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Pedro Henrique Carvalho Domingos

MYTHIC LANDSCAPES: academic readings of Helena Maria Viramontes's Chicana narratives

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Profa. Dra. Miriam Piedade Mansur Andrade - POSLIT/FALE/UFMG - indicou a aprovação do candidato.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Friedrich Wilhelm Eggensperger - UFPR - indicou a aprovação do candidato.

Pelas indicações, o candidato foi considerado APROVADO.

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ABSTRACT

PEDRO HENRIQUE CARVALHO DOMINGOS

MYTHIC LANDSCAPES: ACADEMIC READINGS OF HELENA MARÍA VIRAMONTES'S CHICANA NARRATIVES

DECEMBER 2025

This dissertation aims to analyze literary texts written by Helena Maria Viramontes, a Chicana writer living in the United States, in order to verify the existence of mythic concepts as well as how the writer makes use of said concepts to communicate or modify parts of Chicana existence. This research was developed through a combination of Structuralist, Feminist, and Chicana Feminist theoretical materials to obtain a detailed conceptualization of myth and which specific ones affect the Chicana livelihood that the writer and her characters live in, in order to analyze a collection of short stories, The Moths and other stories, and one of the writer's books, Their Dogs Came with Them, with the objective of offering an expansive study material that future research can make use of while also perfecting our understanding, as Brazilians, of the cultural existence of the Chicana population.

Key words: myth, Chicana, feminism, structuralism.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação tem o objetivo de analisar textos literários escritos por Helena Maria Viramontes, uma escritora Chicana residente nos Estados Unidos, de modo a verificar a existência de ideias míticas neles presentes e quais estratégias são utilizadas pela autora para comunicar ou modificar partes da existência Chicana. A pesquisa foi desenvolvida através de uma combinação de material teórico Estruturalista, Feminista e do Feminismo Chicana, de modo a obter uma representação detalhada sobre o conceito de mito e quais em específico afetam a existência Chicana no qual a autora e suas personagens vivem, no intuito de analisar uma coletânea de short stories, The Moths and other stories, e um livro da autora, Their Dogs Came with Them, com o objetivo de oferecer um material robusto de estudos para futuras pesquisas ao mesmo tempo que aprimora nosso entendimento, como brasileiros, da vivência cultural da população Chicana.

Palavras-chave: mito, Chicana, feminismo, estruturalismo.

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Prof. Dr. Marcel de Lima Santos
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1. Introduction

What does it mean to define oneself as Chicana? The term refers to female Mexican immigrants living in the United States, but grows far beyond being just a female form for the Chicano identifier, the intersection of its racial, gender and social markers that make them unique within the United States geographical context. Among the people claiming their existence as part of this group, there is Helena Maria Viramontes, a Chicana writer well-known within the community for her heartfelt, genuine representation of the community. The way said group sees her can be summarized with this excerpt from an interview she gave to Gonzaga University's Alyssa Cink:

> I would share my work with people, [who] would tell me, 'Oh my God, that reminds me of my mother,' 'Oh my God, that reminds me of my family,' 'You just captured my sister.' And that's when I realized that I wasn't just writing about my own, personal stories, but actually writing about community ("Fiction and social justice").

There are many factors that make her writings carry such a strong, grounded connection to Chicano and Chicana community of which she is part, with this thesis deciding to focus on the way she makes use of mythical structures in her narratives. I believe that understanding how this presence of myth manifests within Viramontes's creations greatly enhances one's view of her stories and assists one with learning more about the Chicana experience. In order to fully argue why, I will offer further explanations on concepts of myth, Chicana identity and which of Viramontes's bibliography I will make use of here, as well as why I selected those texts.

The concept of Myth is central to the theoretical framework of this thesis, mostly in terms of its structuralist stance. Writers such as Mircea Eliade regard the concept of myth by describing it as a story that, via explaining why a particular part of society exists, also defines the meaningful, proper ritual through which people obtain something. It is important to highlight the author defends myth as being a foundational part of society to this day, saying "certain aspects and functions of mythical thought are constituents of the human being" (*Myth and Reality* 181-182), but he does begin his discussion by talking about myth's existence in archaic, ancient societies. He argues, in that context, "every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for the archaic world, a ritual" (*Cosmos and History* 35), an instruction and structure in how to perform something and carry oneself, many of them carrying instructions to perform an existential renewing, a system of "periodic purifications […] and periodic regeneration of life" (52). Meanwhile, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer say in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, myth is humanity's first means of enlightenment, a means of "liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1). All explanations and restrictions established by myth offer humans some sort of comfort regarding what they know about the universe.

These descriptions somewhat corroborate with the laymen definition of myth as stories from no longer existing religions but, as mentioned, relevant literature defends that mythical structures continue to be an important part of the modern cultural context under new forms, Mircea Eliade mentioning how, for example, myths of return to the origin continue to be repurposed, while automobiles are mentioned as part of modern mythical "obsession with 'success' that is so characteristic of modern society" (*Myth and Reality* 186). Horkheimer and Adorno also mention, among other cases, how mourning is mythicized in such a way that

restricts it and its emotional output as much as possible, so mourners return to societal productivity as quickly as possible[1].

I would argue that Roland Barthes is especially relevant in terms of modern conceptualizations of myth. In his book *Mythologies*, Barthes discusses a myriad of mythical structures at the time of writing, in the process defining myth as a type of speech in which the intention of the speaker overrides the literal, grammatical content of the message. For example, when looking at an army recruitment ad of a black soldier saluting the French flag, the literal content is what has been just described, but the intention is to create an image of France as an egalitarian country free of racial tensions, in spite of all the racial and colonial conflict it has undergone throughout its history. Through this suppression of historical context, "we reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature" (*Mythologies* 128), something that the previously mentioned authors similarly agree to be an essential function of mythical structures, from the ancient past to the present day. Myth makes the historical context behind culture disappear, helping people ignore that historical passage of time as much as possible.

In review, one may consider that there are three definitions of myth present so far: the laymen definition of it as consisting of religious stories from extinct religions, Eliade's view of it as a source of ritual that establishes rules within a society in some way and Barthes's definition of it as a means of adding information to a message and naturalizing that additional information. I would argue that and encourage seeing these as more interconnected than one may think and mention that all definitions shall be used in this text. However, I also specify that the laymen definition will be used more in regards to acknowledging its existence as we locate relevant structures, while Eliade and Barthes's respective definitions will be used during

[1] For further discussion, see Alvarado, Karina Oliva. "The Boo of Viramontes's Cafe: Retelling Ghost Stories, Central American Representing Social Death", *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 37: Issn. 2, Article 6, 2013.

analysis sections, and also that I will mention which one I am using at any given moment, as well as for what reasons, in order to keep my logic as clear as possible.

I acknowledge that this type of structuralist analysis has received criticism over the years, among them beliefs that myth structuralism may actively reduce the topics it is analyze in order to fit them inside the structures one is witnessing. However, such an end result is not an inevitability. For example, Zuzana Marie Kosticóva posits that Eliade's own writing is based on a belief that "all the different religions show at the same time an essential unity and an incredible reservoir of novelty and originality" (71), arguing that the author not only was aware of the limitations of his methodology, he also defended the uniqueness of each mythology or religion in a relatively impartial way instead of ignoring these differences, considering said unique attributes just as important as the similar shared core while similarly encouraging others to do the same and, generally speaking, other myth scholars I have studied follow similar principles.

Therefore, I believe that attempting to locate myth structures within Viramontes's writing will not simplify her writing, but rather showcase the depths that her stories can reach, locating them into a specific context while similarly putting emphasis on the parts that make her unique. I remind the reader that my methods of study are but one of many theories one can wield as tools for this job and that I will not attempt to force the exact same myth structures to apply to all of her texts, but instead use varying structures for different stories and characters when feasible to do so.

I am now going to provide some discussion of the concept of Chicana. First, a Chicana consists specifically of a female Mexican immigrant and her female descendants living in the United States. For example, if a female Mexican immigrant lived in the United Kingdom, she would not be called a Chicana. Additionally, there are several other terms referring to specific

subsections of Chicana, such as, for example, the Tejana being Mexican immigrants living in Texas. Meanwhile, the Chicano consists of the male members of the Mexican immigrant community or the Mexican immigrant community as a whole. I take the opportunity to clarify that I will use “Chicanos” when I mean the entire population of Mexican immigrants, “Chicanas” when I mean the female immigrants specifically and “Chicanos and Chicanas” when relevant to specify both.

However, even the basic definition of Chicana can expand to incorporate a much larger web of political meanings, something especially seen through Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: the new mestiza*, which is a landmark work in Chicana feminism. Following a historical review of the existence of the Chicano community, Anzaldúa describes how the Chicana "is doubly threatened in this country [...] prey to a sense of physical helplessness" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 34-35) resultant of her being both woman and immigrant, while also being treated as a traitor to the Chicano group when she tries to speak for herself. The Chicana, therefore, is not just a woman or a Mexican, instead being an identity with its own unique characteristics.

