended to highlight the wound and narrate the pain. This melancholic re-telling highlights the importance of history in Chicana/o literature. In his introduction to *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* Ramón Saldívar explains,

For the Chicano narrative, history is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subject of its discourse. History cannot be conceived as the

mere “background” or “context” for this literature; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and content of the literature. (5)

For Saldívar, Chicana/o literature is a necessary tool in recovering a contested and erased past. Yet the lack of adequate Chicana/o history and the erasure of Chicana/o presence from the history and literature of the American West are not the only losses that Chicana/o narrative must contend with. Indeed, Chicana feminist writers and Chicana lesbian feminist writers have been looking back in order to recover their own erased or ignored presence within Chicano history. In *With a Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*, Catrióna Rueda Esquibel discusses how Chicana feminist writers have used fiction to write what she calls “...histories of the unnameable: lesbians in Chicana/o communities” (144). She uses as her examples Gloria Anzaldúa’s lesbian corrido “La historia de una marimacho,” Jo Carrillo’s fictional autobiography of “Maria Littlebear,” and Rocky Gámez’s homage to pulp narratives “A Baby for Adela.” For Esquibel, these texts function to imagine and narrate a Chicana/o past where lesbians exist instead of being ignored, or erased. Thus, these texts effectively queer both the forms that they use and the history they narrate. Esquibel notes,

Just as many other Chicana/o writers have used their fiction to show the ways in which the history of Mexicans in the United States has been systematically erased from the history of the American West, these Chicana writers used the corrido, oral history, and pulp fiction to represent Chicano/a history as queer and to attempt to show Chicana lesbians in their sexed/raced positions in the U.S. Southwest. These tales, which on the surface appear quite simple, are actually playing on the notion of lo popular to create popular histories, histories of the people, to argue that marimachas, maricones, and tortilleras are part of Chicana culture and history. (144)

In *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* Emma Pérez positions herself thusly, “I have no intention of offering conclusive stories about Chicanas and our

past, a past that crosses geographic terrains and political borders. I am more concerned with taking the ‘his’ out of the ‘story,’ that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women’s experience is negated (xiv).” So it is clear that history, as Saldívar argues, is the subtext for Chicana/o narratives but Pérez and Esquibel complicate and deepen that sense of history by being more inclusive. They also illustrate the different ways in which history can be read. If Saldívar and other critics look back and do not see women or queer people in the archive this does not mean that women and queer people did not exist; it means that critics who were not looking for them cannot see them.

By re-telling the story of Texas after the Alamo and crafting the border hero as a queer woman, Emma Pérez re-visits two sites of Chicana pain. The first site is, of course, the conquest and inevitable annexation of Texas. The second is the excision of queer Chicana experience from early understandings of border life. Micaela, the protagonist of the novel, is an outlaw on multiple frontiers and hers is a story that we do not know. This melancholic re-telling of post-revolutionary Texas gestures toward old wounds, but ultimately results in a re-signification of both the border, and the border hero. If one looks back, as Pérez has, to the gaps and the silences to find where subaltern subjects have been lost and silenced, then the cry upon finding these spaces is a “Eureka!” and melancholy has functioned to aid in the finding of a story that needs to be told. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Pérez’s text queers both the history and genres upon which it draws. I contend that her queer vaquera hero challenges the lone, male, pistol-wielding figure that has long been at the center of some Chicana/o literature, and challenges the manner in which the corrido has been positioned as an origin of Chicana/o literature. It is possible that Pérez subverts the themes of the traditional corrido and offers

up a communal hero that looks more like herself. The archetypal figure of the corrido hero “with his pistol in his hand” is replaced with a queer woman who learns to eschew violence and inhabits the border as a conscious mestiza.

Why the emphasis on narrative?

The image of Freud’s melancholy narrator is not only important because of what they are saying, but that they strive to say it. The type of narrative that they offer, which I argue is important in terms of history, is valuable but the act of narration is important in and of itself. As Hayden White says in “The Value of Narrativity and the Representation of Reality,”

To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report of the way things really happened, that narrativity could appear problematical only in a culture in which it was absent—absent or, as in some domains of contemporary Western intellectual and artistic culture, programmatically refused. (1)

So the melancholic incessant narration can be viewed as an incessant assertion of humanity. White not only alerts us to the prevalence of narrative, but his last sentence acknowledges that despite their encompassing humanity some narratives are refused, and/or ignored. This is the case with Chicana/o narratives in general, and with queer Chicana/o narratives in particular. The impulse to narrate is universal, and narrativity only becomes problematic when the narrative in question is refused. Mainstream narratives of US literary history, the history of the US as a narrativized nation benefit from the refusal of Chicana/o narrative, because it introduces a particular alterity which challenges the coherence of the US origin story. In turn, the introduction of queer

Chicana/o narratives challenge the coherence of Chicano nationalism and thus poses a problem. It is important to understand that queer narratives are nothing new in any literature. Perhaps the terminology is contemporary, but as queer people have always existed so have their narratives. Freud's derision of the melancholic narrative shows that it poses a threat to the master narrative of a coherent self.

In Chicano literature the idealized coherent self is a young man on a quest for identity. This figure closely mirrors the figure of the idealized Movement Chicano. In the desire to create a coherent self and movement, Chicanos duplicated the patriarchy of the Anglo society they were countering. In *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices* Alvina E. Quintana contextualizes the issue thusly:

The Chicano power movement's failure to critically examine the patriarchal consciousness of the dominant system led to internal power disputes and to the creation of a cultural nationalism that duplicated the very hierarchical structure it opposed. Chicana women were thus quickly transformed into the subordinate class within Chicano nationalism. (19)

Quintana places the Chicana at odds with both the Chicano nationalist desire for a coherent self and the Anglo feminist desire for a coherent self. Neither movement left space for the specific presence of the Chicana whose identity relies on intersectional attention to race, class, gender and sexuality. Quintana describes this predicament this way:

Like other "women of color," Chicanas were subordinated and contained by the rhetoric of oppositional movements. On one side they were restrained by the traditional masculine interpretation of their respective cultures and on the other by the dreams and aspirations of a feminist utopian vision that allowed no space for cultural, racial, or, for that matter, class differences among women. (20)

In "Narration in the Psychoanalytic Dialogue," Roy Schafer offers a narrative analysis of Freud's psychoanalytic theories. Schafer posits that the process of psychoanalysis is itself

a narrative process which is commonly viewed as empirical science. Freud established a tradition within which psychoanalysis is understood as an essentialist and positivist natural science. One need not be bound by this scientific commitment, however; the individual and general accounts and interpretations Freud gave of his case materials can be read another way.

This other way that Shafer hints at is of course narrative. Freud's case studies can be understood as narratives highly influenced by other narratives. Shafer continues:

In this reading, psychoanalysis is an interpretative discipline whose practitioners aim to develop a particular kind of systemic account of human action. We can say, then, either that Freud was developing a set of principles for participating in, understanding, and explaining the dialogue between psychoanalyst and analysand or that he was establishing a set of codes to generate psychoanalytic meaning, recognizing this meaning in each instance to be one of a number of kinds of meaning that might be generalized. (25)

By Schafer's reading the conversation between analyst and analysand, or the person being analyzed, constitutes a narrative that is up for multiple interpretations. Freud may have intended to use these case studies as foundations for empirical data, but they are ultimately narratives subject to interpretation. He may have used them to generate meaning about psychology, but they can be used to generate meaning about a myriad of other things. Furthermore, the structuring influence of the analyst is not immune from interpretation. Both analyst and analysand are contributing to, and a part of a narrative. So Freud's psychoanalytic theories can be subjected to narrative analysis. We can examine his theory on melancholia in terms of the narrative of melancholia. By Schafer's reading, Freud adheres to a collection of primary narratives:

One of his primary narrative structures begins with the infant and young child as a beast, otherwise known as the id, and ends with the beast domesticated, tamed by frustration in the course of development in a civilization hostile to its nature. Even though this taming leaves each person with two regulatory structures, the ego and the super ego, the protagonist remains in part a beast, the carrier of the indestructible id. (26)

This is the model of the narrative of the coherent self. The ego and superego regulate the id in a clear psychic hierarchy. All roads in Freud's psychoanalytic narrative lead to successful regulation and failure to achieve this constitutes a pathological behavior. That the melancholic refuses to properly mourn and move forward demonstrates their refusal to adhere to the master narrative. The melancholic narrative is a narrative of psychic deviance. Shafer continues,

The filling in of this narrative structure tells of a lifelong transition: if the innate potential for symbolization is there, and if all goes well, one moves from a condition of frightened and irrational helplessness, lack of self-definition, and domination by fluid or mobile instinctual drives toward a condition of stability, mastery, adaptability, self-definition, rationality, and security.

Freud's master narrative is one of coherence, one of forward moving psychic development. This desire for coherence is seen across many varieties of narrative in the aforementioned narratives of the US as a nation, and in the narrative of Chicano nationalism. The symbol of the coherent psyche can be mapped onto the idea of a coherent nation. As narratives go, this narrative that relies on wholeness and the taming of an internal beast is neither unique in general, nor unique to Freud. It is one of the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. If to narrate is to be human, then this is one of the stories of our humanity, and following White, only problematic when some element of the narrative is refused. When something happens to disturb the forward motion of Freud's narrative of psychic coherence, it is not the narrative that must change but the

disturbance that must be excised. Schafer explains that, "If all does not go well, the inadequately tamed beast must be accommodated by the formation of pathological structures, such as symptoms and perversions (27)." Melancholy is a pathology formed from an inadequately tamed beast, it is evidence of something gone awry and the melancholic is thus a psychic deviant. Their narrative is called into question, and with their narrative, their humanity. Quintana places Chicana writers between two competing oppositions and argues that this position necessitates negotiation which in turn makes room for

...new aesthetic opportunities to support or refute either or both of these two oppositional sources and thereby join other feminist activists not only in deconstructing oppressive values but in laying out alternative perspective(s) that represent their social quandary. Gender complicates as it informs a Chicana multiple subjectivity that in turn dramatizes and recasts any previous understanding of cultural *mestizaje*. (21)

So Chicana narrative emerges from the need to negotiate between multiple discourses that would seek to erase Chicana experience altogether. It is those erasures, those moments of pain, however, that spur Chicana narrative to create something new. The narrative is propelled by melancholy and the camps that would deny Chicanas the opportunity for narrative also deny the acknowledgement of their humanity. Chicana narrative is key to articulating Chicana humanity. Quintana contends that,

Like ethnographers, Chicana writers focus on microcosms within a culture, unpacking rituals in the context of inherited symbolic and social structures of subjugation. They use their own writing for self-analysis; their cultural self-ethnographies or self-representations provide an indispensable means for deconstructing Chicana cultural experience(s), because they eliminate the possibility of outside misinterpretations of cultural symbolic systems and allow the writer to record an intimate social discourse regarding her ambivalence around ethnicity and gender. This process permits marginal individuals to become the subjects of their discourse. (34)

By narrating their own experiences Chicanas engage in a subjectifying process. Through their melancholic narration they are able to articulate themselves as subjects instead of figures under erasure.

The imagery of the untamed psychic beast appears in Anzaldúa's theories of the Chicana self. Thinking of Freud in terms of narrative, begs the question: what if we told different narratives about our selves and our psyches? What could our narratives encompass if they didn't need to result in a limited sense of coherence? In many ways, Pérez's creation of Micaela answers this question. When we expand our origin stories, we make room for those narratives which have been previously refused. Micaela could not be found in the archives, because as a queer woman of color, her story would be triply ignored, so Pérez recovers her, gives her a narrative, and gives her back the humanity that had been previously denied.

Beyond simply being a marker of humanity narrative is the means by which we can communicate our experience to others. White explains:

...narrative may well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture specific. (1)

Narrative offers an expansive communicability and a means of translating experience across the borders and boundaries of self and nation. If previously we can understand the incessant melancholic's narration as an incessant articulation of humanity, then we can also understand it as an incessant desire to communicate, and to translate a singular experience into shared knowledge.

In “The Value of Narrativity” White turns to the tension between historical and non-historical discourse, asking whether history should be understood as a narrative.

There is a difference between reporting events that have happened, and arranging these events into a story. White adds:

And their example permits us to distinguish between a historical discourse that narrates on the one side, and a discourse that narrativizes on the other; between a discourse that openly adopts a perspective that looks out on the world and reports it and a discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story. (2-3)

Pérez’s creation of Micaela, as a figure who didn’t exist in the official record, mediates the tension between re-telling historical events as they happened and re-telling them as a story. If Pérez were to simply relate the official record, Micaela’s story may never come to light. Pérez specifically calls Micaela into being and tells her story because it was left out. White explains that for the sake of objectivity true events must simply exist. The tension between narrating and narrativizing comes into play when we attempt to give items of historical record a story. Yet, we are not content with a simple record. A basic accounting of events tells us nothing of the past; all history must be narrativized in order to have real meaning, and in order to be effectively communicated to members of future generations, or as White states,

What is involved, then, in that finding of the ‘true story,’ that discovery of the ‘real story’ within or behind the events that come to us in the chaotic form of ‘historical records’? What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified, by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story? In the enigma of this wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse, in general, an intimation of the psychological impulse behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity. (4)

We are, essentially, caught between two competing and complementary impulses: our desire for an accurate, objective account of the past and our desire for a story. It would seem that what we want from our historical accounts is a completely accurate story, something that provides an unassailable truth, which is impossible. Much like the desire for a coherent self, the desire for an objectively true narrative is ultimately a desire for the impossible. The impossibility of these desires to be fulfilled is itself melancholic, especially for those who don't acknowledge that such objective coherence is an impossible goal.

In *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*, Ramón Saldívar explores the world of Chicano narrative. Using the concept of the dialectic, Saldívar roots his discussion of narrative in our history of contact, conflict, and resistance. For him narrative is and has been an important strategy of resistance for the Chicana/o community. He writes,

The language of narrative, especially that of Chicano narrative in its place of difference from and resistance to American cultural norms, can be grasped as a strategy to enable readers to understand their real conditions of existence in postindustrial twentieth-century America. (5)

The resistance here is manifold. The language of Chicana/o narrative is resistant because it is different, potentially multilingual, and potentially non-standard. The story that the narratives tell are resistant because they may go against the traditionally sanctioned historical record revealing a historical truth long buried that counters our national stories. They may counter stereotypes and they may narrate stories of resistance. Taken with my previous discussion, if narration is an expression of humanity, then the expression of Chicana/o humanity may be read as always disruptive to the mainstream narrative. It is

constantly resistant because it constantly asserts our complex humanity in the face of a homogenizing national narrative. The strategy for navigating the tension between the homogenizing national narrative and Chicana/o narrative is what Saldívar terms the ‘dialects of difference’ (5). Of course, the dialectic relies on negation and conflict in order to find a synthesis. This differs from the confluence of meaning to be found in the principle of the dialogical, and in the energy of the decolonial, neither of which seeks resolution through synthesis. Yet, I agree with how Saldívar identifies a tension between competing narratives. The incessant narration of the melancholic mediates this tension, and the experience of melancholy provides a strategy for negotiating it.

Américo Paredes is generally credited with identifying the corrido as the originary form of Chicano narrative. It emerges in a region that makes sense: it addresses regionally and historically specific conflicts, it redresses stereotypes, and it narrates physical resistance to colonizing forces. It essentially meets all of the established criteria for Chicano narrative. Saldívar mobilizes Paredes’ criticism as the historical foundation for Chicano narrative being rooted in conflict and resistance. Actually, it is Paredes’ text that is our originary text, by using the narrative of the corrido to narrativize Chicano literary history in the Southwest. If we think along with White, then the corrido becomes an example of a text that exists in the official archive, that is, official in terms of the Chicano archive, which is complicated by its lack of legitimacy within the larger Anglo archive. So, Paredes takes an historical text and builds a theory of resistance via narrative. He narrativizes early border experience as resistance and hence we accept that our literary origins are inherently resistant vis- á-vis border conflict. The consequences of

this are that we forget how to look for other forms of resistance, as other experiences are erased in favor of upholding a general nationalistic origin story.

The Novel as Corrido, the Corrido as Novelistic

In the Bakhtinian sense, the corrido is much like the novel, an open-ended form of multiple voices interacting with each other in a dialogic process, so the appropriation and application of the corrido as a paradigmatic master narrative of contemporary Chicano literature strategically silences the corrido's multi-voicedness to emphasize the monologic script of social opposition between Anglo and Chicano culture.
Jesse Alemán, "Chicano Novelistic Discourse: Dialogizing the Corrido Critical Paradigm"

Any discussion of the corrido in Chicana/o literature necessitates a return to the roots of both the literature and the birth of Chicana/o literary criticism in the U.S. academy. The border corrido emerged out a period of conflict in the contested area that would later become Texas. The border corrido was the aesthetic representation of cultural resistance during the mid-late nineteenth century in the U.S. Corridos have maintained popularity and continue to be produced in border areas and in Greater Mexico. Corridos were denigrated by early anthropologists and other scholars as being uncomplicated examples of an oral folk tradition. Américo Paredes' 1958 monograph "*With a Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero*" sought to reclaim the corrido as more than just regional folk production. His work examined the corrido as a dramatization of widespread border conflict that elevated both the conflict and the form to a level of national and academic significance. His scholarship was an early challenge to the acceptance of American Exceptionalism within American Studies.

Paredes' work gave rise to the corrido critical paradigm. According to Jesse Alemán in "Chicano Novelistic Discourse: Dialogizing the Corrido Critical Paradigm," "This form of Chicano criticism views the corrido as the Ur-narrative of contemporary

Chicano literary production” (49). Therefore, the corrido becomes the ideological form from which all Chicana/o writing emerges, thus rooting all Chicana/o literary production within a tradition of border conflict, conflict with Anglos and then resistance to said conflict. As Alemán contends,

Because most critics build their paradigm from Paredes’s study, they argue that the main concern of contemporary Chicano literature should be the description of social antagonism between Chicano and Anglo culture, making the underlying politics of the corrido critical paradigm a method of literary analysis that views social resistance as the defining characteristic of Chicano literary production. (50)

This is not to place judgment on the efficacy or value of the corrido critical paradigm. My intention in using Alemán’s discussion follows his ultimate argument that this critical paradigm is somewhat limiting. As it reads, the paradigm structures both the behavior of the narrative and the hero within it. Alemán argues that it is not the corrido which is limiting, but the way in which scholars have interpreted and marshaled the corrido within Chicana/o literary studies.

Alemán uses M.M. Bakhtin to reposition the corrido within a novelistic framework. In both “Epic and the Novel” and “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin discusses the importance of the novel as genre he states, “The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensibly and rapidly, reality itself in the process of unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. (7)” For Bakhtin the novel is the ideal form with which to represent and dramatize life. The novel as a form, with its ability to encompass multiple languages and ideas, is more reflective of actual reality. Counter to the idea of the novel is the concept of the epic. Where the novel is open and ever

evolving, the epic is closed, generically predetermined, and concerned with representing an absolute past. Bakhtin elucidates:

The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic worldview, 'beginning,' 'first,' 'founder,' 'ancestor,' 'that which occurred earlier' and so forth are not merely temporal categories but valorized temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree. (15)

Bakhtin is concerned with the ability for language in general, and literature in particular to be sites that are hospitable to multiple and un-fixed meanings. He describes heteroglossia as "...the primacy of context over text. (428)" Words mean different things in different situations; the conditions of an utterance affect the meaning of the utterance and "...all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve" (428). Seeking a formal resolution of meaning, while perhaps providing comfort or providing ease of use, is actually a process in limiting that meaning. Heteroglossia is, therefore, a threat to formalized systems of meaning because it is about the proliferation of meaning.