This does, however, also mean the Chicana can find itself in conflict with both the feminist and Mexican/Chicano groups. Within Chicano contexts, Chicanas are seen as betraying the movement, while within feminist contexts, they are often ignored or seen as too different to truly be a part of the movement or asked to ignore their particularities in order to assist with the general, white-led ideals. This type of relationship can be seen within other women of color movements. For example, Audre Lorde describes how Black organizations see the “Black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as a people” (4) while White feminists are unwilling to explore the ways in which they may need to adapt in order to include Black women and other women of color. Anzaldúa’s beliefs regarding the

intersectional existence of the Chicana is, therefore, a conceptualization that other similar academics and activists agree with.

Anzaldúa discusses misogynistic behaviors of Chicano culture and how its female members are both restricted by it and become part of the transmission of social roles. Situated within a Borderland, the meeting point between two cultures, white and native, Mexico and United States, the livelihood of Chicanas is restricted.

> For a woman of my culture, there used to be only three directions she turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. A very few of us (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 17).

Borderlands: the new mestiza also ventures into describing the linguistic context that surrounds the Chicana, existence of the queer individual within the Borderland context, the importance she attributes to writing, the way the group navigates being a junction of White and Native blood, among other topics that shall be mentioned and expanded upon as necessary through the thesis.

That being said, I clarify that the book is not the only one through which I obtain information regarding the Chicana cultural context. *Women singing in the snow* by Tey Diana Rebolledo discusses the continuous existence of Chicana writers and common archetypes in their creations, in the process explicitly mentioning the impact of *Borderlands: the new mestiza* as a book that "defined what Chicanas had been feeling for some time, but she presented it in a positive way" (103). Rebolledo also continues Anzaldúa's discussion of the Chicana identity, arguing that "the very notion of identity requires individual demarcation" (97), something difficult in the family focused environment of the Chicano society that is prone to labeling the Chicana as a traitor for it. And, as mentioned, she discusses Chicana cultural writing archetypes

in detail, from their origins to current usage and variations, detailing how creations such as the *curandera* and Coatlicue alike carry real social importance. I highlight here how both Anzaldúa and Rebolledo talk about how many Aztec myths live on to the modern day via said creations, many times through syncretic stances with Christian beliefs and other myths to do so. Chicana myths and culture, therefore, can be said to carry very particular, ancient roots, even as they reinvent and recreate themselves in modern times.

I mention that loneliness and isolation are recurrent topics in Chicana writing. This is something discussed not only by the aforementioned writers, but also, for example by Cherrie Moraga in "Art in America, con acento", who argues the Chicana existence is "a politic, a politic that refuses integration into the U.S. mainstream" (157), which nonetheless leaves her isolated upon seeing her fellow Latinos on opposite political positions. Anzaldúa and Moraga both see needs to create new paradigms, new cultures in order to resolve this issue.

Lastly, I will discuss Viramontes. This thesis will focus on Viramontes's short story collection *The Moths and other stories* and her novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*. The former follows short stories unrelated to one another, connected only on the thematic front, as they show different woman characters at distinct points of their lives, starting with the young, barely a teenager protagonist of "The Moths" and culminating in Aura, the elderly, isolated protagonist of "Neighbors". Meanwhile, *Their Dogs Came with Them* consists of a novel following a connected story line, with a chronological beginning and an end. However, said story is told in an anachronistic fashion, the point of view alternating constantly across its cast and stopping the reader from identifying a singular protagonist within the narrative, even if there are people that qualify as main characters.

Both books have received academic criticism and analysis before, but to an unequal extent. My research indicates that, within *The Moths and other stories*, the titular "The Moths"

and the short story “The Cariboo Café” have received more attention, both academically and with general audiences. Meanwhile, others such as “Snapshots” have a surprisingly small amount of discourse dedicated to them. When it comes to *Their Dogs Came with Them*, the book has attracted a decent amount of academic work, but some characters present in it are critically understudied. As a general statement, I can say the author is well-regarded within the Chicana community and, as remarked upon in the interview passage at the start of this section, considered very skilled at creating characters that reflect subtle details of her culture and its inhabitants. Not only that, returning to the mention of the Chicana existence many times being a lonely one, spent fighting against the wider Chicano and Latino cultures, the United States’ social organization and the dangers that come with being a woman, I feel like the selected texts’ multitude of stories and protagonists help counter-balance that feeling, reminding its audience of the multitude of people who do, in fact, live a life alike theirs. Therefore, there is great value in further exploring the texts I have selected for this thesis, continuing the path threaded by previous writers and charting new trajectories through under-analyzed aspects.

I mention here that the primary material I will analyze is mostly written in English, Spanish or Spanglish interjections being relatively minute. The English and Spanish language, alongside their many dialects, are source of great controversy within the Chicana context. Anzaldúa describes how she was often punished at school for speaking Spanish instead of English, and that many regional varieties of Spanish are seen in an even more negative light by speakers of both languages (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 53, 55-6). This is an experience that Viramontes shares, even mentioning how, with the educational system pushing English upon her, she lost her expertise in Spanish to the point where, though she understands it, speaking and writing is another matter altogether: “I am asked why I don’t write in Spanish. I say, ‘My

God, I've never learned the language!'" ("Social and political perspectives of a Chicana writer" 228).

This may seem like something that contradicts my claims of Viramontes being a writer that represents the community she is part of, I argue that is not at all the case. Viramontes's status as a Chicana and a Chicana writer is fully independent from the language in which she writes or speaks. "There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 58-9). Even if the languages in and of themselves occupy greatly different spots in the social hierarchy of the United States, when it comes to the level of the individual person, Viramontes writing mostly in English makes her just as much a Chicana as a Chicana writer who writers mostly in Spanish, and I believe that we gain nothing from arguing otherwise.

That linguistic side-note finished, I return to discussing this research's methodology: why apply the structural, mythical focus to these analyses? Roland Barthes defends that "a voluntary acceptance of myth can in fact define the whole of our traditional Literature" (*Mythologies* 133). In other words, the novel is an exceptional way to both transmit and modify mythologies, creating new systems of meaning on top of the previous ones. This is similar to how Anzaldúa, describing her duty as a writer, says "I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 71). Through analyzing writing, we can identify myths from the writer's culture or how they incorporate myths from other cultures to enrich their text. Conversely, by being aware of these myths' presence, the reader can strengthen their understanding of a text and how it exists in communication with previous literature and the context in which it is written, attempting to create means of being that do not currently exist. Viramontes's stories, with their focus on the Chicana individual often ignored

by the American society, "by allowing us to think of ourselves and our worlds with one foot in older discourses and another at a growing, opening edge, the not-yet-voiced could begin to create new myths—new containers for new wine—beyond the limited already-known" (Helene Shulman Lorenz 503).

Previous literature has discussed Viramontes in a mythical context, and even in specifically structuralist ones[2], with what I feel is a significant (but understandable, given her relevance to Chicana culture and the way she is mentioned by name in some of the texts to be analyzed here) focus on the figure of La Llorona, something that will be further detailed in future parts of this thesis, even though there are other aspects one can study in the stories. Therefore, following this *status questionis*, I will perform multiple analyses on specific mythic attributes of Viramontes's writing, with the objective of conducting a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, view of the short stories within *The Moths and other stories* as well as the novel *Their Dogs Came with Them*, hoping to identify and discuss mythological elements present in them and prioritizing aspects I have not seen in previous literature. The end result will be akin to an article collection, which I hope will create a helpful, convenient starting point for others to do further research work on the author and her works.

I now mention one last reason for this thesis. Literature, in all its shapes and sizes, can transmit an incredible amount of cultural and mythical information. As Brazilians, with all the privileges, downsides and attributes that entails, I believe it to be our duty to learn more about our Latina sisters, the Chicanas of the United States, meeting them halfway instead of distancing ourselves from them. By analyzing Viramontes's creations, as well as all the myths they transmit, I hope to assist with creating that international bridge of solidarity and support.

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[2] See Swyt, Wendy. "Hungry Women: Borderlands Mythos in Two Stories by Helena Maria Viramontes". *Varieties of Ethnic Criticism*, vol. 23, no. 2, Oxford University Press, 1998.

2. Myths of Chicanas

Before I begin properly discussing the selected primary texts, I will do a short, non-exhaustive review of some mythological presences related to the Chicana community. The information presented in this section will be restated and expanded upon in future sections as needed, but I believe that preemptively mentioning it here shall assist with making the cultural background of Viramontes's works more visible through the dissertation and, consequently, will increase the internal cohesion of this dissertation.

To start, I make use Miguel Leon-Portilla's *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico - Expanded and Updated Edition* to address what can be considered the foundational events of Chicano and Chicana existence. The book performs a review of the Aztec history and culture, which, quoting J. Jorge Klor de Alva's foreword for the book, "for Mexicans on both sides of the border [...] has played a critical historical and symbolic role in the formation of their collective identity" (xiii). Gloria Anzaldúa agrees with such a statement, describing both that "*Én 1521 nascio una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 5, italics from original text) and how elements of Aztec culture survived all the way to modern day Chicano and Chicana culture.

Important in this mention of history and culture is the fact that, long before the colonization process began, the country currently known as Mexico repeatedly received waves of settlers from the land to the north, the area that would eventually become the south of the United States. Out of these groups, "the Aztecs or Mexicas were the last of the many nomadic

tribes to enter the Valley of Mexico from the north" (Leon-Portilla xxxii), struggling to establish themselves in the region against the already existing states until they managed to begin their settlement of Tenochtitlan around the 14th century. On the present day, the fact the Aztecs came from the north gains a great amount of relevance to Chicano culture as they search for Aztlán, "the ancestral homeland in the north that the Aztecs left in 1168 when they journeyed southward to found the promised land, Tenochtitlán (Mexico City), in 1325" (Alicia Arrizón 23). The process of migration towards the United States has, alongside pragmatic reasons, a strong mythical urge, one that makes Chicanos inherit "a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing *la migracion de los pueblos mexicanos*, the return odyssey to the historical, mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 11, italics from original text).

I address here part of the Aztecs' religious beliefs, more specifically, their frequent sacrifices. According to Leon-Portilla, "there is good evidence that human sacrifices were performed in the Valley of Mexico before the arrival of the Aztecs, but apparently no other tribe ever performed them with such frequency" (xxxix), something that made them greatly disliked by other cities in Mexico. The sacrifice of prisoners of war, alongside the warring itself, were both conducted in honor of the Aztecs' patron God, Huitzilopochtli, with Tlacaelel, royal counselor, declaring that uniting all nations was their sacred duty and, to do so, warring and sacrifices were necessary.

Huitzilopochtli's importance is very noticeable as an example of the way myth causes naturalization of history, with his status as one of the most important deities of the Aztecs being a direct result of a request for "a new version of Aztec history" (León-Portilla xxxviii). As years went on, such history and mythology became accepted by the people in such a way that it made it seem like it had always existed. It is also relevant due to causing a shift in gender

structure. According to Anzaldúa, Huitzilopochtli's rise to power within the pantheon, replacing the male and female pair of lords of duality, Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl, signifies a shift "from the egalitarian traditions of a wandering tribe to those of a predatory state" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 34) coated in patriarchal domination.

Cecilia F. Klein elaborates and adds to this explanation of the Aztec's relationship with gender roles by describing how the Aztecs viewed "femininity as a metaphor for military cowardice" (222) and that women could only be associated with combat if portrayed as a villain for stepping out of cultural gender boundaries or as submissive assistant to her husband within the confines of the home. Klein also goes into detail about how women's objects and bodily secretions were believed to carry great mystical power, this being part of the reason they were subjugated and so unnerving when transgressing their allotted gender, something that aligns with Joseph Campbell's description of how "the fear of woman and the mystery of her motherhood" (59-60) was something that greatly scared patriarchal societies all over the world.

It must be mentioned that Huitzilopochtli was not the only God in the Aztec pantheon held in high regard. The great temple of Tenochtitlán, also known as Templo Mayor, "supported great shrines to Tlaloc, as well as Huitzilopochtli" ("Myth, Cosmic Terror, and the Templo Mayor" 150), Tlaloc being identified by Carrasco as a god of rain and agriculture older than Huitzilopochtli and also that, although the sacrifices were justified thanks to Huitzilopochtli, there are arguments Tlaloc obtained the majority of them thanks to his domains on areas much more immediately relevant to the Aztecs' daily life. Through this conjunction of Tlaloc and Huitzilipochtli, the Templo Mayor, center of the Aztecs' geographical, political and religious world, held "a corehent image in which the symbolism of rain, water, mountains, and agriculture was closely intertwined with, and yet opposed to, the solar symbolism" (Johanna Broda 76). Finally, I mention that the Templo Mayor occupies a curious spot in Aztec

studies as a significant amount of what we know about it was uncovered in excavations during the relatively recent time period of 1978 to 1982, allowing scholars to finally complement historical records with some level of firsthand study.

Returning to The Broken Spears, the books follows its review of pre-colonization Aztec history and culture with shares written records of the fall of the Aztec empire against Spanish colonizers, from the first battles to Aztec survivors struggling to escape subjugation. As described by Aricela Esparza,

> People and ways of life that were thought to have no value were marginalized, erased, and often killed through genocidal violence, displacement, poverty, and exploitation to make way for what is characterized as progress through a Eurocentric lens that constructs nonwhite people as less than human and in need of being 'civilized' (129).

The Broken Spears effectively showcases the birth of Chicana, *mestiza* existence, both by recording the start of colonization and by including the figure of Malinche, an enslaved Aztec who was sold to Cortes and assisted him as translator and advisor, giving him children in the process. Because of this, she is seen as someone who betrayed her culture, Norma Alarcón arguing that Chicano myth makes use of that vilified status in order to turn her into "a handy reference point not only for controlling, interpreting or visualizing women, but also to wage a domestic battle of stifling proportions" ("Chicana's feminist literature" 182). Miren Neyra Alcántara adds that La Chingada, a common way to refer to Malinche, "notes violence, going outside of itself and penetrating unto others by force" (133), marking Malinche as, in a vulgar way, the fucked one, her children being the children of the raped woman and something that "subdues women through the image of sex that is sinful and destructive" (133). After all, to be a sexual woman is to be like Malinche and, consequently, betray their culture.

Interestingly, Randy P. Conner et al.'s *Cassells Encyclopedia Of Queer Myth, Symbol, And Spirit Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, And Transgender Lore* argues that, while being a representative of Chicana women, there appears to be "an androgynous or transgendered quality with which Malinche has come to be associated" (225), with Malinche carrying a history of being represented by men in Mexican theater and ritual dances, as well as carrying objects such as whips and snakes, associated with "gynandrous or Amazonian deities and spirits" (225). Malinche is a symbol of all that is bad in womanhood and, as a result, seems to sometimes transgress it because she is seen as evil, somewhat similarly to how pre-colonization warrior women were treated.

Conner et al. considers it clear that "for Malinche, little choice was given to her as to whether or not she would accept the role of translator for the Spanish conquistadores" (225), while Norma Alarcón's earlier article instead brings forth debates regarding how much awareness of her situation and power she could exert upon in Malinche had. At the end of the day, said debates culminate in Chicana Feminists creating their own view of Malinche, focusing on her limited, but present, influence, raising the possibility that it was "because of her diplomacy and intelligence that a more total annihilation of the Indian tribes of Mexico did not occur" (Tey Diana Rebolledo 65). Whether hated, reclaimed or re-contextualized within her multiple interpretations, her womanhood and possible transgression of it being loved or vilified, the fact remains that Malinche is assigned the mother of the Chicanos and Chicanas. Her "children not only don't fade, they become reified as a third race, neither Indian nor Spanish: La Malinche is sex, is ugly, is mestiza—but real" (Deborah A. Miranda and Ana Louise Keating 205).

I now change focus from *The Broken Spears* to Rebolledo's *Women Singing in the Snow*. The book is a cultural analysis of Chicana writing, presenting common Chicana literary

and mythical archetypes alongside historical contextualization of their writing, “an attempt to show how Chicana writers, with the self-realization of their emerging consciousness, have managed to make themselves the subjects of their own discourses” (Rebolledo X).

I begin addressing this book via the figure of Coatlicue due to its close relation to the aforementioned Huitzilopochtli. Coatlicue is an Aztec Earth Goddess that, while cleaning a mountain sacred to her, finds a floating ball of feathers. Upon picking it up and storing it into her apron, Coatlicue is impregnated, something that her already existing children, the goddess Coyolxauhqui and her four hundred siblings, consider disgraceful. Deciding to kill their mother for that, Coyolxauhqui and her siblings march towards her, in some versions succeeding at their goal. One way or another, their brother, Huitzilopochtli, proceeds to leave his mother’s womb fully formed, decapitates his sister and similarly defeats his remaining siblings, Coyolxauhqui becoming associated with the moon while he is associated with the sun. Being the origin myth of their main deity, Huitzilopochtli, it is no wonder that the myth was of great importance to the Aztecs, to the point that the aforementioned great pyramid dedicated to the God, center of the Aztec society, “represents the *Coatepetl*, the ‘Serpent Mountain,’ where the miraculous birth of the god took place” (Johanna Broda 77).

Rebolledo discusses some divine aspects related to Coatlicue which granted her a particular set of traits, associating her with both death and birth, filth and cleansing, “goddess of love and of sin, with the power to create and devour life” (51). As a result, she is a deity of dualities and contrasts, seen as surprisingly good in guiding people through their internal conflicts. Anzaldúa gives great importance to this aspect of the Goddess in a personal philosophical belief that she calls the Coatlicue state, “a way station or it can be a way of life” (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 46) where the Goddess forces a conflicted person to address their contradictory feelings, traumas and fears once they boil to a paralyzing state. In doing so,

Coatlicue enables the person to achieve a synthesis, an understanding of themselves and their repressed parts, Anzaldúa describing the process as necessary for progress and survival. All greatly aligns with Rebolledo's description of her.