To bring this back to the corrido and to Chicana/o literature, Alemán argues that by its very nature the corrido critical paradigm seeks to root Chicana/o literature in an absolute past. While this root may appear to offer historical legitimacy to Chicana/o writing, it actually functions as a confine that Alemán argues runs counter to the inherently heteroglot nature of Chicana/o literature and discourse:

Numerous critics have already pointed out how Chicano literature straddles the borderlines of two national languages as it incorporates and combines each to create a hybrid discourse that registers the liminal cultural position Chicanos occupy between both linguistic world views. (Alemán, 49)

So Chicana/o literature always/already possesses hybrid linguistic and world views regardless of the genre, and confining Chicana/a literature to an absolute past is limiting

because it impedes the confluence of all this multiplicity. While critiquing an absolute past may seem ahistorical, it is really about allowing the past to exist in a constant conversation with the present. It is an insistence of movement which is thematically parallel to Emma Pérez's concept of the decolonial imaginary. The corrido critical paradigm functions as a centralizing, or as Bakhtin would say, centripetal, force. This puts the corrido critical paradigm at odds with the concepts of the borderlands and border thinking, which function as de-centralizing, or centrifugal force. The novel as heteroglot is a decentralizing force. When we root Chicana/o literature in borderland subjectivity a la Anzaldúa, rather than the corrido critical paradigm, Chicana/o literature becomes a decentralizing force.

The Chicana/o novel, then, should be superlatively decentralizing. That the novel is heteroglot means that many different voices and forces can come into conversation within the novel. Bakhtin identifies this as novelistic discourse. Alemán explains that "...novelistic discourse registers the interaction of multiple voices as they cross each other's social boundaries in a process of 'interanimation' that highlights the ideological assumptions behind each discourse" (51). So, if we understand that the hybrid nature of Chicana/o literary discourse renders it always/already novelistic, then understanding the corrido as novelistic allows for the corrido to function as a decentralizing force in terms of form and content. So instead of being just resistant, the corrido is also disruptive. When freed from its position as master narrative of Chicana/o literature, then the entire field of Chicana/o literature becomes a decentralizing force in the face of canonized and canonical bodies of literature.

By returning to the epigraph with which I began this section, it is advantageous to understand the corrido as novelistic. In order to understand it as such it must be freed from its position as originary Chicana/o literature. Alemán's essay also goes on to discuss the ways in which the corrido is problematic in terms of gender. Understanding the corrido as novelistic and not as part of an absolute Chicano past allows for the corrido to be re-oriented. The corrido, despite criticism that it is solely a masculine genre, is not inherently sexist and can be redeployed toward newer and more progressive ends, like what Pérez does with *Forgetting the Alamo*. By understanding the corrido as novelistic we can read Pérez's novel as a corrido departure text. As such we can examine how a queer female border hero changes what we've known about corridos, and what the corrido changes about Chicana feminism.

While Alemán's piece offers a more expansive view of the corrido that can be used to incorporate gender and sexuality, it does not provide a specific feminist analysis. For a feminist reading of the corrido I turn to María Herrera-Sobek's book, *The Mexican Corrido: A Feminist Analysis*. In this text Herrera-Sobek uses Jungian archetypal theory to identify five primary archetypes that examine the roles of women in corridos.

Female Archetypes

Paredes's seminal study gives us the central image of the highly masculine hero "with a pistol in his hand." Both the hero and his phallic pistol inscribe the corrido within a patriarchal structure that excludes and limits the participation of women. Though emblematic of a specific time, this patriarchy is problematic and when taken with the influence of the corrido critical paradigm, it establishes a decidedly misogynist origin

story for Chicano literature. It is not simply that the corrido is male centered that makes it problematic, it is that the construction of the corrido hero as a specifically male heterosexual figure that is exclusionary. We should not, however, be dismissive of the corrido because of its misogyny, because texts have meaning in context and much of the context of the corrido has been patriarchal. There is still a lot within the corrido that can be re-read in terms of gender and sexuality. Both melancholy and the decolonial offers ways in which we, as critical readers, can look back and seek out the interstitial voices that have been silenced by a tradition of patriarchal literary criticism. Herrera-Sobek writes,

...male authors have incorporated mostly masculine-oriented themes and a strongly patriarchal ideology. Nevertheless, there is nothing inherently male in the corrido, or in its structure, which can and does feature female protagonists. It is only a fact of history, not of necessity, that the majority of corridos have been written by males (xvii.)

This sentiment is emblematic of Herrera-Sobek's overall theoretical trajectory and it illustrates my second epigraph from Pérez. Just because Pérez could not find an actual Micaela in archive does not mean that Micaela was not a possibility. This is an example of the imaginative and germinating potential of melancholy. Looking back, the absence of a queer female corrido hero is painful but by revisiting the site of that wound Pérez is able to find a Micaela and thus create a present presence out of an absent presence. It is painful to be part of a community, but to look back into its history and not see even a trace of yourself. That the voices and experiences of queer and female subjects haven't always been included in what we consider the Chicano archive is painful.

By arguing that the corrido is not inherently male, or naturally male, Herrera-Sobek makes space for the gendering and queering of the corrido. She uses feminist archetypal criticism which she defines as

... a type of analysis that views archetypes as recurrent patterns in art, literature, film, songs, and other artistic endeavors depending on historical, political, and social forces for their formation. This theoretical construct views the archetypal image as malleable entities and not as solidified images encased in the psyche at birth. (xiii)

The female and male archetypes present in corridos emerge out of a specific social context. Understanding these archetypes as social constructs makes them malleable; they can be changed, they can be re-read and they need not be understood as limiting representations from an epic, unchangeable past.

Herrera-Sobek identifies five main female archetypes in the corrido: the Good Mother, the Terrible Mother, the Mother Goddess, the Lover, and the Soldier. Most of these archetypes fill ancillary roles in the corrido, or they exist to serve the needs of the primary hero. Examining how these figures function in the novel is not the same as examining them within the corrido. Pérez animates each archetypal female figure and imbues them with subjectivity. It is the male characters in this text who occupy the roles of ancillary figures, and the reader understands their motivations only insofar as one of the female characters attempts to understand them. Someone like Jedidiah “Jed” Jones, Micaela’s cousin, is given little independent interiority. We get insight into his psyche only when Micaela wonders and speculates about what he might have been thinking.

Figures like the soldadera may have signified an actual historical female presence, but they were not given any kind of subjectivity in the corrido. Herrera-Sobek discusses how the soldadera in the corrido may have represented the egalitarian ideals of the

Revolution, but these representations and ideals never materialized into actual equality. She says, “The soldadera was forced to fade into the woodwork by male leaders who, taking complete control, encouraged women to return to the home and become, once again, mothers and daughters. It was easier to glorify the soldadera and to mythify her than to grant her the vote (116).”

Chicana Literary Backgrounds

What is the moment/climate from which *Forgetting the Alamo* emerges? Let’s position this queer border novel within a larger framework of Chicana/o border literature. Since we know that Pérez is addressing an absence within the Chicana/o literary canon, we must also understand the novel as answering back to a legacy of literary misogyny, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. In *With Her Machete in Her Hand* Rueda-Esquivel describes herself as a detective, sussing out textual records of Chicana lesbian existence within the Chicana/o literary archive. The importance of her work does not lie in merely proving that Chicana lesbians maintained a textual existence prior to 1982, but in proving that existence matters to Chicana/o literature at large. Rueda-Esquivel explains, “My job is to remind old school *machistas* that influence doesn’t only flow in one direction, that queer Chicana art and fiction is important not only for what it says about queer Chicanas but also for what it says about Chicana/o culture, about American society (xvi).” When examined within the milieu of Chicana/o literary history this argument is not unfamiliar. Noted literary historians have been laboring at the argument for decades that Chicana/o literature, and Chicana/o people did not emerge as a spontaneous phenomenon lacking history. Francisco Lomelí takes issue with the concept of Chicana/os as the sleeping giant. In “An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence,” Lomelí states,

Though conveniently descriptive for an uninformed mass media, such attributes are to a degree detrimental because they perpetuate, sometimes unconsciously, the portrayal of our people as a ‘sleeping giant’ on the verge of waking up, thereby assuming there has been a dormant stage. The truth of the matter is that our literature has been perceived with as much confusion as have our people, the extreme case being that traditional literary circles do not admit its existence nor do they acknowledge its birthright. (35)

Queer Chicana/os have not been the sleeping giants of Chicana/o literature, nor have they in particular, or Chicanas in general, emerged out of recent history. In “An Interpretive Assessment of Chicano Literature and Criticism” Lomelí locates a “...salient impetus...” of Chicana writing in 1975:

They [Chicanas] introduce a focus that had been previously underrepresented as men were usually limited in their perspective of female roles and dimensions. As has become poignantly clear, these roles and dimensions revealed external male impositions that either bordered on stereotypes or a narrow range of characterizations. Similar to previous Chicano literati, they set out to rectify the situation of a recognizable gap. (26)

Lomelí’s assessment of Chicana/o literature articulates a trajectory of recognition and rectification. Rueda-Esquivel’s work in filling the gaps of queer Chicanas in literature and literary history takes one more step and adds re-signification to the process of recognition and rectification. Once added, once recalled, these previously absent presences will have a profound effect on the body of work into which they are brought. The limited range of characterization of women or the possible stereotyping of women that Lomelí alludes to in Chicana/o literature and criticism points to a myopic misogynist Chicano literary gaze. This can be an unintentional perpetuation of patriarchy on the part of Chicano writers and critics; it can also illuminate a vested interest in the maintenance of patriarchy for Chicanos in society. The recognition of the gap is what illuminates the need to investigate further questions. It is important to remember that the “new additions” to any discussion will always necessitate new parameters and terms of that discussion. As

Chicano literature would necessarily change the face of literature categorized as American, enlarging the sphere of Chicano writing to include all genders and sexualities will change the face of Chicano literature.

Both Rueda-Esquivel and Pérez give us unique approaches to incorporating queer women into Chicana/o literature and history. While Rueda-Esquivel engages with chronology for the sake of discussion, her recovery of Chicana lesbian writers does not enforce a strict linear chronology, or as she explains, “I don’t believe in ‘firsts,’ that is in naming one author or text as ‘the first Chicana lesbian’ author or text. In my view, to enact this naming invariably erases an author or text that came earlier, as a means of propping up the borders of identity” (2). To articulate a “first” is to implicitly erase someone else who may have come earlier simply by not knowing that there was someone else. It seems better to remain elastic in our conception of literary history and origins and follow as Rueda-Esquivel does a methodology of historical genealogy. She writes, “Following Teresa de Lauretis, I work from the notion that lesbian writing is not a linear succession of tradition but rather a complex genealogy: One can focus on a particular line within that genealogy, but doing so generally excludes competing lines, fragments, dead ends” (4). The genealogical approach is especially valuable to the analysis of previously unrecognized queer and female texts. It allows space for newly read texts to come before and after texts we already know about it. Genealogy offers space for new additions to change the shape of our family tree. In *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, Rosa Linda Fregoso explains why the Foucauldian genealogical approach is useful for Chicana cultural work,

For Foucault, genealogy is a historical method that gives voice to the marginal and submerged people in their resistance to the forces of power and domination. In the process of retrieving and resurrecting “subjugated knowledges,” the practice of genealogy alerts us to alternative accounts of resistances, struggles, and conflicts that in fact constitute history. Genealogy is a method reflected in the scholarly practices of feminist, multicultural, queer, and postcolonial historiographies and researchers. (105)

Major figures in our Chicana genealogy include La Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and La Llorona. These women represent the virgin whore dichotomy that exists at the root of patriarchy in Chicana/o culture. Notably La Malinche and La Llorona are women who have committed grave crimes against their families, and people. They are symbols associated with excessive crying and speaking; they are classic figures of Chicana melancholy as they both in some way represent the incessant narration, or insistence on narration that characterizes Chicana melancholic subject making. Though once reviled, they have been recovered by many Chicana theorists as figures of agency and articulation. According to Rueda-Esquivel, La Malinche as a figure of betrayal has been recovered by Chicana lesbian writers who were often depicted as betraying the heterosexist nationalist movement. In turn, La Llorona can be read as a victim of patriarchal structures, in a manner that then indicts the patriarchy instead of the weeping woman.

Micaela represents a new literary intervention, a combination of these recovered figures, and a re-invention of the classic male corrido hero. Historically speaking, she may have been possible but the suffocating homophobia of the current archive rendered her invisible. Micaela becomes a matrix for literature and history, and as such challenges the origin stories of Chicana/o literature. Rueda-Esquivel’s most important intervention in tracing the genealogy of Chicana lesbians in Chicana/o cultural production is to

“...acknowledge queer desire as always-already present in Chicano/a communities, both historically and in their contemporary formation” (182). The Chicana lesbian is not a new invention, and the queer Chicana/o subject is not a modern formation.

Forgetting The Alamo

The novel opens in 1836 at the end of Texas Revolution, and the start of the Republic of Texas. Pérez’s protagonist Micaela Campos cannot help but to constantly remember that which she would rather forget: the violent fracturing of Texas that has destroyed her family and set her up as an outlaw bent on revenge. The novel, narrated in the first person by Micaela, is told as a backward glance. It is a re-telling of events that have already happened. As such it becomes a re-telling not just of Micaela’s own experiences but of the historical events that are bound up with her personal story. She gets to re-tell her past and by doing so she interweaves her position as a queer Tejana caught within multiple borderlands into the mainstream history that previously erased or ignored women like Micaela. The melancholia in this novel inhabits multiple planes in terms of the regional history, race, gender, sexuality and of course the general mood of the protagonist.

Forgetting the Alamo is a novel of conquest that occurs in a multiply occupied space that literally doesn’t exist anymore. To utilize Pérez’s own theories, the Texas of 1836 is a decolonial space as it stands in flux, as an independent republic with formal national ties to neither the US nor Mexico. Pérez captures Texas as the Republic of Texas, a national space and time in between Mexico and the United States. It is in process between colonial occupations. The shifting national identity of the land corresponds with the shifting national identities of its inhabitants, and Pérez offers many characters that

defy easy categorization.

My analysis of *Forgetting the Alamo* includes a discussion of the internal, textual melancholy of the characters and story, as well as a discussion of the meta-melancholy that is present due to the relationship between fiction and history and between nation and narrative. I draw from multiple trajectories including corrido criticism, Chicana/o literary criticism, feminist and queer studies, Texas history, and narrative theory.

Micaela, Pistol in her Hand

As we begin to think critically about Micaela, we must be aware of her positions in Chicana/o literature and history, in geography and time, and in literature and history at large. In “Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard,” from which I take one of the epigraphs for this chapter, Pérez elucidates the difficulties in finding the history of someone like Micaela who she refers to as “my queer vaquera baby butch...”. The project is decolonial in nature and is both an exercise in inhabiting the imaginary and rendering visible that which has been rendered invisible. The work of the decolonial imaginary is melancholy work. It is first a backward glance, then a rumination on old wounds and finally a re-telling of the story, as Pérez says, “To decolonize our history and our historical imaginations, we must uncover the voices from the past that honor multiple experiences, instead of falling prey to that which is easy—allowing the white colonial heteronormative gaze to reconstruct and interpret our past (123).” According to Pérez and other scholars of queer history, it is difficult to find primary sources of queerness in any official archive. It is not as if queerness is a new phenomenon, and scholars and writers who place queer subjects at the center of histories and stories are not guilty of presentism. The decolonial imaginary should be understood

as a lens through which to see that which has always been there, but has remained unseen and silent. Queer histories of people of color are the marginal stories of already marginalized groups, as such these stories are hard to find, so Pérez suggests looking for them in a different way. It is not enough to simply turn to the archive to find verification of queer existence in the past, one must learn to examine the archive with a decolonial gaze. Pérez points out,

Cultural and literary texts, newspapers, police records, widows' wills, court dockets, medical records, texts by sexologists, religious tracts, as well as corridos—all of these and more must be reinterpreted with a decolonial queer gaze so we may interrogate representations of sexual deviants and track ideologies about sex and sexuality. (125)

Pérez, as novelist and historian, locates Micaela as a border subject whose sexuality emerges alongside the Texas-Mexico border. Pérez draws upon the work of Siobhan B. Sommerville who notes the correlation between the classification of sexuality and the classification of racial bodies during the 19th century. While Sommerville locates her work within a framework of US black/white relations, specifically the Plessy v. Ferguson case, Pérez adapts Sommerville's thesis to brown bodies of the Southwest:

Moreover, I would take her premise and argue further that it is not historical coincidence that the classifications of homosexual and heterosexual appeared at the same time that the United States began aggressively policing the borders between the United States and Mexico.... A brown race was legislated against from fear that it could potentially infect the purportedly pure, white race in the United States. Eugenicists and sexologists, according to Sommerville, worked hand in hand. Consequently, the border was closed as a result of scientific racism clouded by a white colonial heteronormative gaze looking across the river to see racial and sexual impurities. (Pérez 126)

So, Micaela is positioned as a queer border subject whose simple literary existence queers the genres and spaces she touches. Pérez makes an explicit connection between the colonizing forces of the nation and the forces that would colonize Micaela's sexuality. To

begin thinking about Micaela we must understand that she is both a deeply imagined protagonist and a very real figure in the history of our border.

The novel opens with a poker game that pits Micaela against her older cousin Jed and a small gang of evil men. Jed is half Mexican and half white and can easily, and often does much to Micaela's dismay, pass for white. At first it seems that Micaela pits herself against Jed the way any younger cousin pits themselves against an older role model. Yet, as Pérez reveals Micaela as a machista, it becomes clear the Jed and Micaela are absolute rivals with competing masculinities. Indeed it takes Jed a while to realize how Micaela is competing with him, as he cannot read her as a serious rival. Jed has entered into a game of dangerous stakes and, when he puts down the seemingly winning hand, the unsavory characters whom he has bested warn him to lower the stakes he has won. He refuses and in Micaela's mind this is the moment that will haunt her and her family for the rest of their lives. While this opening card game is being recalled as a moment of rupture by Micaela, it is also a moment where both she and the reader recognize her invisibility in the masculine space of a card game in a saloon. It is Micaela who actually possesses the winning hand, a hand that beats Jed's. She can't play in this game because as she put it she "...has no dick," and if she can't play then she can't hope to win.

Pérez sets the novel in the liminal place of the Texas Republic and she creates a protagonist who operates within a liminal gendered place. The opening card game establishes Micaela as not fitting easily into the gender binary of masculine and feminine. Her envy of Jed represents her envy of his masculinity and his ability to pass. It would be too simple to read Micaela as a character who wants to be a man. She must be understood as a character who wants the power and mobility that seems intrinsically bound to

masculinity; she wants to be visible and she wants to win. Along her journey, she will dress in both feminine and masculine drag in order to hide her identity, and pass for whatever is necessary. Like most border journeys, Micaela's crossing and mixing of gender binaries shows them to be more fluid than fixed, more constructed than actual. Furthermore, Micaela inhabits a decolonial gendered space because she is moving between masculinity and femininity toward figuring out her own personal gender identity.

Forgetting the Alamo: Luck and Illegibility: Reading Cards, and Counting Heroes

Forgetting the Alamo is Pérez narrativizing the absence from within the official archive. Pérez renders intimate lives of women in loving detail, adding detail to the historical record that was never there. She calls these figures into full being, so that we can fully see them. When the novel opens, Micaela is narrating a poker game, but she is also giving a detailed description of her cousin Jedidiah, a figure who will loom large in her fate. She is watching him intently, reading his movements within the game, and the reader can tell that these are long-held observations. Though she tries to emulate him at cards, she is unsuccessful. Within the opening scene, we get a full picture of Jedidiah because of how Micaela is reading him. Yet, we know nothing of Micaela, not even her name as the story opens:

I was the plain opposite. No one watched me and at the time I might have taken advantage of my unexceptional character more had I known that I could have used it to my gain, but I lacked confidence and envied what I didn't have and that was Jed's style for winning even when he was losing. Me, I was impatient for victory, the kind of impatience that makes you look nervous to others, especially since I didn't know how to risk all that had to be risked if I was to be the victor. (Loc 47)

This scene offers an intertextual pun on visibility and invisibility. Micaela, self-conscious of her unobtrusive persona indirectly describes her position within the official history, the one from which she is absent, the one from which Pérez strove to recover her. She is absent, and unreadable. Jed, however, half white and male is completely visible and rendered in brilliant detail – inside and out. He is symbolic of the official narrative the exemplary border hero, male, mestizo, cunning, and brave. Pérez’s descriptions of Jed parallel the popular descriptions of Gregorio Cortez that Américo Paredes draws upon. Jed is cast as the border hero, a catalyst in the story – though by no means the center. Micaela watches him and wonders why he gets to be so important, and why he is allowed so much agency in a way that must parallel the reading experience of Chicanas who search for themselves in the archive and find only Gregorio.