I also mention, however, that Anzaldúa discusses how the Aztecs replaced female deities with male ones and academic Paul Scolieri similarly mentions Huitzilopochtli's birth and Coyolxauhqui's death as consisting of a "transference of power" (93) myth. It is interesting to look at some previous Chicana literature that makes use of the myth, given how aware they are of this fact. Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* references the story in order to discuss how Huitzilopochtli has taken away the power from female deities, as well as how Coatlicue implicitly abandons her daughter to the fate of being killed by her brother and subjugated by patriarchy, putting Coyolxauhqui in focus. Meanwhile, Pat Mora's "Coatlicue Rules: Advice from an Aztec Goddess" focuses on Coatlicue's feelings upon being targeted by her children for being pregnant, as well as her awareness that her story was created by men.

I feel that Rebolledo specifically, due to her focus on Coatlicue as a mythical figure present within the Chicana literary space, reduces Coyolxauhqui to somewhat of a footnote in the myths[3]. This becomes representative of an interesting tension within Chicana culture, and immigrant writing as a whole. "The narrative of the daughter, almost always American-born, or at least American-assimilated, dominates the anthology [*This bridge called my back*], as it does much of ethnic women's writing" (Shirley Geok-lin Lim 209) and the conflict between the mother and daughter's points-of-view follows. As Moraga and Mora show, Coyolxauhqui

[3] *Borderlands: the new mestiza* also focuses on Coatlicue's while Coyolxauhqui is relatively unmentioned, but I believe it to be less noticeable due to Anzaldúa not focusing on Huitzilopochtli's origin myth within a literary context. Outside of *Borderlands: the new mestiza*, Anzaldúa's later texts, such as "Let Us Be the Healing Of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—la sombra y el sueño", 2015 and "now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts", 2002 also apply greater focus to Coyolxauqui.

and Huitzilopochtli's myth is not only about their opposition to each other, but also about Coyolxauhqui and Coatlicue's relationship as mother and daughter, which sometimes results in the writer selecting one of the two to favor at expense of the other. Representations of the myth often focus on how they blame each other for their final fate even if they carry awareness of the context responsible for the narrative in which they are inserted and how blaming each other for their end fate is, consequently, pointless. Huitzilopochtli, patriarchy, is at fault for their fate, but mother and daughter have hurt each other still.

Moving on from Coatlicue, I address some archetypes which, at least partially, have had their conception influenced by her. The Virgin of Guadalupe as she is known in Mexico is a variation of the Virgin Mary whose origin story is described by Alcántara:

> The first apparition occurs on December 9th 1531, where the Virgin asks Juan Diego to go to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga to build a temple on the same place where she appears.
>
> Bishop Zumarraga is skeptical and asks for proof. On December 12, The Virgin appears to Juan Diego a second time and orders him to collect Castille roses. Juan Diego picks the roses and places them in his "tilma" [cape], a garment used by Aztec men. He takes them to the Virgin and she sends him to the Bishop. Juan Diego opens his cape in front of the bishop and when the red roses fall from it, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is perfectly preserved in the cloth, erasing the Bishop's doubt (131).

I add information from other sources. Anzaldúa mentions that Guadalupe not only spoke Nahua, the native language of the Aztecs, to Juan Diego, she presented herself as María Coatlalopeuh. "'Coatl' is the Náhuatl word for serpent. Lopeuh means 'the one who has dominion over serpents.' I interpret this as 'the one who is at one with the beasts.' [...] Because *Coatlalopeuh* was homophonous to the Spanish *Guadalupe*, the Spanish identified her with the

dark Virgin, *Guadalupe*, patroness of West Central Spain" (Borderlands: the new mestiza 29). Carrasco says that the Virgin, upon appearing, announced she was there to extend her love to all in the land, regardless of race and ancestry, and she specifically wanted Juan Diego, as a poor, native Aztec abandoned by his society, to deliver her message ("Love, Begging to Be Let In").

A syncretic confluence of the Tonantzín aspects of Coatlicue and the Guadalupe of Spain, Guadalupe is a mestiza existence and "the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 30), symbolic protector of her people to the current day, "a symbol of family, faith and heritage" (Ryan Christopher Jones), with her ambiguously brown appearance allowing her to fulfill her promise to spread her love to all by being "both a foreigner and a home and heart in which all of us can dwell together in all the borderlands of our lives, nightmares and hopes" (Love, Begging to Be Let In") Guadalupe, by very strength of her promise, is a symbol not only of the Mexican and Chicano identity, but also of equality, strength and love.

At the same time, she is by some considered to be, in comparison to her Aztec predecessors, an "unilateral figure: she personified nurturing, beneficent aspects and not the supposedly negative, life forces of the powerful Tonantzín/Coatlicue" (Rebolledo 52). Alcantará argues "the paradigm finds its roots in the ecclesiastic system, that is inherently patriarchal and colonial […] this cultural prototype, anchored in a venerated figure, keeps women subdued and as a result, women suffer spiritual and sexual damage" (132), with the Chicana suffering great anxiety from how unattainable and self-defacing the characterization of Guadalupe, an ideal they are encouraged to strive towards, seems to be: virgin, yet sexually available for procreation, lacking in power or authority, a paragon of "unselfish giving, intercession between earth and spirit, and the ideal qualities of motherhood" (Rebolledo 53),

failure to achieve this insurmountable task taking the Chicana back to Malinche, the fucked one, the failed woman that must be scorned.

This creates a personal crisis of faith for many Chicanas, as they attempt to reconcile how the greatest religious figure they have access to, one that puts a female figure as a possibly life-changing position of great power is also one that can, at many times, appear to never have assisted them. Rebolledo describes how different writers reconcile with her in different ways, be it be reincorporating her abandoned indigenous aspects, making Guadalupe too undergo the difficulties they go through, fully accepting her as a figure they consider a harmful symbol of the religious cultural domination they undergo or returning to her in her own terms, finding their peace with, connection and respect for Guadalupe's genuine power and care, that greatly inspires many people, in both sides of the Mexican border, each and every year.

Following Guadalupe, I address La Llorona, the third Chicana mother. As Anzaldúa describes:

> *La gente Chicana tiene tres madres*. All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *La Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 30, italics from the original text).

Anzaldúa describes La Llorona's duty as consisting of ensuring the Chicanas are "long-suffering people" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 31) to whom wailing is their only means of protest. Rebolledo does agree with such a description, but goes on to further discuss its existence. Born from syncretic Native stories of mothers who had their children murdered and similar European myths, La Llorona, besides her status as a boogie man, is "symbolic of Chicano culture, whose children are lost because of their assimilation into the dominant culture

or because of violence and prejudice" (Rebolledo 77). However, her presence within the culture does not end with tragedy, even if her story does. Instead, Rebolledo describes how some modern interpretations focus on the catharsis of her existence, whether that comes from accepting the grief she represents or re-purposing her moaning shouts as means of celebration.

I must disclose here, my academic research on Viramontes's writing has resulted in an overwhelming amount of articles focusing on the thematic, symbolic, implicit or explicit presence of La Llorona within her texts, such arguments being present in Ashley Denney's "Cultural Reclamations in Helena Viramontes' 'The Moths'", Mary A. Seliger's "Racial Violence, Embodied Practices, and Ethnic Transformation in Helena María Viramontes's "Neighbors" and 'Their Dogs Came with Them'", Wendy Swyt's "Hungry Women: Borderlands Mythos in Two Stories by Helena Maria Viramontes", among others. As a means to cover new areas in the academic discourse, I will actively avoid the already existing La Llorona discussions in favor of addressing other mythical constructs, though still making use of them when directly relevant to the primary material.

I now mention one more relevant literary-mythical figure, that of the curandera and its mirror counterpart, the *bruja*. Described by Rebolledo as "the most prominent contemporary archetypal heroine in Chicana literature" (83), the curandera is a folk healer with great cognitive skills, to the point of occasionally being a seer. With her deep knowledge, wide array of abilities and literary presence inherited from oral, pre-colonial traditions, the curandera and her capacity to exert "control over her own life and destiny as well as that of others" (88), exercising balance in physical, environmental and psychological levels, becomes a platonic ideal of the Chicana evolution, capable of flawlessly commanding power and respect without compromising any aspect of her own personality. This even extends to the *bruja*, someone who

"can and does sometimes seek vengeance and revenge […] She fulfills our desires to seek justice against those perceived as more powerful" (Rebolledo 88).

One can see a curandera's healing practices through Marcel de Lima's *The Ethnopoetics of Shamanism*, which mentions a famous, real life curandera in the form of María Sabina. "She was known locally as a Wise One, which is the name the Mazatec give to their highest category of curer, whose healing techniques involve the ingestion of sacred mushrooms in order to acquire the spiritual power to diagnose and cure the sick" (Lima 126), aligning herself with previous description of curanderas as being women with unique powers and even seers, the mushrooms' spiritual power granting her visions that offered her great knowledge and the power with which to cure her patients. I highlight Lima's analysis of Sabina's poetic existence in relation to said visions as well as her state as a syncretic religious figure, her status as a twentieth century shaman inherently incorporating a mixture of Christian and Native beliefs within her rituals. With these abilities, Sabina manages to save the life of her own sister and many others, while also managing a position of influence within her community, if one that is mostly retracted from her after she allows outsiders to witness and record her deeds.

Carrying healing, power and the capacity to command authority within her society, it is not surprising that the curandera is so attractive a figure to the Chicana writer. Anthology publication *This bridge we call home* carries mentions to the archetype on multiple of its texts, and I highlight Jody Norton's analysis of how a fictional text's usage of it contributes to teaching the reader "this is how you protect those made sick by poverty and oppression; this is how you form feminist communities; this is how you learn to heal others and yourself" (154). Irene Lara carries herself similarly, considering "writing as a spiritual and political practice" (437) to be her healing work, her participation in curandera tradition.

Other aspects not directly related to a literary/mythical archetype are relevant to be discussed. Besides the image of the writer as translator whose acts of connecting different people confer actual power to them, connected to Malinche's multilingual existence, Rebolledo also mentions a tradition of the Chicana writer as an ethnographer and historian, one that tries "to understand the historical and political forces that shaped them, and their participation in the larger sociocultural scheme" (120), managing to understand its cultural context not unlike how Barthes describes the mythologist can "undo the signification of the myth, and I receive the latter as an imposture" (*Mythologies* 127).

In line with how Barthes describes the way wine, milk, steak, chips and other food articles carry mythic, symbolic power to the French, Anzaldúa and Rebolledo do a similar association to the Chicanas. For Anzaldúa, "food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 61), memories of Mexican cuisine remaining a strong part of her memories. Rebolledo follows up by describing how the writer as a cook is a popular, relatively unique writing convention for Chicanas, aligning with the way that "one of the spaces traditionally construed as female is the kitchen, and Chicana literature is filled with images of active women preparing food" (Rebolledo 130). Cooking in Chicana literature becomes associated with knowledge and inherited tradition, and as such cooking skills present themselves as a form of authority for Chicanas. Rebolledo highlights that ethnic food are especially important for this representation, showcasing tradition, memory and the breaking of it. Enchiladas, chiles and tortillas, specifically, are charged with romantic and sexual imagery (Rebolledo 142-143) by some writers.

The blank sheets of writing also make themselves present with great importance for Chicana writers. "For women, the idea that stains upon the blank sheet are made of blood is almost a certainty" (Rebolledo 149), especially relevant when "the writing of the early Nahuatl

peoples and the Aztecs was signified by the colors red and black" (Rebolledo 150). Writing becomes strongly associated with life itself for many Chicana texts, both in terms of generating and sacrificing life.

All these literary archetypes and mythical constructs are situated inside and interact with the limitations women face within Chicana culture, in this case, "the ideological model of being good: selfless, nourishing, steady, circumspect, respectful and passive" (Rebolledo 204). Chicana writers interact with these limitations in different ways, some working to expand the range of emotions and multiplicities that female characters are allowed to showcase while others take aspects of womanhood considered wicked or evil. This too, is similar to another recurring aspect of the previously discussed concepts: a variety of possibilities.

The Chicana being a group that has "struggled with the dilemma of the relationship between individual and collective representation" (Rebolledo 208), its writers have managed to deal with such contradictions by recognizing those multiple existences as essential for one's survival. As said by Anzaldúa, this recognition is "a tolerance for ambiguity" where "nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 79). With some of these multiple, personal, plural and contradictory mythical presences discussed, I move forward to seeing how those and other aspects make themselves present in Helena Maria Viramontes's works, and their myriad protagonists.

3. Mythical Moths: Study of The Moths and other stories

I will begin my analyses by focusing on *The Moths and other stories*. The book is a collection of short stories that are not narratively connected, and they offer great potential for a wide range of discussions. Viramontes mentions in an interview that "I think if there are nine

stories in the collection from *The Moths*, there are nine different inspirations for what I was doing" (Flys-Junquera 231-232, italics from the original text), showcasing that each of her creations carries a different origin point and thematic focus.

Therefore, it is fair to see many separate mythological inspirations and allusions across the stories, which I hope to unearth. Whenever I mention a given story for the first time, I will begin the analysis with a short recap of the narrative and only afterwards start academic discussion through looking at specific parts of the text in conjunction with academic sources.

3.1.Center of the world as a ritual site

I will begin the chapter by addressing a structure present in multiple short stories, namely, the center of the world ritual site. Some writers, such as Mircea Eliade, define that myth configures reality by organizing a repeatable action within a location that can double as a "center of the world", those possibly being cities, temples or houses organized in a similar way to a mythical "Sacred Mountain – where heaven and earth meet" (*Cosmos and History* 12), establishing a connection to this world and the afterlife, an *axis mundi* environment, location that can be "regarded as the meeting point between heaven, earth and hell" (*Cosmos and History* 12) or a "vertical structure of an implicit or explicit heavy symbolical content, which is (or may be) interpreted as (a) standing in the center of the world, and (b) connecting its different strata, which (c) allows "shamans" [...] to travel along its trunk" (Kostićová 72). Within these places, rituals are performed, Eliade defining, as I have mentioned before, that "every responsible activity in pursuit of a definite end is, for the archaic world, a ritual" (*Cosmos and History* 28), one that is built around a myth.

Although not directly mentioning houses or temples in the same way, Oscar Muñoz similarly mentions the importance of a center of the world within stories, making the content of myths become "universally valid, but it is expressed, inevitably, within a local scenario" (Muñoz 24). As previously mentioned, the center of the world of Aztec society was undoubtedly the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlán, connected to the mythical Serpent Mountain and associated to multiple aspects such as warfare, rain, agriculture, mountains, caves, among others, with the place being infamous for its sacrificial rituals to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. I preemptively state that this section will not present cases of sacrificial rituals, but that they will be relevant during the chapter of this research dedicated to *Their Dogs Came with Them.* Also, I mention that I will not analyze only rituals or myths directly connected to the Aztecs, but rather will also discuss more general rituals and myths, especially since the way the Chicana lives in within a mix of cultures has made it so many myths from other cultures have been incorporated in their existence.

Roland Barthes also discusses how buildings can carry or transmit myths, although focusing on people's associations rather than rituals: a certain aesthetic style of house may impel him to "name this object a Basque chalet: or even better, to see it as the very essence of *basquity*" (*Mythologies* 123, italics from original text) which, even if said house is outside the geographical context with which it is associated, makes it so "all that justified the Basque house on the plane of technology -the barn, the outside stairs, the dove-cote, etc. - has been dropped" (*Mythologies* 123). The spectator is willing to ignore that due to the mythical style compelling others into appreciating it and ignoring the decisions that led into its existence in the area, instead looking only at its end result.

Gloria Anzaldúa discusses how any action can be repeated obsessively to the point of addiction, becoming a form of "ritual to help one through a trying time" (*Borderlands: the new*

mestiza 46), its persistence harming a person's development and capacity to interact with wider mythical forces. This possibility is important for us to expand the reach of what we can consider ritual, what one can apply mythical charge to and the impacts of those on one person.

This section will focus primarily on the center of the world being represented via houses and temples, the latter to be here understood as churches, discussing how those are represented in a ritual context in Viramontes's writing, as a place where characters engage in repeatable actions with specific, definite ends in tow.

Houses and churches carry important mythical charge from the very first short story in the compilation, that being "The Moths". The house of the protagonist's grandmother is described in a mystical way, the plants existing around it make it "look like it was cradled within the vines that grew pear-shaped squashes ready for the pick, ready to be steamed with onions and cheese and butter" (25), a description that connects the location to matters of life and agriculture. Meanwhile, a local church, whose religion is not specified, is described as cold and lifeless, while the mass that the family attends regularly is something the main character dislikes so much, she avoids attending even as her father commits physical harm to her in order to threaten her into going. After her grandmother saves her life, magically reconstructing her body in the process, the protagonist dedicates herself to assisting her relative with household chores as a way to thank her for all she has done.