The novel is narrated as a recollection of the past. Micaela looks backward and narativizes her past, adding plot, detail and significance where previous events had simply unfolded. In her backwards glance, she knows that this poker game is a pivotal moment by it forming it as a plot twist where there was no plot. She ruminates,

I remember every detail of that day because every detail played over and over in my head for months as I tried to make sense of what had happened. Never the why of it. Why was too big a venture and anyway I’ve come to appreciate that ‘why’ is not worth mentioning since it’s only an excuse for those who need one. Me, I’m tired of excuses. (Loc 53)

The lack of interest in a why expresses the lack of desire for synthesis. We will come to realize that Micaela wants revenge, not resolution and that she will be unsuccessful at both. From this brief passage we can frame her story as a melancholy narrative. She has clearly suffered, is clearly suffering, and is clearly ruminating over these events. This is a

story she has told herself over and over, and she doesn't seek a coherent answer to why these events happened – she just wants to continue narrating the events. As the story progresses, the whys multiply and expand until we are asking “why” in the face of colonization and all of its attendant atrocities. There is no palatable answer for that. There is no excuse or explanation that could confer sense upon what has transpired. Micaela imagines details back into her story that she never could have known. Every moment becomes pivotal in her hindsight. She takes on the impossible task of looking back and ruminating on what might have, or could have been. Though she is well aware of her lack of agency, she looks back and fantasizes about control, as we can see in the opening of Chapter 5:

I don't regret not having stayed behind on the day marauders plundered our ranch. Regret is not enough. Regret only implies disappointment or remorse and what I bore after that day was more than any disappointment or remorse that might pursue me for years to come. I became hollow. Repeating the story even if only to myself inflicts emptiness so vast that I have yet to fill that void. (Loc 392)

What if our origin story is a void instead of a conflict, a loss instead of a fight? Who becomes cast as a hero in this instance? A crucial irony of this opening scene is that Micaela wins the fateful game. The game, however, is pitched as handsome clever Jed against the grotesque Rove. Rove asks Jed whether or not he is a patriot, a loaded question in 1836 Texas, but one that immediately casts this conflict as a clash between Sam Houston and General Santa Anna. In this type of traditional conflict, there is no way for Micaela to win. They do not hear her bet, and they do not look at her hand, choosing instead to face each other and argue about a horse and currency of ambiguous value. This scene sets up Pérez's critique of the traditional border conflict. First, she sets the story prior to 1848, a move that shows that these types of traditional conflicts are not

necessarily tied to one singular national moment. Then she shows that our protagonist cannot function as a traditionally legible actor in these conflicts. In order to fully see Micaela, we must have access to a different type of origin story. It isn't enough to simply 'flip the script' – so to speak- and cast Michael as the hero. We must instead rethink the entire story. We can take it as meta-textual moment when the bartender looks up and noticing Micaela says, "Get on out of here, sweet thing" (Loc 89). He doesn't look at her as he continues, "We don't want no trouble. Go on with your pappy. Girls don't belong in here. Now get" (Loc 89). This trouble, perhaps, to which he refers could be the symbolic trouble within the traditional narrative of border conflict. Girls don't belong in here, indeed. Not only is Micaela undeniably present, despite the fact that she isn't supposed to be there, her retelling of the story is a constant reiteration of her presence. Based on our current historical record, she cannot exist, shouldn't exist, and yet she does.

Although Jed was not eager to avow allegiance to Sam Houston, it is clear that people in the text are equally concerned about Santa Anna. The war is a large general conflict with consequences for regular people regardless to whom they might swear allegiance.

Texas history is complex, and might be the best reflection of the arbitrary and shifting nature of US expansion and nationhood. A thoroughly contested territory, Texas has been claimed by Spain, France, Mexico, and the United States. The colonial history of Texas is layered and Pérez's novel captures this deep contestation. The individual characters of her novel wish to be left alone to live their lives on their land, but with such a history, "their land" becomes a murkier concept than previously thought. The struggle between Micaela and Jed for the family land can be read as a gendered struggle.

Micaela's adored but misogynist father cannot leave the land to his daughter though it is hers, but it is also a representation of Texas colonization. Women can inherit land under Spanish law. Her father breaks that by willing the land to Jed.

Melancholy, Fugue States, and the Passage of Time

The novel is narrated according to Micaela's memories and so the sequence of events is somewhat manufactured. She gives shape to the things that transpired and draws connections between them that may not have been there when they happened. There are also significant passages of time wherein Micaela loses herself to grief and drunkenness. She is able to pass as a boy, and through physical labor and alcohol she is able to numb her feelings. These fugues capture Micaela deep within her melancholy, inflicting harm upon herself for the loss of the twins and Juana. Initially, Micaela is thoroughly conscious of her losses and they spur her toward revenge. The loss of Juana, and her perceived betrayal by Jed, force her into a staggering and blinding pain. She is practically unconscious in this state, and arguably close to the pathological melancholy that Freud describes. Yet, this strategy is one of survival. She numbs herself so as to avoid being crushed by the weight of her grief. While rounding up young cattle on the ranch, Micaela is reminded of the children in her life that she has lost:

I brought in around five more on my own and stood studying the little ones wondering how many would make it to maturity and as I prepared to rope them for branding I thought back to Juana and her innocence but that led me to thoughts of Ifi and Rusty so I expelled the rumination as quickly as I could because I didn't have time to conjure sweet memories right then. (Loc 926)

During her time at the ranch, Micaela is lost, but we can gather from her narration that wherever she is currently narrating from is a safe space, a space that allows her to conjure

sweet memories and ruminate on her story. We know from the end of the story that Micaela's journey never ends. The novel ends with her in flux crossing and recrossing the border between the safety of Mexico and the love of her family in the US. Yet, clearly this final perpetual crossing is more positive than her aimless wandering in search of revenge.

Texas: Context and Contestation

According to T.R. Fehrenbach in his monograph *Lone Star*, Texas represented a large but sparsely populated holding in the Spanish empire. In an effort to secure a better hold on their American lands, and meet the challenge of an ever multiplying Anglo hoard to the East, Don Francisco Boulingy, a Spanish officer, proposed an idea that would set a dangerous precedent for the region. As Fehrenbach observes:

In 1776, Boulingy recommended that immigration be open to Anglo Americans who were willing to change citizenship. He saw the Boonesboro and other settlements in Kentucky were now firmly fixed, and there was even an English speaking outpost on the river, at Manchac. If the east bank became solidly English, Boulingy argued, the English would eventually dominate the country. His purpose was to suck all new settlements west of the river, under the Spanish flag. Spain would have to allow freedom from restriction and give liberal grants of land. The price the immigrants would have to pay would be loyalty to Spain. (Loc 2294)

This same policy of incorporation would be enacted in 1821 when Moses Austin would be granted the right to settle some land in Texas with Anglos who were to become Spanish. Moses Austin's petition was granted on January 17, 1821. Notably, Mexico would win its independence from Spain later that year on September 10, and Texas would again be in turmoil. On his way to Missouri to retrieve families for settlement Moses Austin met with a series of unfortunate events and never made it back to Texas. His son, Stephen F. Austin, would carry on his father's mission of the Texas settlement.

Boulingy's earlier effort to incorporate Anglos into Spanish territories and increase the numbers of Spaniards on American soil had been deemed a success. Fehrenbach reasons, "Anglo-Saxon colonization, properly handled had been a success in Louisiana. Here, as there, there was no other way to put people on the land" (Loc 2778). The Spanish crown was facing both the threat of Anglo encroachment, as well as the continuing Mexican push for independence. The admittance of large numbers of Anglo settlers made logical sense in the face of these threats to the maintenance of the Spanish empire in the New World. Fehrenbach explains:

A band of American colonists in Texas might create a buffer between the Spanish settlements and the Indians, and the right sort of North Americans, loyal to the Crown, would prevent future filibusters. The Royalist authorities felt that colonists who were also landowners and slaveholders – the "right sort" – would hardly be revolutionaries, because they would have some stake in the land. (Loc. 2778)

Fehrenbach spends some time characterizing the Anglo settlers that pushed Westward as highly individualistic, and he appears to engage uncritically with the idea of American Exceptionalism. For him, Imperialism is an act carried out by governments and not individuals. He argues that early settlers relied on the government to use Imperialism to aid their individual lives, but he does not see their individual actions as necessarily imperialistic. This is a narrow assessment of the nature of early American imperialism, but it does establish the American settler as a one who is eager for independence from government. Though Spain required little from the new settlers, even relaxing its insistence on their conversion to Catholicism, it is clear that the new settlers would have little interest in maintaining and upholding the Spanish monarchy. In an earlier passage Fehrenbach characterizes the settlers thusly:

The Americans of the Southwest had a taste of territorial expansion, and both a sense of far horizons and ethnic superiority – a feeling that then pervaded the whole English-speaking world. They were also belligerent, a lasting American folkway that seems to have formed its base in the old Southwest. (Loc 2372)

Even the “right sort” of American settler could not be persuaded by land to give real loyalty to the Spanish crown. There was also the issue of US white supremacy. Spanish notions of race did not intersect with Anglo notions, and Spaniards and Mexicans alike would be seen as an inferior Other to white settlers. Fehrenbach’s account is ultimately too sympathetic to Stephen Austin and the Anglo settler colonialism of Texas. He judges the turmoil of the Mexican government as a fault of the Mexican character rather than historicizing how that unique colonial history contributed to the clash of cultures in the Southwest. He postulates:

The Mexicans, unlike North Americans, had been able neither to form a free government, nor a viable government. Anglo-Americans took pride primarily in the fact that they were free men, and their contempt for any men who did not achieve a similar system of government was both genuine and unavoidable. Americans did not understand cultural pride – a lack of comprehension that was to color all Anglo-American relations with Hispanic societies. (Loc. 3287)

In this passage Fehrenbach ignores that the United States and Mexico had distinctly different colonial histories. He also reinforces the idea of North American Anglos as a homogenous, and thus a united culture. Fehrenbach does not account for the construction of the category of “free men,” and makes no mention of who this category excluded. The sense of American white nationalism was rooted in the exclusion of women and all non-whites. The mestizo society of Mexico could not fathom such homogeneity. The US then as now does not know how to adequately comprehend or govern a mixed race people. Fehrenbach characterizes Stephen Austin as a sympathetic figure who sought to be a civilizing force to uninhabited Texas lands. This ignores long-standing colonial

metaphors that painted Mexican land and Mexicans as equally uncivilized. Fehrenbach cannot write of Austin's pleasure in cutting back the wilderness without comprehending that he is erasing the other half of that dehumanizing metaphor. Fehrenbach argues that Austin sought peaceful cohabitation within Mexico, and was only pushed toward violent expansion when the Mexican government proved unwilling to peacefully coexist with Anglos in Texas. Fehrenbach does offer a multifaceted discussion of the forces surrounding US attitudes toward Texas. We know that the US government was united about simply annexing the state, and that expansion was met with criticism from many sides.

In *They Called Them Greasers*, Arnaldo de León accounts for this diversity of opinion but acknowledges that the dissenters were united under a grand distrust of the Other. Where Fehrenbach claims Anglos in Texas could not bear to be governed by the chaos of shifting monarchy, de León illuminates what constituted this perceived chaos:

What whites refused to accept was a state of affairs in which chaos presided over them. But what exactly was it they considered as disorder? Texas was already settled and under the rule of a government, heir to centuries of Spanish civilization. Something else disturbed them, for to them, a connection existed in the new land between the state of civilization and chaos. The newcomers saw the Tejanos as mongrels, uncivilized, and un-Christian—a part of the wilderness that must be subdued. Living in Mexico and Texas were a sort of people who threatened the march of white civilization. (p. 4)

De León makes a direct connection between the attitudes leading up to the Texas Revolution and white supremacy, while Fehrenbach sketches the Texas settlers as frustrated citizens pushed to a breaking point. Each perspective presents compelling evidence in the form of archived documentation.

In the novel Pérez again offers the narrativized experiences of the people who weren't captured in the historical record. There are sympathetic white characters like Miss Elsie, who see themselves as a part of the diverse Texas landscape. There are also characters like the slimy Walker who views Micaela's family and other landed Mexicans as undeserving of the land. He is more than eager to take what he feels is his rightful place in the social order. The Mexican characters are diverse as well, ranging from sympathetic to complicit in the social order.

Micaela is anxious about the impact that the ongoing war might have for her family's land. She describes possession of the land in terms of genealogy rather than nation. She is neither eager to remain part of Mexico, nor join Texas because she wants to remain on her family's land. The land is described as 49,000 acres, gained as her father's family moved their way up North: "Monclova had been home for a while but two hundred years felt like plenty of time, so they picked up and moved North again, crossing el Rio Bravo, traveled some more and stopped and settled in for what they thought would be another two hundred" (Loc 124). In her description, the emphasis is on movement, settlement, and then more movement:

 Tlascaltecas, and Otomi with the Spanish and the Spanish Moors with the Mexicans and the Mexicans with Apache and Comanche mixing into a brown race journeying through land expansive with bloodred horizons until they stopped and looked around and settled into what was already in our blood. Movement. Settlement and movement. Back and forth our ancestors trekked rivers and streams blending and interbreeding with tribes and making families and villages in deserts, plains and groves. Tribes of families and villages of mud huts sank into the landscape where buried vessels and bones became soil and clay. I felt proud to be a part of that ancestry, convinced that one day it would all be mine and Jed's provided he stopped gambling. (Loc. 128-9)

Micaela is proud to be a part of vast mixed heritage and sees herself and family woven into the legacy of this history. The final sentence is dissonant, ending on her desire for ownership and on the acknowledgement that though she may lay claim to its history only Jed has the legal power to maintain or lose the land. This mixed heritage is one of the many reasons white Texans were so distrustful of Spaniards and later Mexicans. De León explains:

And, finally, the English saw the Spanish as an embodiment of racial impurity. For hundreds of years, racial mixing or mestizaje had occurred on the Iberian peninsula between Spaniards and Moors. At a time when Elizabethans were becoming more and more sensitive to the significance of color—equating whiteness with purity and Christianity and blackness with baseness and the devil—Spaniards came to be thought of as not much better than light skinned Moors. (p. 5)

Pérez locates Jed and Micaela within a vast legacy of history, conflicts and migrations giving the sense that they, their ancestors and descendants, move through time each generation building on the last. De León echoes this genealogy thusly:

Most Tejanos were descendants of Tlascalan Indians and mestizo soldiers from Coahuila. Additionally, a few in Nacogdoches were the offspring of people from Louisiana and reflected that areas racial amalgam, including Indians and blacks. Throughout the province Tejanos had intermarried amongst themselves and with Christianized Indian women from local missions so that colonist continued as a mixed blood population. Their contrast to “white” and salient kindred to “black” and “red” made Mexicans subject to treatment commensurate with the odious connotations white attached to colors, races, and cultures dissimilar to their own. (p. 6)

The genealogical approach to history doesn't identify one moment of origin or conflict. When Micaela describes herself and Jed, she describes them, as simultaneously past, present and future,

Jed and I were the kind of cousins with a history so thick and wide that it was destined to bind us in ways we never wanted and yet there it was.... The next generation would take on the weight of a past begun not with us as cousins but

long before we were born and that weight endured into the generation who would pick it up, measure it and say to each other, these are lies, all lies. Where's my real legacy? But they too realized there's no running from or evading, there's no stopping it or getting away because the burden of inheritance will follow them as it did us in the next and the next and the next generations. (Loc 148)

Their complex family history reflects the complexity of Texas history and the events that led up to the Battle of the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto that claims Micaela's father. The relationship between Micaela and Jed is meant to parallel the relationship between the US and Mexico and their shared history of conquest and colonialism. For Pérez, Texas is a point of contact between two empires: the US, and Mexico. Much of the historical account of the Battle of the Alamo focuses on the conflict in character between the US and Mexico.

Remembering to Forget

What is this battle that creates the caesura at the center of the novel? We could argue that in the context of the novel it is the poker game that sets the events in motion, but we know that these events are themselves set in motion by the larger forces of conquest and empire. While Pérez makes the point that these stories have been left out of the official archive, they are no less affected by large canonical events. Of the Battle of the Alamo, Fehrenbach offers the following:

But at the Alamo history was altered. It is not easy to explain exactly why. The complete details of the battle, like those of all the battles of the Texas Revolution, simply are not known, or agreed upon. Few wars of such eventual historic importance have been so poorly documented or reported. Myths have sprouted, and legend has embellished fact. The story has been well told; it needs no retellings of certain perspectives of the battle that are often ignored. (Loc 4222)

Though Fehrenbach's account is decidedly biased, he does point to a lack of organization

within the Texas Revolutionaries. In *History and Legends of the Alamo and Other Missions in and around San Antonio* by Adina de Zavala, Richard Flores describes the context of the Battle in these terms:

Tensions between Anglo-Americans in Texas and the Mexican government came to a head when Santa Anna discarded the Constitution of 1824, causing both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans in Texas to call for independence. In an effort to suppress this movement, Santa Anna led his forces north and made his move on San Antonio de Bexar and the Alamo. Less than two hundred men organized into a small militia, gathered to defend this former Franciscan mission against Santa Anna's forces late in February 1836. On March 6, the Mexicans greatly outnumbering those in the Alamo, made their final siege, taking the Alamo and leaving no prisoners. (ix)

San Antonio de Béxar is one of the centers for Micaela and her family. It is the closest town to where they live and it is home to Miss Elsie's. When Micaela and her father ride to town together, they discover the body of her uncle, her father's brother who had been killed at the Battle of the Alamo. There were of course casualties on both sides of this battle, and once again Pérez illustrates how individuals are subsumed into large institutional forces until their stories are erased. We have little background on Micaela's uncle, and we know from the story that the bloodshed in the battle was rough on everyone. There are dead in the streets and a general feeling of danger pervades this region of Texas. She knows she must be wary of men, white men, and criminals who feel emboldened by the chaotic state of government. Incidentally, the action of the Alamo and its aftermath are asides in the narration of the story. Micaela and her father are riding into town for something else entirely when they are sidetracked by the site of her uncle's body. Her father is spurred by revenge to join Santa Anna's army for the Battle of San Jacinto. No one is pleased with his decision. Ursula, Micaela's mother, is angry at him for leaving their family in pursuit of pointless revenge. His decision to participate in

matters of the State undermine their family unit and Ursula knows they will be left vulnerable in his absence. Furthermore, she knows his participation in the battle will have no real effect on the state of affairs. The national character of Texas had shifted so much by this time that it must have surely seemed to be acting above and beyond the will and reach of the actual people who inhabited its shifting borders.

In the introduction to de Zavala's book Richard Flores offers a nuanced view of the context of the Texas Revolution. He elucidates:

Critical to any historical portrait of this era are several factors. First, as noted above, the initial dispute in Texas stemmed from both Mexicans and Anglo-Americans seeking to restore a federalist government in Mexico. Mexicans in the province also tired of Santa Anna's exploits and of the tedious political circumstances affiliated with their distance from the provincial and national capitals in Coahuila and Mexico City. Second, in spite of his unilateral control of Mexican affairs and politics, and his egotistical and personal ambitions, Santa Anna's actions can be viewed as an effort to control an internal uprising in his own country. (X)

Where Fehrenbach paints Santa Anna as a capricious despot, Flores offers the more measured view of Santa Anna acting in the best interest of his nation. Anglos in Texas were clearly bent on undermining Mexican rule, and Santa Anna had to act decisively. Flores delves further into the often excluded history of the Alamo by noting that neither Texas nor Mexican nationalist accounts adequately re-tell the events that transpired. We must keep in mind that these battles encompassed those wanting an independent Texas, an independent Mexico, and a new state for the United States. Flores explains further:

Finally, an element that seems quote overlooked is the men who died. The Texas nationalist discourse surrounding the Alamo claims this was a battle between Texans and Mexicans. This is not correct. There were only thirteen native-born Texans in the group, and eleven of them were of Mexican descent; furthermore, native Texans were by birth, Mexican citizens. Of those remaining, forty-one of them were born in Europe, two were Jews, two were black, and the remainder were Americans from other states in the US. The portrayal of the Battle of the

Alamo as a clearly demarcated zone of interests between Texans and Mexicans is clearly unwarranted. Prominent Mexican citizens fought on both sides, dividing their allegiance along lines of political and ideological interests, and not along the ethnically or nationally circumscribed positions that have been fabricated by the custodians of the Alamo and popularized at various levels through collective memory. (X)

Flores' account adds complexity to an event that is often painted in broad nationalist strokes. Taken in connection with Pérez's novel, we get an even more in-depth reading of the events of the Alamo and its colonial fallout.

Micaela, never the most perceptive protagonist, insists that she is a Tejana, seeming to exclude herself from any national conversation. Micaela is a nationalist. Her relationship to Texas places her in a fog of allegiance that allows her to be loyal to some non-existent bit of nostalgia. The Others she encounters along her journey try to correct her naïveté for they know that regardless of the nation to which she adheres, she will never be seen as a full and valuable citizen. There is no room in any nation or national narrative for our young queer vaquera. Micaela travels safely among men and women, protected by their inability to ascertain that she is a woman. Yet other oppressed, vulnerable characters are able to read her quite well. La India can read her, Lucius can read her, and of course Jed can always find her. In these instances Pérez is using the perception of figures who would be cast as Other to show how Others read the official record. Just as she looked into the archive and found Micaela through her absence, Others are able to read Micaela as she really is. Her conversation with Lucius illustrates that she is no longer inhabiting the world that she knew. Texas has shifted, and whoever she is may not fit in this newly violent and inhospitable place. The state in flux, moving toward fixity is not an ideal place for a person in flux who will remain in flux. Lucius cautions:

Look here, you better wake on up to what's coming. You might as well get yourself on back to Mexico and leave this place to ole whitey because, darling, it's slave lynching country and it's Mexican killing country and it's Indian scalping country and it's going to be that for a mighty long time. (Loc 1378)

Lucius recounts the story of his wife's death for Micaela. It is a peculiar bedtime story, but Micaela notes that it comforts both of them: "In that dark night he talked about his wife's slaughter with a voice throaty and cavernous. He soothed me in a rhythm that echoed like an angel or some spirit that rose up to comfort me but I suppose that in the telling of his story, he comforted himself as well" (Loc1399).

What Is Lost, But Not Forgotten

By the end of the novel we are able to account for Micaela's actual losses. She has lost family, and people dear to her. She even loses herself but we must question as to what Micaela has lost in these people. Her entire home life is dismantled, but aside from the people who are dear to her this is not a categorically negative thing. Had life continued to unfold as planned, she would have been married off to her mother's paramour, forced to perform heterosexuality and femininity, and forced to watch Jed occupy the land she could not inherit. Each aspect of that life that might have been that is stripped away from her moves her closer to living a life where she doesn't have to hide who she is. The losses become clarifying, but we aren't left with a clarified, authentic Micaela. We're left with a Micaela in flux, a perpetually melancholic Micaela; we're left with more loss with a void at the center of where we expected resolution.

Even the people she's chasing lack focus, both in terms of her understanding of them and how they are depicted in the novel. They're white, and they're male but they seem more like a force of white masculinity than individual men. Pérez names them and

sort of differentiates their faces, but they're not shaped into actual people. They are a barely recognizable violent hegemony that Micaela cannot really face nor destroy. The novel concludes with Micaela on the run from the white men who have framed her for murder so that they could steal her land. The land is rightfully hers, but her father gives it to Jed, who was going to turn it over to the Colonel. Essentially, most of the plot settles around a convoluted land grab, much like the US acquisition of Texas and most of the Southwest. Micaela is framed for the murder of Jed, but it was the Colonel and his men who planned to murder Jed at any time. Pérez kills Jed, the confident mestizo most like a traditional border hero.

Micaela is captured and put on trial, which is of course a sham, and she is sentenced to be hanged. She is rescued by her mother, Miss Elsie, and Clara. These women, operating as various archetypes step to the center of the narrative, subvert the State and rescue Micaela who has become our border hero. She is notably not a lone hero any longer. Her mother hands Micaela her father's rifle and sends her on the run. Micaela will never be free in the US so she runs to Mexico, the ostensible homeland to which she is ambivalent. She finds shelter in a convent but is not content to simply settle. Micaela turns into a true border subject by the close of the novel, crossing and re-crossing between her family in the US and safety in Mexico. In the end Micaela finds herself hungry for justice instead of revenge. No longer will she fall prey to drinking, violence, and murder. She actively chooses to inhabit her painful memories and use them to fuel her desire for a better future:

I'm going back for good one day and on that day our hallowed home will be ours again, but not through the same kind of murdering and hate. I'm not going back like that. I can't. Not anymore. Something inside of me has changed and I guess

it's a feeling for the generations coming upon us, the generations that need a legacy of truth to keep them going 'cause sometimes truth is all we got on our side. (Loc 2766-7)

Micaela longs to return home, but does not want to participate in the conquest, or violence, or nationalism. She clearly dreams of something else, though she may not be able to fully articulate it. Until then, she exists in a sort of physical and psychic Coatlicue State, telling and re-telling her story, wrestling with her demons, and trying to be a better person. She is bolstered toward a better self by the birth of Clara's twins. Clara was a lover to both Jed and Micaela, so while the twins are her children they are also her cousins. They are also a constant reminder of her cousin Jed, and a symbolic reminder of what endures through history. While holding the babies, she meditates on the future:

It's a strange and satisfying thing, the power of future generations in one's arms and I guess that's part of the change inside me I've been trying to explain. That another war is coming doesn't dishearten me as much as before because so long as men like Walker and the Colonel occupy our land, there will be more wars. (Loc 2782)

Micaela's hopeful musings, and desire for justice are historically positioned just before the start of the US-Mexico War. This historical positioning does several things, one of which is really to decenter 1848 as the ultimate origin of Chicano loss and border subjectivity. Pérez places the US-Mexico War within a genealogy of colonizing forces. She also leaves the reader with a border hero equipped to fight a different battle. Micaela is pursuing justice, and seeking a path of non-violence. By doing this, Pérez also leaves us with a border hero who eschews nationalism as the revolutionary strategy. The melancholy novel ends on the brink of war, but with a hopeful note.

Chapter 4 – Assessing and Recovering Our Losses

The previous chapters have examined representations of melancholy brought on by loss. Both Gloria Anzaldúa and Emma Pérez demonstrated creative ways to address psychic and material loss. Their texts, like most Chicana/o literary texts, grapple with the losses central to our culture: loss of land, loss of language, loss of history, and loss of texts. It is the official loss of land at the end of the US-Mexico War in 1848 that seems to have precipitated the rest of our grand losses. Loss of land categorized Mexicans in the US as perpetual immigrants erasing our long presence in what is now the US. Being categorized as “just arrived” results in a loss of history. In *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*, Laura E. Gómez notes that as of 1848 more than 115,000 Mexicans became US citizens, and “While the Mexican American group continues to grow due to ongoing immigration from Mexico, it includes a large proportion of people whose American roots go back many generations” (2). Though Mexicans and Mexican Americans have contributed greatly to the formation of the US, most of these contributions are elided from the great story of the United States. This elision results in the loss of many great texts from the nineteenth century. The result is a vacuum of identity for Mexicans in the US. post 1848, and belonging neither to the United States nor Mexico, the newly hyphenated Mexican-Americans seemed to exist in the perpetual present of the freshly emerged, or newly arrived. For more than a century, without being allowed the opportunity for self-definition, and without being accorded the privilege of an historical record, Mexicans in the US were inscribed by mainstream notions and stereotypes.

In his seminal 1969 essay, “The Mexican in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore,” Francisco Armando Ríos explores the domino effect that these layers of erasure had on Mexican Americans living in the US. Without an acknowledged history of our own, we were left to be rendered as stereotypes. As Ríos explains,

Popular American usage does not expressly distinguish between the Mexican national and the American-born citizen of more or less remote Mexican ancestry. The popular imagination mixes them both into a stereotype that is at once quaint and threatening. Across the length of the United States, the symbol of the Mexican is the peon, asleep against the wall of his adobe hut or at the foot of the saguaro cactus. At best he wears only sandals. He is lazy and given to putting things off until mañana. This picturesque fellow and his inevitable burro adorn the menus and neon signs of restaurants and motels all across the US. At some point in his life, the peon wakes up, takes a drink of tequila, puts on his wide brimmed sombrero, and emigrates to the United States—by swimming across the Rio Grande, of course. Once here, he loses picturesque and harmless ways and becomes sinister: he is now proud and hot-blooded, easily offended, intensely jealous, a drinker, a brawler, a knifer, cruel, promiscuous, a flashy dresser, a good dancer, and, depending on the judge, a “Latin lover” or a “lousy lover.” (16)

These ambivalent stereotypes allow Mexican and Mexican American identity to be used as discursive justifications for colonization, oppression, and general dehumanization. In *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*, Laura E. Gómez notes this same ambivalence in regard to Mexican women:

American attitudes toward Mexican women oscillated between the view that they were prizes to be won from the feckless Mexican men to the view that they were, literally ‘contaminating’ American soldiers. Often Mexican women were described by Euro-American travelers as being sexually promiscuous, a racial stereotype that persists today (27).

Gómez specifically addresses how this type of discourse was marshalled to justify the US-Mexico War and the annexation of Mexican land. Again, we return to the loss of the land which caused loss of nation and loss of identity.

Many historians have now gone back and charted the genealogy of Mexican Americans in the US. Mario García gives us the well-known generational model that

charts different stages of assimilation, acculturation and revolution. For many, the reclamation of Mexican American identity really gained traction during the Chicano Movement of the 1960's. If we think of loss of land as the central loss in Chicana/o melancholy, then the Chicano Movement with its drive toward multifaceted revolution represents a great period of reclamation. The surge in cultural pride was built upon naming ourselves, and looking back for our history. We can acknowledge the movement as a moment of discovery, but we should be cautious about ascribing any kind originary quality to it. Marking the Chicano Movement as the originary point of our consciousness elides the other points of consciousness that have occurred in our vast existence.

In his essay "An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origins to Resurgence," Francisco Lomelí notes the problem with identifying the Movement as a "Renaissance," given that such a move functions to,

...reinforce the myth that our people – and, thus, our literature—are strictly a recent contemporary invention. Though conveniently descriptive for an uninformed mass media, such attributes are to a degree detrimental because they perpetuate, sometimes unconsciously, the portrayal of our people as a "sleeping giant" on the verge of waking up, thereby assuming there has been a dormant stage. The truth of the matter is that our literature has been perceived with as much confusion as have our people, the extreme case being that traditional literary circles do not admit its existence nor do they acknowledge its birthright. Though viewed as an invisible minority, Mexicans have always been a strong force in the Southwest, particularly in the areas of custom, architecture, foods, geographical names, agriculture, and the arts. (33)

I am primarily concerned with the ways in which the great losses of Chicana/o culture are figured in literature. Chicana/o literature offers a dramatic narrative representation of how these losses have mattered, and why.

In the previous chapter I drew upon Hayden White's discussion of narrative as an articulation of self. To deny anyone the ability to narrate is to deny them the ability to

articulate who they are, and why they matter. Lomelí cites the authors of *Chicano Perspectives in Literature* in order to explain the important function of literature for a culture: “Literature mirrors the multiple personalities and motivations, the small victories, and the quiet suffering, the outcries and the anguish –existence in its many phases. Literature assimilates all possible experience in order to recreate an original reality” (34). In “Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink,” Anzaldúa locates the practice of storytelling within all generations of her family and within our most ancient history. “When I was seven, eight, nine, fifteen, sixteen years old, I would read in bed with a flashlight under the covers, hiding my self-imposed insomnia from my mother. I preferred the world of the imagination to the death of sleep” (87) writes Anzaldúa, illustrating her lifelong relationship to literature. In her chapter “Reading Tejana, Reading Chicana,” Sonia Saldívar-Hull recounts her early engagement with literature. Open access to a library provided her with the texts of great literature and the ability to imagine an existence beyond her own. In *Hunger for Memory*, noted Hispanic chillón Richard Rodriguez devotes pages and pages to his relationship with reading. While he ascribes his voracious appetite for books to a desire for knowledge, he also acknowledges the pleasure of reading. Books provided him entre into the world of Western intellectual thought, but they were also comforting:

I came to enjoy the lonely good company of books. Early on weekday mornings, I’d read in my bed. I’d feel a mysterious comfort then, reading in the dawn quiet – the blue-gray silence interrupted by the occasional churning of the refrigerator motor a few rooms away or the more distant sounds of a city bus beginning its run. (62)

Many, if not most Chicana/o narratives, feature some ode to reading as a means to both mental and physical escape. The deep relationship to literature is also expressed by a

strong need to write, and create literature. In the final vignette of Sandra Cisneros' *House on Mango Street*, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Esperanza who is destined to be a writer explains how writing brings her some measure of freedom from her painful past: "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free" (110). Just as reading provides access to another world, writing provides a means to bear witness and to make sure that a story is constantly remembered. The desire to bear witness and to narrate painful pasts comes from a legacy of loss. There is no desire to remedy that loss, only to ensure that other things aren't lost and that our losses are not forgotten. For Anzaldúa, writing takes on a three dimensional quality. Her work is a living entity:

My "stories" are acts encapsulated in time, "enacted" every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and "dead" objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a "who" or a "what" and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be "fed," *la tengo que bañar y vestir*. (89)

In the face of lost land, language and nation, the loss of literature only deepens the catastrophe. Rather than identifying the Chicano Movement as a moment of origin for Chicana/o literature, we should instead look at it as a point of recovery, as a moment of impetus to look back and assess what has been lost.

Our moment of consciousness raising and revolution becomes a melancholy moment where we begin to look back and recognize what has been lost. Efforts to recover what has been lost have been varied. This chapter seeks to explore moments of

recovery within Chicana/o literature. I have chosen two points of recovery: Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ epic poem *I Am Joaquín*, and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s satirical nineteenth century novel, *Who Would Have Thought It? I Am Joaquín* emerges during the Chicano Movement as a way to write Chicanos into history and to assert our longstanding presence on this land. Ruiz de Burton’s novel, recovered as part of the Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage Project, also asserts our presence in the US, and takes a strong stance in regard to Mexican rights in the United States. I am situating Ruiz de Burton’s novel as a specifically recovered text. Originally published in 1872, and republished in 1995, I maintain that the recovery of this novel constitutes a backward glance at a lost text. *I Am Joaquín* casts a backward glance in an effort to recover a lost indigenous past, and the recovery of *Who Would of Thought It?* casts a backward glance in an effort to recover something of our lost literary heritage. Despite their separation across time, both Gonzales and Ruiz de Burton are two writers grappling with lost identity. The profound irony is that the identities they seek to recover run completely counter to each other. Gonzales reaches back to an erased indigenous past that locates Chicana/o identity outside the previously valorized Spanish model. Ruiz de Burton however seeks to position landed Californios within a framework of privileged whiteness. Both writers narrate a coherent identity, while their coexistence within the same canon makes such coherence impossible. Narrating in first person, Joaquín of Gonzales’ poem is an example of a single voiced but collective identity. Joaquín becomes the figure who is “bronzed” by the rediscovery of his indigenous past, and the deemphasizing of his European blood. Ruiz de Burton’s Lola Medina is the opposite of Joaquín. In *Who Would Have Thought It?*, Lola is painted brown by her Comanche

captors, but gradually becomes white as she grows into a kind and generous lady. Though she is painted brown by the Comanche, her brown skin is reified by the racist Yankees who cannot see beyond her color. Whereas Gonzales seeks to reveal a collective indigeneity, Ruiz de Burton seeks to prove an enduring whiteness. Both ultimately critique structures of white supremacy, but they complicate the notion of a unified Chicana/o past.

This is striking, but not necessarily problematic. Within Chicana/o melancholy resolution is impossible and undesirable. I have used Anzaldúa to show how meditating on our collective losses is energizing instead of pathological. The desire for a coherent subjectivity is rooted in Western ideology and it is not the only way to exist as a subject. I aim to explore the gap around which both writers circle. What they seek is impossible as they are working within parallel desires, and their contrast demonstrates the dynamism of Chicana/o identity and the Chicana/o literary canon.

Returning once more to “An Overview of Chicano Letters: From Origin to Resurgence,” Lomelí describes the hydra-headed nature of Chicana/o literary origins. While I do not consider it crucial to locate one specific originary point for Chicana/o literature, Lomelí’s discussion provides an ideal framework for drawing Gonzales and Ruiz de Burton into conversation with each other:

Our literature is characterized by two distinct beginnings. The year 1848 marks its historical beginning because the Mexican-American confrontation determined that Mexicans in the United States automatically became Chicano (circumstantially, at least, since the term was in very limited use at the time). The more contemporary date of 1965 is significant as a symbolic spiritual rebirth or resurgence. That year the Teatro Campesino joined the social struggle of La Causa with César Chávez. Literature and social reality converged in an inseparable entity. Like the tip of an iceberg, the year 1965 represents a larger and

unknown body of artistic activity that had been ignored –one of the best kept secrets of the Southwest for 120 years. (35)

We can take these two points not as absolute points of origin, but as common points between our two texts. The year 1848, as the end of the US-Mexico War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo mark the loss of Mexican nationality and land for those who chose to stay within US borders. This loss necessitates the creation of a new identity for the newly incorporated people, and catapults them into a different category altogether.

1848 – Broken Borders & Broken Treaties

In *North From Mexico* historian Carey McWilliams identifies the US-Mexico War as a culmination of growing tension in Texas, and the growing desire for expansion in the eastern United States. McWilliams notes that the land lost by Mexico, in truly melancholic fashion, was more valuable than anyone really knew:

Not only did Mexico forfeit an empire to the United States, but, ironically, none of the signers of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo realized that, nine days before the treaty was signed gold had been discovered in California. That they had unknowingly ceded to the United States territories unbelievably rich in gold and silver—the hope of finding which had lured Coronado and De Oñate into the Southwest—must have added to the sense of bitterness and defeat. (101)

These lost riches return symbolically as Lola Medina’s treasure in *Who Would Have Thought It?!*. In that text they are used to fund Yankee upward mobility instead of supporting Lola as a Spanish lady. McWilliams points to another loss of the US-Mexico War: the people who remained in the United States. He adds, “Nothing was more galling to the Mexican officials who negotiated the treaty than the fact that they were compelled to assign, as it were, a large number of their countrymen to the Yankees” (101). Viewing these people as unceremoniously “sold” to the US, the loss to Mexico of its citizens is

one not generally registered. Ruiz de Burton's novel puns the captivity narrative by positioning whites as those who have kidnapped Lola, and who hold her in captivity for their own gain.