As mentioned, Eliade describes how the construction of a household mimics actions related to the beginning of a mythical world, and that the act of construction or the moment in which someone "entered it for the first time" (*Cosmos and History* 77) begins a series of renewals continued by the mythical rituals. Reviewing the short story, one can see this form of repetition present. The narrative begins with the protagonist being saved from illness by her grandmother's medical care and food. Then, within the relative's house, the protagonist

commits to performing the same actions: physical care for her grandmother, alongside cooking and gardening. The first two are the same things her grandmother did for her, while the latter is both the source of many of the ingredients the characters use and responsible for further covering the building with vines, strengthening its distinctive characteristics. Within the protagonist's center of the world, she continuously repeats the acts responsible for initiating her into that center, under the supervision of her relative's divine self:

> Abuelita had pulled me through the rages of scarlet fever by placing, removing and replacing potato slices on the temples of my forehead; ("The Moths" 24)
>
> I'd gladly go help Abuelita plant her wild lilies or jasmine or heliotrope or cilantro or hierbabuena in red Hills Brothers coffee cans ("The Moths" 24-25).
>
> But this was a different kind of help, Amá said, because Abuelita was dying. […] And so it seemed only fair that these hands she had melted and formed found use in rubbing her caving body with alcohol and marihuana, rubbing her arms and legs, ("The Moths" 25)

Meanwhile, in "Snapshots", we see another type of constant ritual practice through pictures. Olga, the main character, constantly attempts to recall her own fragmented past by looking at old photographs, doing so as a moment of indulgence after a lifetime of obsessive housekeeping and caring for her family members. She describes doing these actions effectively from dawn to dusk, with only small breaks for eating enforced by her daughter, who intrudes her mother's house by visiting.

Writers such as Susan Sontag confer mythical power to photography, describing it as "a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power" (5) and specifically "a rite of family life" (6) with which one can observe the relatives and action that have long passed. Although photography's unique properties give it an unstable connection to myth, something

to be further explored in future parts of this thesis, Olga nonetheless uses them for an appropriate ritual goal, revisiting the past in order to achieve greater stability within a delimited time and space, in this case, reorganizing her past in order to feel safe inside her own household after her divorce:

> They [the photo albums] stood in the attic for years until I brought them down a day after he remarried [Dave, her ex-husband].
>
> The photo albums are unraveling and stained with spills and fingerprints and are filled with crinkled faded gray snapshots of people I can't remember anymore. I turn the pages over and over again to see if somehow, some old dream will come into my blank mind ("Snapshots" 86).

Therefore, Olga attempts to obtain some sort of self-realization from the family pictures she does not recognize herself at. In doing so, she keeps her sights focused on the past and in her own self-destructive emotional roots, forsaking genuine opportunities for self-reflection and growth. This becomes similar to how Anzaldúa, as previously mentioned, describes obsessive rituals as being developed by people in an attempt to withstand trying times, something that stops them from acknowledging and stopping the root causes of anguish. As a final note, I point out that, before Olga obtained her obsession with photography, she similarly performed a full dedication to caring for her household, a ritual in and of itself that went by unseen by others.

In "Neighbors", the final story of the collection, we see a dual, contrasted ritual space[4], as the story alternates showcasing the houses of its two protagonists, Aura and Fierro. Living in a Chicano neighborhood that suffocates under the presence of highways and other such city

[4] Although I consider this more a coincidence than anything else, I must mention that writers such as Johanna Broda described the Templo Mayor of the Aztecs as being similarly a dual ritual space, shared between the gods of Rain and Sun, Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli.

developments, the characters spend most of their time inside their houses, their surrounding context increasingly hostile to them.

Aura and Fierro have their center of the world threatened by its surroundings, though the story showcases them doing so in a seesaw structure of sorts. At the start of the story, Fierro suffers from loneliness, a decaying public infrastructure that forces him to traverse unfit for walking environments in order to make use of local support systems and his still grieving heart, which aches for the loss of his son and the neighborhood around him. However, upon the arrival of an unnamed woman, his existence over the course of the last couple of days of his life turns for the better, even if that is done by confining himself to his house.

> As the days passed, Fierro knew little of what went on in the neighborhood. When he heard the sirens and screams and CB radios spitting out messages, he refused to go outside for fear of finding Chuy's body limp and bloody once again. Then, this morning as he turned from his side of the bed to examine the woman's slow breathing, he couldn't imagine what had caused Aura to scream so loudly that it startled him out of a sleepy daze, though he wore no hearing aid ("Neighbors" 102).

With the woman present in his house, Fierro no longer needs to join Aura in their daily ritual for socialization, nor go outside to eat tasteless food. Instead, the meals the woman provides strike straight at his affective memory, with other actions she performs further nourishing him.

In contrast, as the narrative progresses, Aura's household experience grows more precarious. The short story meticulously details the character's day-long routine of caring for her garden, her own ritual against interaction with the wider world and ensuing personal strife. After calling the police on a local gang that loitered on her doorstep, not realizing how

disproportionately destructive that choice would be, her garden, an agricultural activity which she religiously took care of for years, is vandalized by the gang in retaliation.

Anxious and panicking, her very house ceases to be a place of safety, which leads her to further seclude herself within it until, at one point, she reaches for the underground security of her basement[5], searching for something in it that may help her, resulting in the main character acquiring a gun that had been stashed away in the location.

> Aura plunges into a female-gendered Mexican-American past [...] Her gendered familiarity with "kitchen utensils," further icons of a female culture-bearing function that no longer pertains, cannot help her. The only item that retains cultural power that has not been drained or debunked by recent events is the pistol, a historic symbol of Chicano self-assertion and heroic defiance. (Pavletich and Backus 140-141)

Pavletich and Backus further discuss how Aura treats the gun as a foreign object, one she is not familiar with, despite the fact she finds it inside the basement, a female associated space, of her own house. However, the gun nonetheless acts as a representative of a Mexican ballad tradition, granting the protagonist the opportunity to defend her house through mimicking a mythical story structure of her culture.

Possessing a basic unit of habitation is essential for livelihood, as is having a place for exercising spiritual needs. We see this in “The Moths”, where her house and her religion’s restrictive existences lead the protagonist to search for and successfully locate these elsewhere, finding her own place for spiritual evolution. In “Snapshots” and “Neighbors” the respective houses are set as ritual grounds disrespected by intruders, leading the protagonists into continuous retrospection from which each of them finds a different conclusion: Olga striving

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[5] One could compare this basement to the underground, dark caves that Broda and Carrasco described as being part of the Aztec Templo Mayor, but, similarly to the previous Aura and Fierro footnote, I consider this to be more of a coincidence than anything else.

to let go of the influence the rites and mythical norms have on her while Aura, having hers forcibly ripped from her, prepares to defend her house and existence with another, more violent side of her heritage.

3.2.Conception across short stories

This section is going to explore how three short stories in the collection address different parts of the thematics of birth and conception, beginning with the third short story in the collection, “Birthday”. Its main character is Alice, a young woman who experiences an unplanned pregnancy. The narrative goes through her emotional turmoil over the situation, in which she is unsure of whether she wants to keep the child or not. At last, she settles on obtaining an abortion procedure which she goes through as the story ends.

Pregnancy and conception are very mythologically charged topics to explore. Joseph Campbell discusses how the process of birth is initially treated as a mirrored companion to the threshold crossing of death, the methods people come from and go to other worlds. However, as communities develop into farming locations, so does the association of birth and death not only with each other, “but sex and murder” (Campbell 351). This is doubly so for women, with this being mentioned in a passage Campbell includes from an Abyssinian woman, who describes how a woman’s life changes completely after pregnancy. No longer is she allowed to be a virginal maiden; she has to be a mother.

This view of motherhood is reaffirmed by the field of psychology and its associated literary studies. Luce Irigaray discusses how female sexuality “fades away before maternity” (*Speculum of other woman* 75), forced to dedicate itself to the child instead of carrying any individuality. This is further discussed by Shirley Neuman, who mentions both the reduction

of woman to motherhood, and how children continue the process by ignoring their mother's existence as a person once they recognize themselves as separate from her.

Within the Chicano context, Anzaldúa expands visualization of motherhood by describing how Chicana women carry three possible paths in life, "to the church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 17), acceptance of motherhood being central to the culture even if heavily punished when done improperly. Once such a thing happens, the mother is doomed to be compared to Malinche who, as mentioned in previous parts of this dissertation, was a historical figure accused of having sold her people and family to the Spanish colonizers, having children with those same colonizers herself.

Aztec mythology also has Coyolxauhqui's attempt to kill her brother while he is still in their mother's womb, only to be killed herself by said brother. Her aggression targeting her brother, not her mother, marks the story as having "symbolized all pretensions -past and future- to Aztec supremacy" (Klein 226), the gendered status of Coyalxauhqui's defeat very pointedly marking how women were held as subordinate to men in Aztec culture, while also representing how "Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 27) in favor of Huitzilopochtli, the masculine brother in the myth and patron deity of the Aztec empire. The fact that Coatlicue, the mother, is, in fact, successfully killed by her daughter in many versions also serves to underscore the danger of pregnancy as well as the way it can be used to make women "get taken in by the patriarchy" (Rebolledo 52).

At last, a meaningful cultural construct regarding motherhood is that of La Llorona, the wandering ghost who lost her kids and wanders the world wailing for them. "The tragedy of La Llorona is the tragedy of all children because of violence, neglect, abuse" (Rebolledo 78),

a symbol of the Chicana's attempt to cope with the overwhelming violence that happens when her loved ones die before her.