With the land stolen and Mexican citizens effectively sold into US citizenship, the year 1848 presented the US with a new non-homogenous group that challenged the growing hegemony of whiteness in the US. Viewed as a mongrel race, Mexicans in the US were phenotypically varied, and themselves possessed a different understanding of race than that which prevailed in the US at the time. Gómez describes this issue as paradoxical explaining that, "The central paradox was the *legal* construction of Mexicans as racially 'white' alongside the *social* construction of Mexicans as non-white and as racially inferior" (4). This paradox informs much of the anger and resentment that Ruiz de Burton felt in regard to the position of landed Californios after the signing of the Treaty. This paradox also illustrates the absurd construction of whiteness and white supremacy in the United States. This irony affords another strange parallel between Gonzales and Ruiz de Burton: both were intensely critical of US white supremacy, and both would see it destroyed in its existent state. Yet, while Ruiz de Burton sought full recognition of her Hispanic whiteness, Gonzales sought to affirm the creation of a bronze race. Though at odds with each other, both provide a multifaceted critique of white supremacy, especially in the face of expansionist and anti-expansionist discourse of the nineteenth century.

In *Race and Manifest Destiny*, Reginald Horsman charts the parallel between the creation of the US and the perpetuation of white supremacy. He notes that while expansion was key to the realization of Manifest Destiny, it brought with it a concert of

racial anxieties. In the early nineteenth century Anglo-Saxons (Horsman's term) in the US had primarily encountered Indians and blacks. They had been successful in all but wiping out the Indians, and though blacks flourished in terms of population, because of slavery they were utterly subjugated. Both of these contributed to confidence in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon. (230) Despite such confidence, there were those Americans who worried that expansion and the subsequent incorporation of other races would result in the pollution of the new Republic. These anxieties swirled around the potential expansion into Mexican territories. Bound up in the belief of Anglo-Saxon superiority was the idea that an expanded US would be beneficial to all, consequently bringing the bright light of the democratic republic to other nations. According to Horsman, Americans were so critical of what they perceived as a corrupt Mexican government that

It was even assumed at the beginning of the war that a Mexican population oppressed by the military, the clergy, and a corrupt government would welcome the invading armies. Throughout the conflict some argued that United States was carrying freedom to the Mexicans, and that a true regeneration of the Mexicans was to take place. But it soon became apparent that most Americans believed that the Mexicans lacked the innate ability to benefit from the opportunity to be given them by liberating American armies. (232)

Some who opposed the expansion into Mexico did so on the basis of slavery, concerned that annexing Mexico would mean annexing slave territory. The central concern though is clearly race. Annexing Mexican land, and incorporating 115,000 Mexicans posed a problem to racial identity in the US. Horsman cites John C. Calhoun's famous tirade against the incorporation of non-white races into the US. Calhoun expounds with his famous proclamation: "We have never dreamt of incorporating into our Union any but the Caucasian race – the free white race... Ours, sir, is the Government of a white race"

(241). While Calhoun acknowledges that some Mexicans have pure Spanish blood in their veins, they are overall “polluted” by their Indian blood and general racial mixing.

Despite the racist protestations, expansion prevailed and the US was forced to contend with the “Mexican problem.” Though Treaty signers believed they had provisioned a good citizenship bargain for the Mexicans who elected to stay in the US, according to Laura Gómez, the citizenship rights under Article VIII of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo were at best legally vague, and at worst purposely obfuscating. Signers of the Treaty did not understand the vagaries of US citizenship, so the newly annexed Mexicans were granted Federal citizenship, but not state citizenship. Gómez recounts that after several court cases involving Mexicans trying to exercise their rights as citizens,

The California Supreme Court candidly acknowledged that the treaty provided only federal citizenship. Federal citizenship extended the protections of the Constitution and provided a ‘shield of nationality’ abroad, but did not convey political rights. Instead, political rights stemmed from being a citizen of a state. (44)

Given that much of the newly acquired territory wouldn’t be granted statehood for some time, this left many “citizens” in limbo, and with little legal recourse or protection. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton embodies perfectly the situation of these dispossessed citizens living in hostile territory. In the Introduction to Ruiz de Burton’s second novel, *The Squatter and the Don: A Novel Descriptive of Contemporary Occurrences in California*, Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita describe Ruiz de Burton as:

A writer who witnessed the disappearance of the old order and disruption of everyday life with the disintegration of past structures, shifts in power relations and the rapid capitalist development of the territory, Ruiz de Burton would seek to

reconstruct a bracketed history and to question dominant ideological discourses touting the “American Way” as a just, democratic and liberating system. (7)

Ruiz de Burton

In the introduction to *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, Amelia Montes and Anne Goldman position Ruiz de Burton as a nexus of critical Chicana/o literary thought. The 1992 republication of her novel *The Squatter and the Don* catapulted her into critical importance and immediately called into question the nature of the Chicana/o literary canon. Though some have recovered her as a subaltern voice, speaking for the dispossessed Californios— a kind of proto-Chicana — others have noted her possessive investment in whiteness. Her novels are sharply written intersectional critiques of nineteenth century Yankee society. As the first Hispanic woman to be published in English in the US, she deftly satirizes US expansionist policy, social mores, and domestic ideology. She parodies the romantic and sentimental genres effectively, turning Yankee ideology back onto itself. In our look back to find the texts we have lost, Ruiz de Burton’s novels represent quite a find.

They are of course troublingly elitist, and again there is valorization of a pure and true whiteness which complicates her position in Chicana/o literary history. In the Introduction to *Reconstructing a Chicano/a Literary Heritage*, María Herrera-Sobek reminds us of Socrates’ imperative “know thyself.” It is a pertinent reminder in a text that seeks to reconstruct a lost heritage. As excavators and investigators, Chicana/o literary scholars are in a position to shape our literary heritage into one that supports the image of the Chicana/o literary subject that we already have. Herrera-Sobek reminds us, however, that “It is particularly important for a minority group struggling with questions of

identity, legitimacy, and ethnic pride to investigate its past as well as its present no matter what the consequences may be” (ix). In this brief introduction Herrera-Sobek charts the irony of the twice colonized Southwest. Looking back to the days of the Spanish conquest, she highlights the loss of language as a key tool of domination. From denying that the existent indigenous people had a language, to renaming the people and the land, “Language in its written and oral forms became an essential weapon in the process of achieving hegemony in the Americas” (xxi). The conquest here is described in terms of language and narration. The Americas, described in Spanish by the Spaniards became what the Spaniards said:

In their hands was the task of ordering, naming, identifying, and constructing an image of America that served their particular needs, goals, and ideology at the expense of the native populations. It is at this juncture—that is, when the Spanish writing and speaking systems were imposed on the Amerindians—that the construction of the Other takes an ominous turn, because it was through the written word that the Spaniards described the New World to Europe.... Amerindians, without the power of the word—oral or written—were at the mercy of the Spanish writers. The repression (indeed, the burning) of their manuscripts further relegated them to a world of silence and negated their ability to represent themselves. (xxi)

This repression of self-representation led to erasure, and then this same loss of language was used by the US to conquer Mexico. Propaganda, yellow journalism, and the florid prose of sensationalist novels were used to create stereotypes that justified colonization and fashioned Mexicans as Others. Herrera-Sobek traces this loss across centuries to the present where modern day Mexican Americans feel the loss of language and literature and self-representation. I take from this an edict to not create a hegemonic Chicana/o subject, or to elide any of literary ancestors.

This sentiment is reflected in José F. Aranda Jr.'s essay "Contradictory Impulses: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Resistance Theory, and the politics of Chicana/oStudies." Aranda's essay seeks to dislodge Ruiz de Burton from the subaltern/resistant position into which she has been placed by Sánchez and Pita. While I have asserted that Ruiz de Burton's critique is complicated by her investment in white supremacy Aranda cites the need for caution in recovering Ruiz de Burton's complexities. The Recovery Project has recovered, and recirculated many lost texts by Hispanic writers in the US. This work has added to our official archive, and further demonstrates the history of intellectual production by Hispanics in the US. However, as Aranda explains,

... [T]he Recovery Project is not without its critics, and the case of Ruiz de Burton serves as an object lesson in the complexities and contradictions in reconstructing literary history. In recovering the nineteenth century for Chicano/a Studies, the Recovery Project has inadvertently reactivated a long-standing debate about the heterogeneity of Mexican American culture and history and its relation to left-activist politics, and questioned anew the idea that Mexican Americans have always been proletarian in character. To date, treatment of recovered texts has mapped out an uneasy alliance between the traditional working-class paradigms of Chicana/o Studies and the liberal, bourgeois leanings of the individuals who wrote after 1848. (553)

Recovering Ruiz de Burton does not provide an antidote to the loss of Mexican American literature in the US. Quite the opposite, in fact, as Ruiz de Burton begs more questions than she answers and causes the loss of a coherent working class Chicana/o identity. Her investment in whiteness rings parallel to Gonzales' investment in patriarchy despite his commitment to Chicano liberation. Each of these writers contends with both the larger losses of Chicana/o history as well as the personal losses of privilege attendant with actual revolution or structural change. So, too, must Chicana/o scholars contend with the lost privilege of a singular Chicana/o identity.

The Cultural Work of Ruiz de Burton

In the Introduction to the 1995 edition of *Who Would Have Thought It?* Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita situate Ruiz de Burton's novel within a matrix of historical and generic concerns. They contend:

In *Who Would Have Thought It?* Ruiz de Burton carries out an aggressive demystification of a series of national foundational ideologies. By variously deploying allegory, satire, and parody, the author effects a critique driven by a perceived crisis in the body politics of the United States itself. (viii)

Ruiz de Burton uses the literary conventions of the time to produce a critique about the political ideology of the time. This is extraordinarily clever considering that the discourse of separate spheres, novels of domesticity, and novels of sentimentality were meant to shore up ideologies of national security and pride. In "Manifest Domesticity," Amy Kaplan explores the multiple meanings of the word domestic as it relates to nineteenth-century literature, gender ideology, and foreign policy. She acknowledges that scholarship on the cult of domesticity showed that previously discounted women's texts actually illustrated the ways in which white women in the nineteenth century created and fostered middle-class American culture. Separate spheres were never really separate, but were in fact permeable and interconnected:

Most studies of this paradigm have revealed the permeability of the border that separates the spheres, demonstrating that the private feminized space of the home both infused and bolstered the public male arena of the market, and that the sentimental values attached to maternal influence were used to sanction women's entry into the wider civic realm from which those same values theoretically excluded them. (581)

So the spheres were never really separate, and in fact each relied on the other for differentiation. These revelations illustrate the ways in which recovered works change the

canons into which they are recovered. These revelations also illustrate the continued value of revisiting old texts with fresh perspectives. These reconsiderations do not illustrate feminist revisionism, but show that more attention to gender reveals important information about previously held ideas.

Kaplan takes the critique of separate spheres even further by suggesting that the sphere of the domestic allowed white men and women to come together in the face of the foreign. She explains:

This deconstruction of separate spheres, however, leaves another structural opposition in tact: the domestic in intimate opposition to the foreign. In this context domestic has a double meaning that not only links the familial household to the nation but also imagines both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home. (581)

One might imagine that Ruiz de Burton is already engaging in this deconstruction by satirizing the literature of separate spheres in *Who Would Have Thought It?* The story relies on the introduction of the foreign to the domestic. This is Lola in the home of the Norvals, this is Mexican Ruiz de Burton in Philadelphia, and this is all of the new Mexican Americans elsewhere in the Southwest. Calhoun's fears that Mexicans in the US would be a pollutant are correct. The introduction of the foreign Mexican to the US domestic pollutes the ideology of a pure American identity. White people will not be sullied by the inclusion of Mexicans into the United States, but the ideology of American whiteness will indeed be troubled.

Kaplan further expands the concept of domesticity:

The border between the domestic and the foreign, however, also deconstructs when we think of domesticity not as a static condition but as the process of domestication, which entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, and the alien. Domestic in this sense is related to the imperial project of civilizing, and the

conditions of domesticity often become markers that distinguish civilization from savagery. (582)

Kaplan's larger, and enduring argument is that we must necessarily read the discourse of domesticity with the discourse of expansionism and Manifest Destiny. Thinking of domesticity as strictly the province of the home prevents us from understanding the relationship between domestic ideology and nineteenth century national building. *Who Would Have Thought It?* presages this discussion by using the discourse of novels of domesticity to critique US national and foreign policy. Believing themselves civilized and thus capable of civilizing, the Norvals commit the most egregious acts that they justify by dint of their position as civilized Yankees. The larger critique is that Anglos in the US, and for Ruiz de Burton especially East coast Anglos, believed themselves so civilized that they must in turn civilize the Mexican savages who have just been incorporated into their borders. Looking forward to the issues that Gonzales will address in *I Am Joaquín*, the discourse of civilization becomes the discourse of assimilation.

Kaplan continues:

Through the process of domestication, the home contains within itself those wild foreign elements that must be tamed; domesticity not only monitors the borders between the civilized and the savage but also regulates traces of the savage within itself. (582)

For the Norvals, Lola is the savage entity thrust into their midst, but in Ruiz de Burton's infinite irony it is Lola who acts as a civilizing force for the Norvals and other East coast Anglos with whom she has contact. This analysis is echoed by Sánchez and Pita in the Introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?*:

The novel, with a national and international focus, situates the U.S. as a modernizing and expansionist nation, within which the family domain is also

transformed. Shifting between these parallel spheres, the political and the domestic, enables a transcoding of the two social contracts, metonymically related: marriage (the family formation) and the Constitution (the republic), each governed by its own conventions and boundaries. The allegorical transcoding of power-relations, violations of conventions and deception is matched by an ironic transcontextualization of several nineteenth century narrative genres. (x)

Ruiz de Burton's *Who Would Have Thought It?* as a recovered text? challenges both the Chicana/o literary canon, and the mainstream Anglo canon as well. Despite its myriad of problematic complications, i.e. the continued valorization of whiteness, maintenance of class hierarchy, and the erasure of the indigenous as actual people, this novel provides a sophisticated meditation on the loss of land and life that occurred after the US-Mexico War.

Who Would Have Thought It? is a particularly scathing and sophisticated satire of Boston Yankee life. In this text Ruiz de Burton manages to parody the Sentimental novel, point out the hypocrisy of white East Coast abolitionists and weave into this a complex metaphor of the US-Mexico War. In "Beast in the Jungle: Foreigners and Natives in Boston," Anne Goldman identifies Lola Medina as a symbol of the conflict of the US-Mexico War that Ruiz de Burton places in the center of Boston society life. Ruiz de Burton also uses this novel to illustrate the hypocrisy of abolitionists who promoted equality, but clearly did not want that equality to spread to their own households. Though the Norvals are noted abolitionists, the arrival of a dark skinned Lola causes the family to evaluate her in a very standard animalistic way. They view Lola as black, and so they refer to her as a "specimen" and as part of the "animal kingdom." Lola is also thrust into comparison with the household's Irish servants. Ruiz de Burton does not create a solidarity between the marginalized Irish and the marginalized Lola. It is merely that Lola has been incorrectly and unjustly identified whereas the Irish truly are filthy and

disgusting. Aranda also discusses how Ruiz de Burton's critique is built on the backs of other marginalized groups:

With the intent of demystifying the United States and its cultural institutions, Ruiz de Burton's satire debunks the claim to moral righteousness of Protestant clergymen and their argument that the United States is a Christian nation destined for greatness. She pits the rhetorics of politicians against their avarice, cowardice, and duplicity. Political representation in her novel is a farce played out at the expense of the illiterate and the working class. She lashes out equally at constitutionally sanctioned notions of inequality that bar women from elected office and at social norms that infantilize and deny women's potential. She depicts the hypocrisy of white abolitionists who hold racist views of blacks while championing their cause and savagely ridicules the pretense of respectability and republican patriotism associated with Anglo-American women who fiercely attempt to embody that reigning "cult of domesticity." (564)

Ruiz de Burton is critical of how the Yankee's narrow understanding of race blinds them to seeing Lola for who she really is. In this critique the Yankees are shallow, incapable of seeing below the surface and their rhetoric of equality is merely empty words. Goldman points out that Ruiz de Burton's treatment of the Irish serves multiple purposes: "But Ruiz de Burton's besmirching of the Irish also indicates her desire to foreclose upon potential affiliations between two populations whose Catholic practices have afforded others an opening for vilifying them both as 'foreign'" (88). It is vitally important that Lola be a specific kind of white, and that her nobility raise her above the ideology of the Yankees, and also above the races they reviled. Ruiz de Burton's portrayal of the Irish is not an uncommon move, but it is still problematic. Goldman says, "Ruiz de Burton's own unattractive representation is designed to undermine the assumptions white Americans hold about Mexicans. Nevertheless, it distinguishes one California population only to demean others en masse" (89). At the heart of the novel is Lola, the blackened character who will gradually whiten. The problematic differentiation that comes at the expense of all Others points out not only hypocrisy, but that the

black/white racial dichotomy of the US is an ineffective system to understand race. Ruiz de Burton may not be arguing for the acknowledgement of the mestiza as a category within US society, but she is gesturing toward the constructed nature of whiteness, and showing that it is a shaky foundation on which to build a national ideology.

More explosively, at least to Goldman, is that Ruiz de Burton draws together a comparison of the US-Mexico War and the Civil War. Holding these two wars in concert is breaking new ground in very recent scholarship. Just as Ruiz de Burton opens the space to interrogate US constructions of whiteness, so does she open up new ways to interrogate these two wars (Goldman 90). In “Thank God, Lolita is Away from Those Horrid Savages: The Politics of Whiteness in *Who Would Have Thought It?*” Jesse Alemán explores Ruiz de Burton’s troubling, though unsurprising relationship to whiteness. In this article, Alemán asserts that “. . .the contradiction between Mexican American dispossession and claims to white citizenship rights remain a thorn in the side of Chicana/o literary history” (97). Chicana/o literary historians who have looked back at Ruiz de Burton have had trouble assimilating her into the discourse of resistance that has primarily shaped Chicana/o narrative. There is a sort of cherry picking that attends Ruiz de Burton as critics seek out kernels of resistance that ignore larger issues. This relationship to whiteness isn’t an affectation of Ruiz de Burton; it is a common and documented historical fact.

Faced with the Mexican question after the US-Mexico War, the US sought to resolve it by casting most of their new citizens as racial others. Alemán explains:

After 1848, however, Mexican territory becomes subject to the laws of Manifest Destiny. The United States thus rescinded Mexico’s 1821 landownership policies and reintroduced racialized codes of citizenship status, voting rights, and property

titles that fully denied land rights to Indians and questioned the rights of Mexicans, whose racial ambiguity made them dubious representatives of the United States' citizenry. (97)

Alemán cites Martha Menchaca who explains that claims to Hispanic whiteness and pure Spanish heritage were often employed as strategies of survival in the newly racialized territory. Lola Medina, a metonymic figure who symbolizes the conquered land and the dispossessed people, is also the embodiment of US anxieties about Mexico. If annexation was anxiety provoking because of the Mexican question, then Ruiz de Burton places the Mexican right in the midst of Boston society. The result is less about contagion and racial pollution and more about the ways in which white Mexicans pose a challenge to white Americans. According to Alemán: "As with Lola's arrival in the North, the expansion of the United States' borders after 1848 means the expansion of the nation's racial signifiers, and through the story of Lola Medina, Ruiz de Burton challenges the definition of whiteness in the United States to include Mexicans" (100). Alemán continues to explain that the white citizens in the novel react poorly to Lola's whiteness. In the text, Lola's whiteness increases in direct relationship to the declining moral value of the white characters. Lola doesn't just become white, she becomes the whitest. Mexican/Spanish whiteness becomes superior to the crass Anglo-Saxon whiteness of the Norval family. However, just as their whiteness is founded on the elision of racialized Others, so is Lola's. It is with this observation that Alemán draws a relationship between Anglo colonialism and Californio colonialism. Despite the sophistication of Ruiz de Burton's critique and the considerable work she does to deconstruct hegemonic whiteness in the US, there is always her troubling reproduction of oppressive systems.

There is no comfortable resolution with Ruiz de Burton, no place of rest. In terms of melancholy, when we look back and recover her lost texts we are inundated with more loss. It is most useful to focus on Ruiz de Burton's action rather than her outcomes, narrative or otherwise. She did open up the scope of discussions of race in the US, and she did orchestrate complex conversation about US expansion. Though she was lost in the present, she wasn't silenced in her own time. In the Introduction to the 2009 Penguin edition of *Who Would Have Thought It?* Amelia Montes describes Ruiz de Burton thusly,

Ruiz de Burton yearned to make sense of her cultural and racial position in a nineteenth-century Mexican and American culture. Americans' several burdens—of the colonizer, the dispossessed, the pilgrim, and the wanderer—in a land of multiple cultures, and Ruiz de Burton's perspectives, enlarge our scope of the American identity, because she contributes what it meant for a Mexican American woman to experience the establishment of American nationhood in the nineteenth century. Most important, she was convinced that a book was the best vehicle in which to understand this project. (xx)

Ruiz de Burton was lost in a new world, and trying to assert herself and explain her position. In their 1995 introduction to *Who Would Have Thought It?* Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita position Ruiz de Burton as the ultimate outsider. She is racially Other in the eyes of East Coast Anglos, she is widowed, she is female, and she asserts herself within the public spheres of authorship and politics. During her life, Ruiz de Burton witnesses the US-Mexico War, the Civil War, and the period of Reconstruction. Sánchez and Pita situate Ruiz de Burton's outsider perspective in these terms:

...her extended stay on the East coast provided an opportunity for first hand observations and assessment of the US Republic as it was torn apart during the period of the Civil War and was reconfiguring itself immediately thereafter. Reconstruction after the Civil War, which displaced the old plantation ruling class in the South, would no doubt also trigger memories of what had taken place in Alta California, where after occupation the ruling Californios were reduced to a subaltern minority. (ix)

Nationally speaking, she witnessed these various, formative conflicts from different states all through the US. Internationally speaking, she would have been able to place these national conflicts within a more global, or at least inter-continental context.

Ruiz de Burton functions as an outsider/insider because though she is Other, she still moves through drawing rooms and Anglo society. She represents a melancholic internal alterity. She is part of the excess that was meant to be erased as the US consolidated its white national identity. She is lost, but not disoriented, and able to see the cracks in mainstream US ideology. Chicanos in the twentieth century will also experience this internal alterity. Where Ruiz de Burton was critical of formative US ideologies, Gonzales is critical of the continued assertion of the American Dream. Gonzales' will occupy the same outsider/insider position that allows him to critique structures of US oppression. His position also allows him to place Chicano existence and US oppression within a lengthy intercontinental history that shows the US as inextricably linked to Mexico and her descendants.

Lost in a world of Confusion: History and Identity

In 1967 former boxer and passionate Chicano activist Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales published his epic poem, *I Am Joaquín*. In 1969 Luis Valdez directed a documentary that interspersed a reading of the poem with images and text from Chicano history, and by 1970 the text had been picked up and published by Bantam, selling over 100,000 copies and becoming, as the *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature* describes it, the first Chicano bestseller. The stirring poem inspired the activists of the Chicano Movement and holds a significant place within the Chicana/o literary tradition.

The poem narrates the history of the Chicano in the United States. Gonzales begins in the present day, describing himself as “lost in a world of confusion” (788). Joaquín as a singular persona stands in for the collective identity of the Chicano. He is lost, caught between worlds, and deciding how he will proceed into the future. As a Chicano he does not fit into modern gringo society and is faced with the choice of assimilation or annihilation. By emphasizing mestizaje, Gonzales uses Joaquín to illustrate a third choice beyond the modern of binary of submitting to the Anglo world, or starving to death. Indeed, Joaquín as the collective identity of Chicanos is the third option. In the face of choosing, Joaquín emphasizes collectivity and mestizaje. In, *Movements in Chicano Poetry: Against Myths, Against Margins*, Rafael Pérez-Torres asserts that the introduction, “...suggests that the poem touches on points of rupture in the articulation of Chicana subjectivity and culture but that it finally affirms Chicana identity and activism through history” (69). With this introductory root in collectivity and mestizaje, *I am Joaquín* begins its journey through the Chicano past, starting with Aztec roots and moving through Mexican history up to modern times in the US. The epic scope of the poem and the intense sweep of history demonstrate the cultural longevity of the Chicano people as well as lasting endurance in the face of constant adversity. In the introduction to the poem Gonzales explains,

Writing *I am Joaquín* was a journey back through history, a painful self-evaluation, a wandering search for my peoples and, most of all, for my own identity. The totality of all social inequities and injustices had to come to the surface. All the while, the truth about our own flaws—the villains and the heroes has to ride together—in order to draw an honest, clear conclusion of who we were, who we are, and where we are going.

The work clearly evokes a deep social consciousness and was an effective rallying cry for the Movement. It is also notable as an effort to articulate Chicano history and identity in

the face of prevalent stereotypes; it would be unfair to identify the poem as only effective in terms of activism. In the Introduction to her 1986 monograph, *Chicano Poetry: A Critical Introduction* Cordelia Candelaria cites the appearance of *I Am Joaquín* as one of her reasons for locating 1967 as a historical jumping off point for Chicano poetry:

Joaquín's impact was immediately felt by Mexican-Americans in the Denver area and, later, by activists throughout the country who saw the poem as a seminal consciousness-raising vehicle for el pueblo and the larger U.S. society. By experiencing *I am Joaquín* either in a reading or through the film, many young Chicanos for the first time felt the possibilities inherent in a genuine Chicano literature. (xii)

For Candelaria, *I Am Joaquín* functions as an important literary historical moment. She connects it to the larger genealogy of Chicano literature, and notes that it has effects for both the Chicana/o community and society as a whole. Though 1967 is not the origin year of Chicana/o literature, and *I Am Joaquín* is not the originary text of Chicana/o literature it still represents the potential for a long history and creative future. It illustrates that the Chicano experience in the US and Mexico is worthy of narration. Though it is crucial to our understanding of Ruiz de Burton that we not categorize all Chicana/o literature as resistance literature, it is clear from the impact of *I Am Joaquín* that resistance literature is eminently valuable within our canon. Gonzales' epic poem affirms an epic past, and a burgeoning aesthetic, which signals for many the creation of a Chicana/o aesthetic consciousness.

I Am Joaquín offers a valuable depiction of the growing Chicano historical consciousness. Gonzales' poem, unlike Ruiz de Burton's novels, locates the roots of the Mexican people firmly in indigenous history. Ruiz de Burton valorizes the Hispanic heritage that Gonzales' poem specifically works to dethrone. Gonzales writes,

I owned land as far as the eye
Could see under the crown of Spain,
and I toiled the earth
and gave my Indian sweat and blood
for the Spanish master
who ruled with tyranny over man and
beast and all that he could trample
But...
The GROUND WAS MINE.
I was both tyrant and slave. (789)

I Am Joaquín acknowledges that the Chicano past is comprised of both the indigenous and the European. He is less connected to the European roots and identifies the modern struggles of working-class Chicanos with the struggle of colonized indigenous people. Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales do sort of flatten out indigenous people. Rather than acknowledging the diversity of Mexico's indigenous population, Ruiz de Burton casts indigenous people as savages, and Gonzales casts them as warriors. Both depictions erase the specificity of the indigenous presence. Ruiz de Burton either erases them as full subjects in her work or they are stereotypical figures deserving of their poor treatment and place within the caste system of nineteenth century California. Gonzales, for his deep pride in his roots describes a distinctly masculine indigenous population and emphasizes their bravery as warriors. He creates a monolith, that while positive, doesn't allow for a fully three dimensional subjectivity. The use of the indigenous is undoubtedly equal parts genuine historical belief as well as rhetorical strategy. In "Literary Primitivism and 'the New Mestiza,'" Sheila Marie Contreras explores the ways in which Anzaldúa employs neoindigenism in her work. Contreras traces this practice back to Movement writing, and explains that:

Indigenism in el movimiento attempted to glorify Chicana/o history and to establish the legitimacy of mestiza/o presences in the United States. By naming Chicanas/os as indigenous to the Americas, movement indigenism challenged the

status of Mexicans as "immigrants" and "foreigners." Furthermore, the claim of indigeneity asserted a historical relationship to land that was no longer occupied by mestizas/os, even if cultivated by mestiza/o hands. El Plan de Aztlán and Corky Gonzalez's (sic) "I Am Joaquín," both foundational documents of the movement, each assert Chicana/o origins in pre-Conquest Mesoamerica (53)

While Gonzales makes use of Chicano indigeneity, he does so in a stereotypical way. He draws upon incomplete histories and myths to create a warrior past that ignores the historical specificity of actual indigenous life. Candelaria points this out as well, noting that Gonzales articulates a sense of the pure blood Indian that runs counter to the actual mixed blood heritage of Chicano/mestizos:

Gonzales apparently does not accept the obvious truth that the mestizaje that he acknowledges with pride is by definition not "pure" as he asserts. It is, rather, mixed blood within a blended gene pool. He futilely rejects the African blood and culture transmitted to Spain during the Moorish takeover between 700 and 1200 A.D., even though after centuries of Moorish occupation, Spain's people culture, and language were visibly altered by the intermingling of peoples. (49)

Furthermore, Gonzales erases the possibility of indigenous mestizaje. It is well accepted that mestizos are a mix of Spanish and Indian blood, but what about inter-indigenous mixing? There were multiple groups of indigenous people in pre-Conquest Mexico. Why wouldn't there have been mestizaje prior to Spanish contact?

If for the purposes of my comparison we are comparing Lola to Joaquín, then we are also comparing possibly competitive collective identities. Though Ruiz de Burton is not utilizing the idea of the collective as a means to critique the capitalist fetishization of the individual, Lola does stand in as a metaphor for all dispossessed Californios in the nineteenth century. Like Joaquín, Lola is trapped in Anglo society trying to orient herself and maintain her identity. Lola is the embodiment of every cultural and class virtue, but the Anglos cannot see beyond her brown skin. As her skin fades in the novel she is

transformed into a figure of hyper-whiteness; a virtuous being who transcends the very category of whiteness as it is embodied by greedy, lustful, land-grabbing Americans. Lola is, of course, meant to evoke sympathy even while Ruiz de Burton maintains a sort of winking awareness of the sentimental appeal for sympathy. Joaquín, on the other hand, is meant to inspire and empower. He evokes a history of struggle and a present and future of continuous struggle. Pérez-Torres notes the interplay between the title of the poem and the figure of Joaquín:

The poem is an assertion of self. “Joaquín” and Joaquín collapse into a single entity characterized by a history of pain, struggle, ultimately triumph. The collapse of speaker and title signals a collapse as well of history into culture. The poem works to make these realms coterminous so that culture is history is heritage is “Joaquín” is Joaquín. (69)

Joaquín as a literary figure is meant to draw Chicanos together as one collective subjectivity with a shared history and shared struggle. It is a daunting purpose, but it is clear what Gonzales is doing with his work. Lola Medina is a character in a novel which would generically speaking imply that she could be more well-rounded than Joaquín. They both, however, mostly function as vehicles around which the larger point swirls. Ruiz de Burton’s work is more complex than Gonzales’ and not just because her work is a novel instead of a loosely constructed poem. Ruiz de Burton’s work collapses multiple genres almost to the point of satire toward the creation of a sophisticated rhetorical argument. Clearly her ability to perform whiteness should be evidence of her civility and class. Lola is a Trojan horse of sorts meant to appeal to Anglo society and destroy from within. In that vein Joaquín is a battering ram. In *Chicano Poetry: A Response to Chaos*, Juan Bruce-Novoa notes the relative simplicity of form in *I Am Joaquín*:

The writing is simple, free of complicated poetic tropes; the language easily accessible, communicating a readily memorable impression. Hence repetition is a key technique. As in oral tradition, reiteration insures listeners' retention. Repeated material forms permutating motifs that, nevertheless, remain essentially constant. Thus, readers learn a process of repetition and development from which nothing in the style distracts. (48)

The poem is, indeed, most effective when read aloud, paying homage to the oral tradition of Mexico and the Southwest, and to corridos of the US and Mexico. Bruce-Novoa also points out that the content of the poem is simple and highly accessible. He describes the content as "Mexican popular lore—including its commonest clichés..." (48). The accessible symbols are presented without commentary, with both Gonzales and Joaquín marshalling the archetypes of Chicano history for their cause. These archetypes, according to Bruce-Novoa, are presented to an audience that should know them, but they are also presented in such a way so as to be informative to those Chicanos who have no knowledge of their history. While judging this work as simple may seem like a critique, Bruce-Novoa links its simplicity with the effectiveness of its message. The images are clear, and the message is coherent. *I Am Joaquín* gets its point across, as Bruce-Novoa clarifies:

The design is well planned and carefully executed, with a coherence that may strike the critic as simple, and which is meant to be exactly that. The poem's purpose is propaganda, consciousness-raising, not intellectual analysis or "high culture." The audience's tradition is judged to be oral and popular and the material is pared to that level. Within those boundaries it functions quite well. (49)

Ruiz de Burton is making an appeal to reason, specifically directed at Anglo audiences. *I Am Joaquín* is a call to action, specifically directed at Chicano audiences. Yet the emphasis on action, simplicity of form and uncritical use of archetypes should not imply that *I Am Joaquín* is an uncomplicated work. Pérez-Torres refers to Bruce-Novoa's

assertion of simplicity and counters by describing the poem as revealing the complexity of Chicana/o identity:

Despite its call to power and its self-positioning as the summation of all that is “Chicano,” “Joaquín” reveals the discontinuities and contradictions inevitable in a history of dispossession and disempowerment. This is not to cast aspersions upon a classic text in the poetry of El Movimiento. Rather, it is to reveal how complex claims to national culture and self-determination can be, given the numerous discourses interpellating the subject position “Chicano.” (70)

Though Lola and Joaquín are meant to draw in discourses of identity and critique mainstream society, the work these characters do is really more complex. They both end up performing multifaceted critiques of their society, and the construction of identity and nation.

Though disparate in time and space, both of these texts ruminate on a grand loss. The complex critique they both offer and the complexity they engender swirl around the ways in which they seek to narrate and amend the losses of land and identity. Each text exists in a fragmented present, and each author grapples with possessing a fragmented subjectivity in the face of the seemingly monolithic United States. The texts are both flawed, however, because they each reach back to a remembered coherent identity. They seek to restore what has been lost, not in the sutured fashion of Gloria Anzaldúa, but with a literal recovery of the past. The appeal to a coherent past is familiar in Chicana/o literature. In his book *Mestizaje* Pérez-Torres draws on the work of Tey Diana Rebolledo to unpack our complex infatuation with a seemingly better, more cohesive past. We draw comfort from the past, from the sense that there is an enduring world behind us that stands in contrast to our troubling present:

This sense of comfort derives from an apparent ethical wholeness located in a world that no longer exists. The seeming order of another place and another time

forms a powerful myth of selfhood, one that undoubtedly holds a strong appeal in times of moral and social ambiguity to the mestiza/o subject in transition. (196)

Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales look back to a more coherent past in order to make sense of their troubling present. For Ruiz de Burton, this is a past of Mexican landed whiteness, and for Gonzales this is a past of indigenous nobility. In “Feminist Neo-Indigenism in Chicana Aztlán” Arthur Ramírez examines the impulse to flatten the specifics of indigenous presence in Chicana/o writing:

To be sure, Indigenism itself has also been at times overly idealized, romanticized, made to hark back to a "paradise lost" that never was. For some it provides a refuge from a harsh reality, affording escapism, at times more cosmetic than concrete. Some Marxists charged that past glories among indigenous cultures were built on the backs of slave labor. Also looming was that scorned image of the noble savage, of a pristine purity incarnate, that patronizingly scorned the indigenous way of life just as it held it up as an inspiring model. (72)

Their reliance on a comforting past, however, elides the complexity and specificity of the past on which they draw. Ruiz de Burton’s romanticizing of the courtly manners of Spanish Mexico erases the indigenous presence and duplicates problematic stratifications of race and class. Gonzales’ appeal to his indigenous ancestors erases the actual history of the Aztecs and other tribes in Mexico. He draws upon indigenous people as warriors in order to create imagery for his poem. Both authors ruminate on the loss of land, and the loss of a homeland. The irony of Californios losing their Mexican homeland is that they still occupy the same land. The loss of land and nation results in a profound dislocation of subjectivity. Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales draw on different nationalist discourses. Gonzales employs the energy of Chicano nationalism, and his poem becomes the rallying articulation of Chicano nationalism. Ruiz de Burton seeks to graft elements of her

Mexican national identity onto her new position as United States citizen. Pérez-Torres discusses Mexico as the absent homeland:

The idea of home resonates not just with an ambiguous present, but with an absent past. This past is often associated with Mexico, which represents an ever-absent homeland. In the Chicano cultural imaginary, Mexico as homeland forms a site of origin well mapped as an ethical center. Meaning and moral clarity seem to be located in a time long past, though it is equally clear that the moral certainties of that past time can be terribly contradictory and damaging. Patriarchal privilege, rigid racial and social hierarchies, and embedded class distinctions are all part of a world in which moral certainties are possible. In short, a profound sense of dislocation lies at the dark heart of Chicano identity. (197)

This dislocation, and desire to ameliorate loss with the balm of an imagined past is deeply melancholic. Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales have created melancholy texts that grieve the irreversible loss of land, nation, and identity. They don't know that their methods of recovery only root them further in their loss. Their narratives exist as the incessant recounting of their loss without offering any real recourse. Pérez-Torres describes this melancholy as characteristic of Chicana/o narrative thusly:

The fiction seeks to return what is absent, make present the invisible. Deeply ingrained, both in a sense of the mixed-race body and in mestizo literature, is a deep-felt awareness of loss. Loss, as Chicana/o literature makes clear, is irrevocable. Thus Chicano narrative represents a paradox, investing its energies in a struggle to reclaim what can never be regained. The process of storytelling is one whereby the ambivalence and melancholy about loss find expression through culture. (199)

Chicana/o literature narrates loss, and in a way reclaims it while affirming that what is lost can never be brought back. The energy of Chicana/o melancholy is thus generative and not pathological. Though both of these texts ultimately fail in various ways, they succeed as generative paradoxes of Chicana/o subjectivity. Both Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales seek to amend the losses that have proven formative to Chicana/os in the United States. Each author, however, provokes more questions than easy answers.

By ruminating on our lost past, lost land, and lost language these writers have not found themselves stuck in a Freudian pathology; instead, that they have created the potential for further discussion and for the reconsideration of previously held beliefs. Ultimately, reclamation proves elusive. Gonzales cannot adequately recapture the whole of lost history, but he can produce an important and inspiring poem. Ruiz de Burton's recovery provides a valuable disruption of nearly every facet of Chicana/o literature and history. In "Nationalism, History and Myth: The Masks of Aztlán" Charles Yves Grandjeat describes Aztlán as a unifying symbol around which Chicano nationalism could gel:

The nationalist drive was crystallized in the motive of Aztlán, mythical homeland of the Aztecs, which became the symbol for the would-be Chicano nation. Aztlán was... a meeting point-one between a glorious past and a present of struggle, and one where Chicanos from all walks of life would forgo inner rifts, come together and turn history around. It was a place of synthesis and change. (19)

Grandjeat goes on to draw a connection between the formation of the US in 1776 and the symbolic formation of Aztlán in the twentieth century: "Thus, the Chicano nation, like the United-States in 1776, surged from a Declaration, a 'speech act', a performative uttering rather than a cognitive statement" (19). So then, for Grandjeat, nation building in these instances is a narrative act:

What it arises from is an imaginative, creative effort, an ability to come up with creative representation which, beyond statistical categories and their cleavages, will impose a convincing, unifying, symbolic logic, a discursive apparatus able to foster a collective consciousness. (19)

Nations are narrated into being, and so they can be narrated and re-narrated in perpetuity. Thus, articulating the nation becomes an act of melancholic incessant narration. The one sure place where we can find common ground between Gonzales and Ruiz de Burton is

ironically within the loss of land. Both authors use different strategies to recover their loss: Gonzales asserts nationalism, Ruiz de Burton asserts racial superiority and a return to previous colonizing life. Both authors are also uniquely poised at different moments of nation building: Gonzales at the birth of Chicano nationalism and Ruiz de Burton at the consolidation of US nationalism. Perhaps the resolution for the grief and loss that both texts express is something equally paradoxical, a melancholy homeland that is real and imagined, always lost and always present. If loss of land is at the center of Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales' melancholy, then I contend that Aztlán as mythical and melancholy homeland provides the respite that both authors seek.