I take the opportunity to address fertility technologies' impact on the topic of pregnancy. Adaljiza Sosa Ridell mentions that Chicana women have a history of forced sterilization, alongside a general context in which abortion is an unstable right that not all of them have access to, even if it was legal at the time of Ridell's writing. As she mentions, many times "their infertility as well as their fertility is beyond their control" (186). The matter of abortion is the most relevant one for this part of the thesis, and also one Ridell highlights as "a critical reproductive health issue" (193) for Chicanas as a whole and the specific demographic of fifteen years old or younger.

I also mention that Ridell considers it impossible to lay a definite statement regarding how important motherhood truly is for the Chicana community, categorizing common arguments for the idea as assumptions rather than decisive evidence. One could establish motherhood as being relevant for the Chicanos, rather than the Chicana subsection, especially given that she mentions the same general areas that other authors who do mention the focus on motherhood within the Chicano household (that of it being backed by religious obligation, need to produce laborers or the focus on the family unit a necessary for survival), but I comment that the wording on Ridell's article is, in this regard, unclear. For the purposes of this thesis, I will consider the general concept of motherhood as important to the Chicana identity, this happening due to both personal wants, whether that consists of them wanting children or not, and external pressure, since Chicano men establish a great amount of importance to having children, especially male children, to affirm themselves as men, as well as the consequences that come with failing to be a mother or being one incorrectly.

Within the context of Chicana existence from which Viramontes writes, Alice's unplanned pregnancy is, therefore, very emotionally and mythologically charged for her. The character very directly deals with the loss of identity that would come from the conception coming to its conclusion, asking herself "would I like to stay Alice, or become a mama" ("Birthday" 39). To accept pregnancy, to give birth is to give up on her identity in its entirety.

Such a question becomes especially loaded as one analyzes Alice's maturity within the story. As Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano discusses in her introduction to the short story collection, it is not inaccurate to say Alice is "characterized as a child in the story" (13). Mentions of things such as her presence on a university campus, the fact Alice eventually goes to the abortion clinic by herself, and the fact the only confirmed age in the narrative being her best friend, Terry, who, at the age of twenty-one, is seen by Alice as a beacon of maturity, suggest she is a late teenager to young adult. She clearly carries her own independence, but is unprepared to completely exercise it. Pregnancy is no longer a simple passage from one realm to another. By focusing on the woman, it becomes a mythical death of her personality and existence.

I have to mention that Alice can be read as White instead of Chicana rather easily and, in fact, is both the only main character with an uncertain ethnic origin and the only singular main character not to be explicitly Chicana[6], with her full name (Alice Johnson), linguistic habits (the story is the only one in which no Spanish words are used) and the way in which she interacts with the world around her not actively pointing to any Chicana cultural markers. This does not stop her from potentially being Chicana, communicating common Chicana struggles to the audience or experiencing pregnancy and all its relevant mythical associations, but I believe it to be important for me to address this possibility before analyzing other short stories.

[6] "The Cariboo Café" does include a White man and a Salvadorean woman as main characters, but that is a position they share with one another and a pair of Chicano kids. Besides that, they are, explicitly and implicitly, their respective ethnicity, while Alice is more ambiguous.

"The Broken Web", the short-story following "Birthday", focuses its discussion of the topic not on the act of giving birth, but the life of women after it. The story follows three women: Martha, her mother and Olivia, all connected to Tomás, a man who is father of the first, husband of the second and lover of the third. Starting with Martha recounting a recurring dream of hers to a priest, the story quickly shifts to the women of the previous generation.

At first sight, it is easy to see the mother and Olivia as clear opposites, the proper wife and the adulterous affair. However, "the narrative deconstructs this opposition by foregrounding their alignment" (Swyt 193), focusing on their relationship to the same man, their age and their relationship with their children. Both of them had illegitimate, out of wedlock children, which they, in varying degrees, resent having to take care of: Olivia explicitly states that, regarding her kids, "she never played mother and they, in turn, never asked her to" (50), while, in regards to Martha's mother, it is mentioned that "only in complete solitude did she feel like a woman" (49), the matriarch treating her trip with her husband (which her children are excluded from) as a rest from her work as mother.

Similar to Irigaray's discussion of how femininity vanishes into motherhood, Martha's mom finds herself lost within that role that Olivia actively rejected, to the point Martha's mom does not have a name to call her own. It is worth noting that, when Gloria Anzaldúa says women can choose between going to "the Church as a nun, to the sweets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 17) she adds only the nun can truly escape maternity.

The danger of conception is further heightened by the matter of paternity. Olivia's kids being born out of wedlock have thrust her into a fringe position in society, while at least one of Martha's kids similarly not being Tomás' puts her at danger of a similar treatment. Similarly to how Alcántara described the connection between Guadalupe and Malinche, at any time, the

Chicana can become Malinche, the promiscuous, shameful mother to be abandoned. Olivia is already associated with the figure from the start, but we see how frail the mother's position is when the fact she had a kid before marriage is equaled to infidelity, Tomás explicitly calling his wife "más cabrona que la chingada" (52), "*la chingada*" being one of the many titles awarded to Malinche. Mythology sets down the ways in which actions must be done, and conception is no exception. Through "The Broken Web", we see maternity is only acceptable when supported by the correct way to do it.

The destructive effects of pregnancy on women's identity and agency are further explored in "The Long Reconciliation", once again with a different focus than the previously mentioned stories. This time, the focus rests on the sexual aspect of womanhood and the violent aspects of death. Amanda, one of the short story's main characters, finds out she greatly enjoys sexual activity, seeing it as one of the few pleasures available to her. However, she does not enjoy pregnancy, both in regard to the physically draining aspects of it as well as the logistical issues of raising a kid in their monetary conditions, Amanda being fully aware "children die like crops here" ("The Long Reconciliation" 78), to the point she turns to alternative medicines in order obtain an abortion.

"In the hunting world the masculine psyche prevails and in the planting world the feminine" (Campbell 351), the former viewing death and birth as a simple passage of consciousness, while the latter sees it as something complex that carries inherent violence. This can be seen in how the main characters of the short story approach the narrative: Amanda treats the topic with due apprehension while her husband is far more nonchalant about the endeavor. For Amanda, pregnancy shall be pain for her and her child, through every step of the process as well as afterwards, when they inevitably perish, while the father sees it as necessary to assert his own manhood, consequences of such an action irrelevant.

It is important to note that the reader sees the end result of this mortality and violence in other short-stories, “The Cariboo Café”, where one of the main characters, a woman from El Salvador, has lost her child to the dictatorship of her country. Although we do not see the fate of her son, the implied violence and threat of death drives her to instability and eventual madness, as she mistakenly takes a kid out of the streets thinking it to be her own. Upon losing him the first time, she becomes La Llorona, mentioning the mythical existence and how “I hear the wailing of the women and know it to be my own” (“The Cariboo Café” 63). Come the end of the novel, “she becomes the voice of all women fighting against injustice everywhere” (Fernández 76) as she refuses to lose her son to the violence of death again, showing La Llorona as a form of resistance against such a fate[7].

Meanwhile, Viramontes’s “Snapshots” focuses on the violence of birth and ensuing death of the woman’s personality. In it, the main character addresses how she first obtained her current hobbies, that of obsessively perusing photography albums, following the birth of her daughter, “to pass the time and pain away” (“Snapshots” 86). The pain of pregnancy and birth ensues a “crisis of meaning as a ‘woman’” (“Making ‘familia’ from scratch” 224), that is forcefully suppressed by her husband, who eventually packed them [the photos] up in a wooden crate to keep me from hurting myself” (“Snapshots” 86). Olga never truly comes to terms with the pain, instead spending her life as a flawed mother and unhappy woman as a result of it.

Out of the five mentioned short stories, “Snapshots” is the only one that does not mention the Catholic Church and its influence in anyway. From the remaining four, I highlight “Birthday”, “The Broken Web” and “The Long Reconciliation” for those three focus on how

[7] It is relevant to highlight that this reading is applying an specifically Chicana construct to a Latin-American character, something is discussed in further detail in lvarado, Karina Oliva. "The Boo of Viramontes’s Cafe: Retelling Ghost Stories, Central American Representing Social Death”, *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 37: Issue 2, Article 6, 2013.

their characters deal with the presence of the Catholic church's rules (God is mentioned in "The Cariboo Café" but, although certainly relevant for that story, I argue His presence is not meaningful for matters of conception and its pain).

Anzaldúa argues institutionalized religions such as the Catholic church "impoverish all life, beauty, pleasure" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 7) by encouraging a division of mind and body that depreciates the value of the knowledge present in the latter. And, in it, the act of abortion Alice and Amanda went through, which both affirms their own bodily autonomy and experiences born from said body, is fiercely forbidden, marking a taboo action the characters have to grapple with.