Aztlán: The Melancholy Homeland

Aztlán as a symbol of recovery for Chicana/os is not a new concept. Some writings on Aztlán explore it as a unifying myth and symbol marshalled in the face of overwhelming oppression. In the Introduction to *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland*, edited by Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco Lomelí, the use of Aztlán is explained this way:

During the decade from 1965-1975, Chicanos not only demonstrated in the streets to increase their opportunities and status, they also struggled to define a sense of mythic past and history in order to recapture what official history had omitted. Aztlán became a collective symbol by which to recover the past that had been wrestled away from the inhabitants of Aztlán through the multiple conquests of the area. (ii)

Other writings are apt to understand it as an actual place, as the symbolic component to the material reality of the Southwest. The appeal to the past, either its creation or acknowledgement, is key to survival. In this sense, both Ruiz de Burton and Rodolfo Gonzales share the desire to ensure survival in the face of US imperialism. What is key

about the intellectual history of Aztlán is that it is used to articulate an erased history. Without history a culture has no identity and risks being subsumed into the Anglo hegemony of the United States. I view this need for history as an aspect of Chicana/o melancholy. This harkens back to Pérez-Torres' points about the paradoxes of our desire to remedy our losses. Each attempt to invoke a unifying symbol in the face of devastating loss only works insofar as that symbol is not interrogated. Yet it is our intellectual responsibility to interrogate these symbols. Each move we make to ameliorate our losses leads to further loss. Chicana/o identity is rooted in loss, and rooted in the interrogation of these losses. We should not comprehend this as Chicana/o identity being rooted in negation, or lack; these losses do not constitute a deficit because the nature of our engagement with them is constantly productive.

Recounting and re-counting our losses ensures an expression of history, and thus Chicana/o survival and legitimacy. While Freud viewed melancholy as a pathological barrier to mourning, the melancholy rumination on our losses proves fruitful for Chicana/o writers. As the Introduction to *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* states, "It should be kept in mind that by reappropriating Aztlán the Chicano did not choose to live in the past; rather, the community chose to find its taproot of identity in its history so that it could more confidently create the future" (ii). Looking back and recovering and rearticulating the past is ultimately a way to move forward. In resurrecting the symbol of Aztlán from our erased past Chicana/o writers and historians essentially sought to fill in a gap in our history. In reading about Aztlán it becomes clear that there is no settled conclusion as to whether or not it constitutes an actual material reality. The process of marshalling Aztlán for the Chicano Movement is an exercise in creating a symbol out of

a myth. There is no denying the power of myth, and the necessity of mythological life to a culture. However, my contention is that Aztlán doesn't really fill the void of history. First the losses that Aztlán is supposed to ameliorate can never be healed or overcome. Colonized people are never simply going to mourn the loss of their past and future and move on. Putting a symbol in place of the loss doesn't lessen the loss. We lost our homeland multiple times, we do not have it back, this is still the United States and many Chicana/os still live as second-class citizens.

Aztlán as melancholy homeland is the perfect companion to our historical melancholy. It is loss upon a loss that reminds us what we have lost and how. Aztlán, as the name of our homeland is the symbol Chicana/os will employ in the incessant narration of our past. It is not productive to attempt to resolve Aztlán; rather, we should examine how it has been used and where it will take us in the future.

Written at the first Chicano National Youth Conference in Denver, Colorado in 1969, the *Plan de Aztlán* provides the organizing principles for Chicano nationalism. The *Plan* makes a specific reclamation of Aztlán in these terms:

In the spirit of a new people that is conscious not only of its proud historical heritage but also of the brutal "gringo" invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano inhabitants and civilizers of the northern land of Aztlán from whence came our forefathers, reclaiming the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. (1)

With these opening lines Aztlán becomes Chicano birthright and the physical space of the Southwest. Chicano presence in Aztlán is viewed as a return to the homeland of our ancestors, the Aztecs. This early neo-indigenism collapses Chicana/o ancestry into a sort

of monolithic Aztec composite. Aztlán is elevated as a symbol, but the *Plan* is also definite about Aztlán being a geographical place:

We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continents. (1)

Aztlán belongs to the Chicano people because we were here first, and because we work the land. The imagery here is very concrete. Chicanos are physically tied to the land because we work it with physical labor. The *Plan* is, after all, a plan – a directive for moving forward and building a Chicano nation. Its relationship and utilization of Aztlán must necessarily be material in nature. Note the contrast between the physical, geographic space of Aztlán and the “capricious frontier” of the Anglo border. In this instance Aztlán is real, and the Anglo border is imaginary – a rhetorical move that presages Anzaldúa’s discussion of the borderlands, and play between the material and the imaginary nature of the border. There cannot be a nation without land, and the Chicano Movement sought to derive power through nation building. According to the *Plan*, “Nationalism as the key to organization transcends all religious, political, class, and economic factions or boundaries. Nationalism is the common denominator that all members of La Raza can agree upon” (2). Aztlán is the physical space of the nation, that is a given in this piece. That Aztlán is physical land means that land needs to be reclaimed,: “Lands rightfully ours will be fought for and defended. Land and realty ownership will be acquired by the community for the people’s welfare” (2). In the *Plan*, I think that Aztlán is less symbol and more concrete assertion. It is a literal reclamation of lost land, and since it is a plan of action it make sense that symbolism is less important.

Perhaps the *Plan* engages uncritically with the idea of Aztlán, but it is a call to action and Aztlán serves an important function.

In the essay “Search for Aztlán” Luis Leal explores Aztlán as material and symbolic reality. In his discussion Aztlán is a symbol for both the Aztecs and the modern day Chicanos. Even during the Pre-Columbian era Aztlán was a lost homeland. Leal also points out that Aztlán is symbol and myth, and that even though neither of these bears the weight of material geography they serve an important function for Chicana/o life and culture:

Aztlán ...is as much symbol as it is myth. As a symbol, it conveys the image of the cave (or sometimes a hill) representative of the origin of man; and as a myth, it symbolized the existence of a paradisiacal region where injustice, evil, sickness, old age, poverty, and misery do not exist. As a Chicano symbol, Aztlán has two meanings: first it represents the geographic region known as the Southwestern part of the United States, composed of territory that Mexico ceded in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; second, and more important, Aztlán symbolized the spiritual union of the Chicanos, something that is carried within the heart, no matter where they may live or where they may find themselves. (8)

We can think back to Emma Pérez narrativizing a queer mestiza into her novel about the US annexation of Texas. Pérez looked into the official archive, and could not find a queer vaquero. This did not prove the inefficacy of the existence of queer vaqueras in our collective past; rather, it showcased the paucity of the archive. Aztlán may be a symbol built on a myth built on a symbol, but narrativizing it in the form of something like the *Plan*, or in a poem like *I Am Joaquín* calls it into reality and so it serves an important cultural function. Genaro M. Padilla elucidates the importance of cultural myth in his essay “Myth and Comparative Cultural Nationalism:”

Without heroic dreams and cultural symbols of mythic proportion, however, the material aims of a nationalist movement may lack the spiritual center which sustains struggle. The drive for a homeland however tenuous, may be said to

hinge upon the degree to which the group, inspired in part by its poets, is able to imagine its own mytho-historic identity. (115)

Leal explores the Aztec myth of Aztlán, and traces it back to the 13th century where it narrated a mythic homeland in the face of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. From this essay it is clear that the historical discussion of Aztlán should be an intellectual historical discussion. The impulse to demythologize and prove or disprove the “reality” of Aztlán is pointless and derivative. It doesn’t need to have been captured in historical record or on a map for it to be valuable. Miguel Pina captures an important aspect of the work of Aztlán in his essay “The Archaic, Historical and Mythicized Dimensions of Aztlán,” wherein he draws on the work of Mircea Eliade to argue that Aztlán lends legitimacy to the case for an established past. The recovery of Aztlán offers the “...power and authority that resides in that time space interval that Mircea Eliade designates as *in illo tempore* or ‘in the beginning’...” (15).

Despite the presence of actual history, most of the history of Aztlán remains intellectual. There are authors that excavate Mesoamerican history and anthropology to find the reality of Aztec life in relation to the symbol of Aztlán, but for our purposes I am concerned with the symbol of Aztlán and the manner in which it mediates the tension between myth and reality. In “The Vicissitudes of Aztlán” Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe discusses the tension between Aztlán as national origin story, and its failure to address the material reality of Chicanos in the struggle. Much in the same way that I contend that Ruiz de Burton and Gonzales can be drawn together via loss of land, Aztlán was meant to be a unifying symbol for all Chicano concerns. It specifically addressed both the loss of land and history that were byproducts of multiple products. Benjamin-Labarthe offers this assessment:

The concept derives much of its power from its very vagueness. Only dimly legitimized by ancient cartography and historical chronicles, the rather blurred and open topography of the Aztec legend² helped accommodate a plan for a reconquest at first welcomed with enthusiasm by Chicano activists in the late sixties and early seventies. But the same vagueness also allowed for controversy and turmoil. The symbol then provided a locus where conflicting ideological interests came to a head. Aztlán, the brain-child of the revitalizing imagination, or the pragmatic timeliness of a then student-poet at San Diego State University, Alurista, doffed its statute of ancient myth to don that of political credo with publication of *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*. Alurista presented himself as spiritual guide as well as master of political strategy. The Chicano nationalist project was irrevocably linked to the rediscovery of the myth. Within the enclave of the university, surrounded by a few adepts who were versed in a cryptic language and devoted to the memory of the Aztec gods, the poet-ideologist devoted himself to the exegesis of pre-Columbian cosmogony. A Chicano elite was at work here with a view to specifying the historical nature and geographical legitimacy of the territories of Aztlán. (79)

Benjamin-Labarthe notes the disconnect between Aztlán as an intellectual project, primarily available to the university elite, the boots on the ground activism of Chicano Marxists who sought a real dismantling of Anglo capitalism. Yes, Aztlán provided the burgeoning nation with an origin story, but how did this contribute to other more concrete struggles?

Benjamin-Labarthe also notes the tension between *El Plan*'s assertion of a borderless state and César Chávez's desire, as leader of the UFW, for stricter control of the border as a means to protect legally immigrated farmworkers. The ideas of collective ownership appealed to the farmworkers, but the reality of a borderless state threatened the protections the farmworkers had gained because of enforced borders. Benjamin-Labarthe explains:

If the intellectuals were able to envisage a situation in which people could circulate freely, regardless of borders, Chávez and his followers, on the other hand, advocated keeping a check on massive immigration, as this would have jeopardized the struggle of legally admitted workers. The campesino movement wanted most to protect their hard-won advantages. (81)

According to Benjamin-Labarthe, the Marxists took issue with the lack of genuine economic concern in *El Plan*. By and large the symbol of Aztlán seemed poetic and primarily intellectual. The Marxists in Benjamin-Labarthe's essay seem distrustful of the historical concern of Aztlán. She writes, "A flight into the past would prevent the Chicano from concentrating on the history waiting to be made. Historical man cannot be backward looking whatever the poet may say" (82). These assertions runs directly counter to the value that I have found in melancholy as a useful strategy for self-making. It does, however, lend support to my thesis of Aztlán as melancholy homeland. Too poetic, and lacking in concrete action, Aztlán as our melancholy origin story served its purpose mainly as a rallying symbol. Yet, we cannot be dismissive of its intellectual value, and the legacy that it has had within Chicano Studies. Melancholy Aztlán as explained by Benjamin-Labarthe is a generative symbol:

For indeed, Aztlán was far from lacking in the capacity to mobilize, but its destined application has been displaced, considering the original project. The myth of Aztlán revisited by Alurista answered the needs of a well-defined social group whose realm of action was that of ideology: it was useful to intellectuals, and more particularly to Chicano artists who were to find it revitalizing. Alurista's discourse was excessively justified by the necessity for Chicano studies to be accepted in the University curriculum. The recognition of Aztlán's credentials brought to the fore a whole new terrain of investigation: a wealth of literary texts of Mexican and Spanish origin were unearthed in order to make a comparative assessment of the different theses aiming at clarifying the mysterious origins of the people, the place to where several generations wanted to come back, as to the womb. But more than anything else, the myth of Aztlán demonstrated, as it imposed itself as the emblem of the Chicano movement, the indispensable role of the Chicano intellectual, creator of symbolic imagery. It must be added that the myth had already testified to its capacity to mobilize for other purposes. (83)

At its core Aztlán mediates between the material and the psychic, and no matter how the symbol is employed those of us who occupy the space of the Southwest know that we

exist within this tension. Questioning the material value of our origin story leads to questioning the value of all origin stories. Additionally, though narrative may seem ephemeral, previous scholarship on the relationship between stereotype and reality shows that it can have very real effects. Benjamin-Labarthe ends with this line, “The contradiction is irresolvable, Aztlán must remain because it exists in the struggle, the difference, in the very absence of Aztlán itself” (84). We return again to the irresolution of our most basic losses. We are never able to adequately redress the loss or put something in its place, but the absent presence of Aztlán, the manner in which it occupies the space between symbolic and geographic is enormously productive in that we are constantly revisiting our history, and our origin stories. We are constantly re-narrativizing and asserting our humanity via the regeneration of our origin story.

I find this irresolvability enormously productive, in much in the same vein that Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue State is psychically productive. In “The Aztec Palimpsest: Toward a New Understanding of Aztlán, Cultural Identity and History,” Daniel Cooper Alarcón describes the symbol of Aztlán as a palimpsest, or a page which has been written and re-written upon so that traces of previous writing still remain. Alarcón begins his discussion by looking at the Mesoamerican history which is essentially erased when Aztlán operates as a monolithic signifier of Aztec history. The varied history of our indigenous ancestors should serve as more than a marshalling force for our nationalist movement. Alarcón explains:

While some recent scholarship in this arena has made important interdisciplinary strides, much of the general perception of Mesoamerica, and even much historiography, continues to derive from a narrow, positivist, and Eurocentric perspective that distorts and oversimplifies the Mesoamerican cultures whose complexity we are only beginning to grasp. The widespread recognition of

Mesoamerican cultures as multilingual and multiethnic and the consideration of Mexican culture as the product of a much more complicated mestizaje than a simple Spanish/Indian dichotomy will hold significant implications for discussions of Mexican and Chicano identity, requiring interdisciplinary consideration. (34)

Alarcón acknowledges that work is being done to remedy the historical erasure that some Aztlán scholarship hath wrought, but by using the palimpsest as intervention he successfully addresses all the tensions attendant to any use of Aztlán. Aztlán as palimpsest expands to contain every meaning that has been heaped upon it. He contends:

Thus, the palimpsest is offered here as a model of textual superimpositions and territorial remappings; its inherently shifting and overlapping boundaries make it a model well suited to interdisciplinary study. It is also a model capable of challenging attempts to draw clear boundaries between myth and history, a problem that has plagued Mesoamerican studies in particular. Furthermore, the palimpsest's structure of interlocking, competing narratives has the advantage of preventing the dominant voice from completely silencing the others, thus encouraging scholarship to recognize and consider diversity. In short, I believe that adopting the palimpsest as a conceptual and historical tool will allow us to move toward a more complicated and ultimately more valuable notion of Mesoamerican, Mexican, and Chicano histories. (34)

The palimpsest is an ideal physical symbol of melancholy because it is an object that never forgets, never resolves, and is never wiped clean. In this way Aztlán as a symbol can be constantly re-operationalized without erasing any of its past. The loaded surface of Aztlán can contain all of the critiques levied against it. It can be the homeland of Lola Medina and Joaquín because as a palimpsest it can contain all narratives in confluence with each other:

My purpose is not merely to argue that Aztlán is a palimpsest, but also to demonstrate that in examining its competing, interlocking narratives as a discursive network, we are forced to confront important issues surrounding Chicano cultural identity-issues of difference, diversity, privilege, agency, and self-determination. In recognizing Aztlán as a palimpsest, we can reconfigure it yet again, self-consciously adding another layer, in order to convert it into a

structure that will foreground those controversies--and the cultural categories and relationships they encode--as the very objects of study, rather than allow Aztlán to continue as a mechanism to disguise or divert attention from them. (41)

In “Refiguring Aztlán” Rafael Pérez-Torres jumps easily into un-resolvability, identifying Aztlán as “...an index within Chicana/o cultural production as the grounds of contested representations: a site of numerous resistances and affirmations” (Page). Aztlán makes its journey from place, to myth, to symbol, to absent presence, to palimpsest and what we see is the robust nature of Aztlán as an intellectual framework for Chicana/o identity and aesthetic production. Its generative potential places it in line with the energies of Chicana/o melancholy and it makes sense as a melancholy homeland. Instead of a single point of origin, Aztlán allows for multiple points of origin, and multiple points of consciousness. It does not provide resolution or unity. Pérez-Torres notes that it does not even function as a bridge to the past, because the idea of a concrete bridge doesn’t make sense within the shifting nature of Aztlán:

Rather than evoke a bridge beyond history, I would argue that Aztlán reveals the discontinuities and ruptures that characterize the presence of Chicanos in history. Although it evokes a Chicano homeland, Aztlán also foregrounds the construction of history within a brother in the Bronze Continent, We are a Nation, Chicano context. The difficult articulation of Chicano/a history—a history that speaks of dispossession and migration, immigration, and diplomacy, resistance and negotiation, compromise and irony—remains ever unresolved. (Page)

We find ourselves now back to Anzaldúa’s open wound with Aztlán as Borderland and Border as wound. These important images are riven with melancholy; and demonstrate how melancholy is infused along many lines of Chicana/o thought. I read the Chicano impulse toward history within a framework of melancholy. It is a backward glance, and a

desire to fill in what has been lost over centuries of occupation and colonization. Pérez-Torres expands this idea:

Aztlán as signifier marks how historically grounded Chicano consciousness is. This historical perspective serves to acknowledge the fluid mending and blending, repression and destruction of disparate cultures making up Chicanismo. A tempestuous sense of motion therefore marks that region termed the “borderlands.” Neither a homeland, nor a perpetuation of origin, the borderlands allude to an illimitable terrain marked by dreams and ruptures, marked by history, and the various hopes that history can exemplify. The borderlands represent the multiplicity and dynamism of Chicana/o experiences and cultures. It is a terrain in which Mexicans, Chicanos, and mestizos live among the various worlds comprising their cultural and political landscapes. (Page)

Aztlán reflects this historical melancholy, and the Borderlands reflect the constant generative motion implicit in Chicana/o melancholy. Pérez-Torres’ final lines in this essay are particularly resonant with my discussion of melancholy, and Aztlán becomes part of the incessant narration that characterizes melancholy.

In this regard, he concludes:

Each articulation offers its particular understanding of Aztlán as its fulfillment. This is precisely the reason that Aztlán never adds up. As a sign of liberation, it is ever emptied of meaning just as its meaning is asserted, its borders blurred by those constituencies engaged in liberating struggles named by Aztlán. This simultaneous process of arrival and evacuation does not mark a point of despair, nor in describing it do I mean to disparage Aztlán. On the contrary. We cannot abandon Aztlán, precisely because it serves to name that space of liberation so fondly yearned for. As such, it stands as a site of origin in the struggle to articulate, enact, and make present an absent unity. Aztlán is our start and end point of empowerment. (Page)

With these lines we return to the images of melancholy that I have highlighted in Chicana/o narrative. We come back to the imagery of Tomás Rivera’s “When We Arrive,” the cacophony of voices, and constant motion with no concrete place in mind. We also come back to Arturo Islas’ Miguel Chico, and Sandra Cisneros’ Celaya as

narrators who can never be done with the past, and who must perpetually tell, and re-tell their family histories. Finally we come back to the strange relationship between Ruiz de Burton's hyper-white Lola, and Rodolfo Gonzales' militantly brown Joaquín. Both authors situate their symbolic characters at moments of nation building, and both through trying to return to a unifying past only beg more questions about the constructed nature of history and identity. Each iteration of Chicana/o loss, and each incessant narration of Chicana/o loss resignifies Chicana/o identity as a whole while challenging the valorization of a fixed identity.

In the essay "Queer Aztlán: the Reformation of Chicano Tribe" Cherríe Moraga offers a way to recover what was positive about the idea of Aztlán while being critical about its exclusionary practices and nationalism. Moraga, a multiracial queer writer describes moving between various movements looking for an ideological home. She encounters racism and classism in the mainstream feminist movement of the time and homophobia and sexism in the Chicano Movement. Moraga describes the idea of a 'Queer Aztlán' as fomenting in her mind for many years. For her it combined the revolutionary energy of social movements with radical all-encompassing acceptance. She recalls her earliest description of Queer Aztlán "A Chicano homeland that could embrace *all* its people, including its *jotería*" (147 *italics in original*). Earlier movements did not allow for the inclusion of everyone, and these exclusions created a melancholic excess. Moraga proposes a movement that through its inclusivity acts as a balm for the pain of loss and exclusion.

Moraga mourns the ending of the Chicano Movement, "In 1992, we have no organized national movement to respond to our losses. For me, 'El Movimiento' has

never been a thing of the past, it has retreated into subterranean uncontaminated soils awaiting resurrection in a ‘queerer,’ more feminist generation” (148). Her relationship to the dormant Movement is melancholy. While she mourns the supposed loss of the Movement she acknowledges that it isn’t really lost, that it is simply dormant, waiting for a time when it can exist more fully. She addresses the problems of the Movement in melancholy terms, and is critical of those aspects of the Movement that simply reproduced familiar forms of exclusion and oppression:

What was right about Chicano Nationalism was its commitment to preserving the integrity of the Chicano People. A generation ago, there were cultural, economic, and political programs to develop Chicano consciousness, autonomy, and self-determination. What was wrong about Chicano Nationalism was its institutionalized heterosexism, its inbred machismo, and its lack of a cohesive national strategy. (148-9)

The Movement at its best addressed the losses of Chicana/o people in the US, but at its worst it excluded those that did not fit within its narrow definition of Chicanidad.

The concept of a nation is thoroughly interwoven with the concept of Aztlán, and an integral part of the Chicano Movement. Most, if not all, of that narratives that I have discussed circulate around various national tensions. These tensions are represented as various metaphors in each text, and each story seems to work toward resolution of the tensions of nationalism. Despite its fraught nature Moraga is unwilling to let go of the concept. She explains:

Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women’s sexuality are occupied within Chicano nation. If women’s bodies and those of men and women who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated. Feminism has taught us this. The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown and female as it decolonizes the brown and female earth. It is a new nationalism in which La Chicana Indígena stands at the center, and hetero sexism and homophobia are no longer the cultural order of the day. I cling to the word “nation” because without the specific naming of the nation, the nation will be lost.

(as when feminism is reduced to humanism, the woman is subsumed). Let us retain our radical naming but expand it to meet a broader and wiser revolution. (150)

In this passage Alarcón's use of the palimpsest parallels my engagement with melancholy. Some scholars would dismiss the symbols of nationalism for their complicity in patriarchy and heterosexism, yet understanding them as part of an historical Chicana/o melancholy allows for a constant revisiting, and constant revision of such painful sites. We end up with an image of Chicana/o literature and history as a dynamic, complex whole. Where perhaps Aztlán seemed exclusionary, understanding it as melancholy, or understanding it as a palimpsest, makes space for queer and feminist interventions and presence.

While I have focused on Aztlán and melancholy as they figure in literature and history, I would like to briefly discuss Alicia Gaspar de Alba's "There's No Place Like Aztlán, Embodied Aesthetics in Chicana Art" which focuses on visual art. Gaspar de Alba's piece explores the elasticity of the concept of Aztlán as it becomes an embodied space for Chicana visual artists. Gaspar de Alba begins her discussion in Oz, of all places, thinking about the implications of Dorothy's magical utterance "There's no place like home." For Gaspar de Alba the phrase takes on multiple meanings when we consider the reality or unreality of Dorothy's homeland. So when Dorothy says "There's no place like home" and is

...consequently able to return herself to Kansas, she was learning the quintessential lesson of all displaced, misplaced, and replaced people: home, or a place, is a fundamental aspect of identity. If, as Dorothy discovered, there is "no place like home," then home is in a sense a utopia, a place that is not a place, an imaginary space occupied by memory and desire. (103)

So, if home is a real place then there is no other place like it, but if home is in fact “no place” then it exists in the imaginary space of utopia. Such is the reality and unreality of Aztlán as homeland that is both place, and no place.

As a queer woman, Aztlán is indeed a homeland that is place and no place for Gaspar de Alba. She traces the ways in which Aztlán has generally been hailed as a masculine homeland; a mother land from which men emerge into a Chicano brotherhood that leaves limited room for women, and no space for queer subjects. Her article begs the question of how Chicanas figure Aztlán given the nature of its gendered relationship to representation. Is Aztlán a viable homeland for Chicanas, or is it “no place”? Gaspar de Alba asks:

If Aztlán is the dominant conceptual framework for interpreting Chicano identity, activism, and cultural production, then what are the perceptible differences between the visual art produced by male nationalists and the work produced by feminists within the Chicano nation of Aztlán? How do Chicana artists represent the homeland? Have they gone “beyond” Aztlán? (105)

In this work I have identified places where Chicana writers reinterpreted, or re-gendered a form. Pérez’s work in *Forgetting the Alamo* is an example of how Chicanas represent the Chicano hero, a discourse that like Aztlán has been heavily skewed toward men. Ruiz de Burton’s subversion of the “white women’s fiction” of her time shows how these writers learn to re-inhabit a space that wasn’t necessarily meant for them. It is the pain of exclusion, the melancholy of feeling out of place that provides the impetus for re-creating the space, or new representations of the space. Gaspar de Alba locates the movement once again with Dorothy’s desire for Kansas. Gaspar de Alba frames Dorothy’s desire thusly, “It was the articulation of her desire (“I want to go home”) and her resistance to

hegemony (“I don’t like your country”) that gave her the agency she needed to reclaim her full self...” (107). To put this in conversation with Chicanas in relation to Aztlán, the feeling is simultaneously desire and rejection. It is the melancholy, “I want to go home,” but the rejection of a patriarchal hegemonic homeland “I don’t like your country.”

Aztlán has served as a rallying point for organizing people, and an origin point for aesthetic production, but it is a slippery spot on which to base things. Gaspar de Alba notes the slippery nature of rooting identity and aesthetic production in Aztlán:

If identity in the arts has for some time now been configured through place of origin, and if that place of origin is no-place except in the utopian imaginary construct of Aztlán, then identity for Chicano artists must be rooted in nonexistence, in the subjunctive Netherlands of desire and imagination (“if only I had a homeland”), rather than in the lament for the lost wholeness (“there’s no place like home”). Clearly, to fully deconstruct the paradoxes of identity in the visual arts, identity must be problematized beyond place of origin: but also, place must be seen as more than a physical location or landscape. (108)

Thinking of this in terms of melancholy, then, our losses should not prompt us to remedy what has been lost; rather, they should prompt us to re-evaluate what it is we think we know. We don’t want to, though the creation of Aztlán, merely re-create a problematic nation like the US. In our desire to reclaim lost history, we don’t want to recover a useful past and erase its specificity. Each loss should remind us that we are not lacking, but that wholeness may be an illusion. Gaspar de Alba historicizes Aztlán as origin story within a long genealogy of origin stories, not the least of which is the similarities between the myth of Aztlán and the myth of the Western frontier. Both myths were central to nation building, and this connection further connects Ruiz de Burton and Rodolfo Gonzales. Though ideologically opposite, they both exist at moments of nation formation. They both exist in the desire for home, and the rejection of their present country.

In this article Gaspar de Alba touches on the work of several Chicana artists. I am most struck with her discussion of Carmen Lomas Garza whom she describes this way:

...Lomas Garza offers us a pastoral tranquility that, on the surface at least, reads almost like a eulogy to innocence. In the inimitable “monitos” style, often equated with folk art, primitive art, and children’s art Lomas Garza offers us a child’s view of daily life in her neck of Aztlán. The rituals that define the community’s social and familial life—the Christmas Posada, the making of tamales, the visit to the local healing woman, the church bazaar with its inevitable cake walk...[a]ll of these get rendered in the most minute and meticulous detail. (132)

From this child perspective, we are invited to view a lovingly depicted home, a safe environment of community and tradition. Gaspar de Alba notes that what is missing is “...the racism and the linguistic terrorism of the South Texas schools the she had no choice but to attend...” (132). These paintings, then, according to Gaspar de Alba, fuse child desire for safety and idyll with Lomas Garza’s political consciousness. In the absence of safety and comfort Lomas Garza has imagined safety and comfort. In the face of the racism of South Texas during Lomas Garza’s childhood, she has reimagined home spaces that exists outside of the violent history they hearken back to. This is profoundly melancholic. For Lomas Garza and Gaspar de Alba the paintings are healing, but they are also painfully melancholic. All recovery, re-narration, and reinvention is essentially a fiction. In order to find what we have lost we must create it ourselves which means that we can never have the actual thing that was lost. There is no remedy there is only continuous creation.

Conclusion

Aztlán is the ideal symbol with which to conclude my discussion of melancholy in Chicana/o literature. It exists in the liminality between reality and myth, and it is an idea that some would see completely excised from our discussions due a perceived outdated connection to nationalism. What we find with Aztlán is that we can never recover that which we have lost. In regard to Aztlán as the land in the Southwest that most Chicana/os inhabit, that loss is riddled with irony. How can we physically exist in a space that can never be ours again? These questions are productive, and they prompt us to reconsider our ideas of homeland, return, and reclamation. Discussions of Aztlán presage Anzaldúa's discussion of the Borderland. With her concept of the Borderland she takes a concrete region and applies to the body, psyche, and spirit. The movement here from concrete geographical space to psychic and corporeal metaphor is almost a reverse of Aztlán, which begins in myth and then tries to work its way into physical geography. This movement between binaries parallels the energy of melancholy which moves between loss and healing.

While Chicana/o melancholy may be a strategy with which to turn debilitating loss into productive self-making, it still is worthwhile to try and limit those losses moving forward. I have argued that melancholy for Chicana/os is productive and generative. It is also very clearly a strategy for dealing with pain and oppression. It would be much better if, going forward, such a strategy were no longer necessary. Chicana/os have found strategies of surviving racism and the legacies of colonialism, but it would be better if we didn't have to suffer those injustices at all? We may never be able to recover from nor reclaim what has been lost, but we can make ourselves more robust and we can work to

stop perpetuating the conditions of loss. This is not to say that the onus of prevention should fall to oppressed populations. How can Chicana/os as multiply colonized subjects be saddled with the responsibility of ending all traumatic colonial, and State sponsored loss? Chicana/o melancholy, as I have demonstrated, occurs at multiple levels within the Chicana/o cultural community. We may not be able to prevent the injustices of a violent State, but we can work toward eliminating violence, misogyny, and homophobia from our own communities. This is the lesson that Micaela learns in *Forgetting the Alamo*. While she is initially bent on violence and revenge she realizes that one cannot triumph over the State by using the methods of the State. It is a clear call back to Audre Lorde's powerful assertion that the master's tools will never dismantle master's house.

With this study I have contextualized melancholy as part of a larger affective condition, and I have drawn on its imagistic history to make connections to the Chicana philosophy of Gloria Anzaldúa. I have traced the melancholy in Anzaldúa's work and then explored how this relationship played itself out in terms of narrative with various Chicana/o texts. Loss of self, history, land and language figures largely in my discussion of Chicana/o melancholy. I have re cast the figure of the melancholic who narrates incessantly as a Chicana/o narrator, one who must remember and retell the past. This is seen in Cisneros' Celaya in *Caramelo*, and also in Islas' Miguel Chico in *The Rain God*. Both characters are tasked with the responsibility of narrating their family stories, of re-telling past events to right wrongs and to ensure that nothing is ever forgotten. This isn't a method of healing from the past, indeed with melancholy there is no real healing. Melancholic narration isn't about healing and moving forward. In reality there is no other way to move but forward, time passes regardless of individual desire. It is important to

remember and recount pain, because our identities have been forged through pain. The role of Celaya and Miguel Chico as narrator of family trauma positions them to understand the family story in a new way. By revisiting and re-telling they are able to gain different perspective, and so they can learn something new. This work has also focused on loss of land and nation in order affirm the generative quality of Chicana/o melancholy. Affirming melancholy, and deconstructing the concept of healing doesn't rob the Chicana/o subject of any agency. Each melancholy figure in the texts I have discussed are agents in their own right. Much of the critical discourse around melancholy thinks of it as something that slows a subject down, something that mires an individual in their past. The narrators I have discussed are not stuck. They are simply tasked with remembrance.

It is important to remember that even though Freud reworked his thoughts on melancholy as pathological, much of the early thought on melancholy translates into current thoughts on clinical depression. This is a serious mental illness which I do not see to trivialize with metaphor. I've meant to trace melancholy as an idea, as a cultural trope that means one thing for certain groups, and something else entirely for Chicana/o people. These deviations do many things. For one they destabilize current Anglo Western ideologies for mental health, and psychic cohesion. We're taught that a singular coherent self is valuable and healthy, but this ignores the ways in which other cultures may conceive of the self and the ways in which selves become fractured due to oppression and colonization. If we accept the premise that legacies of colonization, genocide, and enslavement have wrought lasting traumas then we must redefine the possibilities for psychic health. We must be given a means by which to heal, and we must be able to

understand that there is diversity in what it means to be a self/subject. Anzaldúa's discussion of mestiza consciousness and the self as multiple offer an example of diversity in what constitutes a self/subject. The fracturing that occurs as a result of our history is not damage or deviation from some sort of concrete norm, it is proof that there is no norm and that other forms of subjectivity exist.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* examines the legacy of trauma, and she validates painful history at the level of the body. Her work represents an intriguing coalescence of history, the body, the mind, the spirit, art, and the US Mexico Border. Legacies of historical trauma are often explained away as mere feeling in the face of our cultural fascination with the rational and the concrete. Yet Anzaldúa takes two of the most concrete objects of human experience, the body and the land, and shows them as also being nebulous and malleable. The things that we're taught to understand as concrete and natural are shown to be constructed and changeable. At the same time she uses the body and the land as physical evidence of colonization. For Freud, melancholy was potentially dangerous because it caused a person orient their repudiation inward, and because it was a feeling manifested as physical. The energy of self-repudiation, and rumination resonated with what I had read in Anzaldúa. Her Coatlicue State turns the discourse of repudiation on its head. Born of an injury, this state of psychic and spiritual growth required one to look inward and move through trauma. It required the elements of melancholy that Freud viewed as troubling. It also spoke a different kind of mind, and a different way to measure the trajectory of psychological growth. Anzaldúa's subjective model allowed for inward exploration, circling back, and holding on. While she cautions against living too

long in the Coatlicue State, she notes that one may have to make frequent journeys back there over the course of a life.

Another key image in Freud's melancholy is that of the incessantly narrating melancholic. This person, in the Freudian context, is constantly explaining how they feel. Their narrative, however, lacks content, displays indecision, and is general evidence of not moving forward away from their pain. The figure of the incessant narrator is salient because of the many places in Chicana/o writing and culture where the person, usually a woman, who talks a lot is seen as dangerous, trivial, or annoying. Anzaldúa reorients the figures of La Malinche and the hocicona so that they are no longer dangerous or gossipy women, but agents of narration with important stories to tell. Additionally, so many Chicana/o novels are framed as oft told stories that the re-narration of the past becomes a Chicana/o literary trope. When marginalized groups attempt to narrate the traumas they have experienced they are often met with two responses: "get over it," or, "that never happened." Both are trivializing and invalidating. Incessant redressing of wrong becomes a revolutionary voice, a refusal to exist quietly in the face of injustice.

The incessant narrator stands out as a trope, but also as key to the process of Chicana/o history. I have drawn on Hayden White's writing in order to work within the confluence of narrative and history. While I do think that history is essentially narrative and subject to the rules and criticisms of narrative theory, I do not mean to suggest that history and fiction are interchangeable ideas. In fact, they must remain distinct categories in order for them to be so productively blended and explored like they are in Emma Pérez's novel *Forgetting the Alamo*. Pérez is very articulate about the absence of queer subjects in most official archives of Chicana/o experiences. This absence, however, does

not signify a lack of existence. We must be attuned to historically accurate terminology, but we must also not assume that lack of name signals lack of existence. Knowing that a character like Micaela cannot exist in the official narrative of nineteenth-century Texas, Pérez writes a novel wherein she can exist. The Alamo, the well-documented site of the famous battle and concrete historical marker, is an absent signifier in this text whereas the imaginary/imagined Micaela is fully present. The incessant narration in this text takes two forms. We have the internal narration of Micaela, telling and re-telling her story in order to heal from the trauma of her experiences. Her story can be read as a narrativized journey into the Coatlicue State. We also have the re-telling of US-Mexico history. The novel thoroughly recounts the horrors of war and the violence of racism and nationalism. It shows that this nation was founded through bloody, dishonorable conflict and this is not something to be simply forgotten or gotten over. Within the borders of US-Mexico history Chicana/o narratives like this provide a necessary and incessant reminder of our past.

The figure of the incessant narrator is also an important symbol. Shakespeare rendered his melancholy Hamlet as indecisive. While the Danish prince soliloquizes on whether or not he will kill himself, he becomes a waffling figure, seemingly incapable of action. Such an unfair critique can be lobbed at Pérez's Micaela. In Micaela's ruminations on murder and revenge, she may be cast a figure who cannot pick a side, or who cannot decide to be hero or villain. Perhaps, though, she is merely occupying the liminality between two binaries. What if it is only painful to exist in liminality because we have been told that we must pick a side? Again the actions of the melancholic figure become radical, and question the norms that have been cast around it.

The traumas of Chicana/o life in the United States have been largely brought about by the very formation of this nation. Yet, we cannot ignore the structures and problems we have created within our own ranks. By placing the ideologically distinct writings of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton into conversation I mean to explore the tensions at the heart of the Chicana/o Movement. Aztlán figures here as the ultimate symbol for our lost land, the ur-loss that forms our perpetual melancholy. Yet, it too is rife with conflict. What ends up being most productive, and most generative is the ability to find solace in complexity and irresolvability. Gonzales and Ruiz de Burton seem as if they can only exist together if we find a commonality, instead of simply accepting our cultural capacity for difference. Melancholy is troublesome because it refuses to move toward resolution, but what if understand that it’s really only problematic because it refuses stasis and that resolutions can be momentary. We come at the end to an understanding that the Borderlands and Aztlán are melancholic spaces. They are fraught and painful and fractious, and paradoxical, and we must simply accept these conditions as part of our reality. More than shaping our futures, merely learning from events in the past, we can shape our ability to live in the present by learning new ways to process the past. Chicana/o narrative has always broadened how we understand categories of existence such as subjectivity and history. The concepts of the Borderlands and of mestiza consciousness have changed the ways in which we conceive land, history, and the psyche. Chicana/o melancholy further broadens how we think of trauma, the past, and the subject.

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