For Alice, the conflict is primarily internal, as she addresses God and copes with guilt all the way to the operation table, accepting she is going to commit this rejection of Catholic law. Amanda, however, has a conflict more explicitly involved, internally and externally, as, instead of being restricted to her internal monologue, she directly discusses her opinions with the local priest:

> But Father, wasn't He supposed to take care of us, His poor? When you lie together, it is for creating children, *said the priest*. You have sinned, pray. Sex is the only free pleasure we have. It makes us feel like clouds for the minutes that not even you can prevent. You ask us not to lie together, but we are not made of you, we are not gods. You, God, eating and drinking as you like, you, there, not feeling the sweat or the pests that feed on the skin, you sitting with a kingly lust for comfort, tell us that we will be paid later on in death ("The Long Reconciliation" 77).

Amanda rejects the idea of a separate body and soul, that earthly, bodily suffering shall be compensated for the eternal afterlife and that pleasures of the body are to be ignored. Instead of accepting those instructions from the local Church and their command to carry children, she

seeks the wisdom of Don Serafin, who grants her the means to induce an abortion. The man is never seen within the story, but minor characters' reaction to him make it clear his knowledge is considered profane, forbidden, the type of folk knowledge the church failed at stomping out.

All the discussed characters, Alice, Olivia, the unnamed mother and Amanda come into confrontation with the mythical death of the female self-caused by pregnancy, at the same time they grapple with other structures that attempt to shackle them to their fate as a mother. I think it is interesting that the first story of this group is the one in which the main character does, in fact, achieve exactly what she desires, freeing herself from the transformative process of pregnancy thanks to reliable, easy access to abortion clinics. Obtaining an abortion is not a difficulty for Alice, only the mental process of deciding to undergo one is.

One can read Alice's story and the relative ease with which she obtains what she needs as being reflective of her ambiguously White identity, and although I do not discard the possibility, I believe that does not change the line of questioning that she inspires. Before Viramontes shows us the tragedies that can come from undergoing pregnancy, both during and after birth, she shows it to be increasingly not part of the modern world. Myths such as the patriarchal usage of Malinche as a tool of control over women still exist, but even if Alice's friends admonish her to get pregnant in the first place, none use that particular cultural touchstone against her. By presenting a story in which the main character fully abandons motherhood, Viramontes primes her readers to recognize it, and many associated constructs, as similarly non-mandatory, defanging the strength they hold over women.

3.3.“The Moths” and the Shaman

"The Moths" is the first story within the collection, in which the main character is an unnamed teenage girl that lives under constant admonishment from her father due to failure at acting like what he considers to be a proper girl or daughter. Throughout the story, she turns to her grandmother for guidance, assisting her with household chores, obtaining relevant life skills from her and making use of her relative's house to avoid judgment and punishment from other family members. The story ends with the main character using said abilities to ritually take care of her grandmother's body after she dies, cleaning and preparing her proper send-off.

Much of previous literature on the story focuses on the feminine configuration within the story. Colon and Denney both discuss how the protagonist's identity as a woman is restricted by patriarchal society, as well as how other female characters in the story interact with, enforce and are similarly affected by societal rules. The protagonist is unable to be a woman the way her father wants her to be, her sisters succeed at being and her mother struggles to continue to be, only managing to carve a sense of femininity through her interactions with her grandmother, who exerts an alternate way of being a woman. Besides that, other attributes, such as religion also are part of the conflicted relationship between the protagonist and her culture.

I highlight that I disagree with Denney's statement that "The Moths" is an underrated story within Viramontes's bibliography, as personal research has found it to be an academic and general audience darling, if anything, but I still believe there are study opportunities regarding other aspects of the story. Specifically, I want to look at the short story through the lenses of the shaman character and their associated myths.

Mircea Eliade, responsible for one of the first academic works on the nature of the Shaman, discusses its properties in *Shamanism: archaic techniques on ecstasy*, puts the concept in a place of distinction from other religious or medicinal occupations it may be compared to.

Shamans are defined as mastering a type of ecstasy "during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" (*Shamanism* 5), having "access to a region of the sacred inaccessible to other members of the community" (*Shamanism* 7) thanks to it, these being skills they can obtain either from training, inheritance or spontaneous vocation, these not being mutually exclusive.

Eliade also makes the argument that one can consider the shaman to be less of a religious figure, per se, and more of a general mystic that can be found in many religions. The shaman is "the great specialist in the human soul; he alone 'sees' it, for he knows its 'form' and its destiny. And wherever the immediate fate of the soul is not at issue, […] the shaman is not indispensable" (*Shamanism* 8). When it is, however, the shaman is the only one who can heal the soul from what afflicts it.

Joseph Campbell also discusses the archetype, though he focuses on doing so through contrast with organized religions of ancient times. The shaman is depicted by him, at least in the initial stages of its historical existence, as someone who is divorced from current social norms, following his own, personal gods instead of the divinities that priests and normal people follow.

> The shaman is one who, as a consequence of a personal psychological crisis, has gained a certain power of his own. The spiritual visitants who came to him in vision had never been seen before by any other; they were his particular familiars and protectors (Campbell 231).

Through spiritual enlightenment that grants them contact with said particular protectors, the shaman obtains great knowledge that justifies their presence within the tribe in spite of their disrespect towards social norms. Campbell says that, many times, the shamans' way of life even predates the society around them, and nonetheless they are allowed to be a

disruptive part of it. This may seem to contrast with Eliade's definition, who discusses how the religious contexts in which a shaman is located "are earlier than shamanism, or at least are parallel to it" (*Shamanism* 7), but I believe the two authors are not mutually exclusive, given Eliade does mention shamanism is incredibly ancient as a concept and, in the previous quote, he is referring to the basic religious urges present in both religion and shamanism, tying them together to a shared root. Not only that, Campbell associates shamanism with the hunter-gatherers' religious practices, which would make them older than farmer societies.

The shaman's relationship to their context evolved over time, many gradually taking more of a role of medicine men, making them a more acceptable, "built-in" portion of society. Now less feared, this made them individuals that other members of the social group were more willing to actively antagonize due to failed healings and other aspects. Eliade similarly posits this view of the medicine man shaman responsible for healing rituals, reinforcing that they only work when it "not only summarizes the cosmogony but also invokes God and *implores him to create the World anew*" (*Myth and Reality* 28, italics from original text), strengthening the idea that, in those societies, actions were seen as only working when done in the style of mythical examples, because they repeated the original, world and/or concept creating example.

The archetype is also utilized by Anzaldúa, who uses the shamanic state to describe the feeling of otherworldly inspiration born from the transformative experience of creating stories, organizing memories and traumas in a way that reconstructs them into proper narratives. This can be connected to Campbell's description of the shaman being born from overcoming a great personal crisis and, through Anzaldúa's focus across the book on creating a new culture and existence, I would agree with her vision of connecting the act of passing down stories and information to shamanic rituals.

This is supported by Marcel de Lima in his book *The Ethnopoetics of Shamanism*, as he discusses how shamans, by entering a psychic trance, achieve a "gain of mystical knowledge" (146) that is used for healing, yes, but also for art, dance and poetry. The shaman as a healer and shaman as an artist are not two sides of the same coin, but rather the same side, with one of the shamanic groups studied by Lima describing the height of their abilities as being part of "those whose words are healing" (Lima 138). To pass stories ahead, too, is part of the shamanic power and healing from pain, perhaps even by making use of said pain.

As a quick mention not directly connected to the shamans, but relevant to the story, I highlight that, in the case of the Chicanos and Chicanas, their preceding society would be the Aztec, who Anzaldúa describes as, before colonization, having been matriarchal and egalitarian in regard to gender for a significant period of time. This assessment is somewhat divisive among other historians, but remains relevant for this part of the thesis and, given general academic understanding Anzaldúa was someone incredibly influential to other Chicana writers, cannot be ignored when analyzing Chicana writing. From this Aztec origin, the Chicanas also inherit the curandera, a folk healer that "emerges from the history and tradition of multiple culture" (Rebolledo 83), white, Indian and more, and which Lima mentions as being intensely connected to the shaman and also one "that blends traces of shamanic practices with signs of Christian holiness" (Lima 40), the curandera firmly putting herself as one of the most significant archetypes present in Chicana literature and culture.

I argue the figure of the shaman can be found in a couple of Viramontes's stories, but most significantly in "The Moths"'s Abuelita, who effectively fulfills many of the attributes previous literature applies to the shaman. First, the connection between Abuelita and her granddaughter showcases the religious aspects of the shamans. Not only is the elder's medical knowledge seemingly miraculous in its capacities, but her granddaughter directly compares the

feeling of comfort she feels near her relative to the presence of God, something she does not feel when in actual churches.

> And although we hardly spoke, hardly looked at each other as we worked over root transplants, I always felt her gray eye on me. It made me feel, in a strange way, safe and guarded and not alone. Like God was supposed to make you feel ("The Moths" 28).

> Across the street from Jay's Market there was a chapel. [...] I had forgotten the vastness of these places, the coolness of the marble pillars and the frozen statues with blank eyes. I was alone. I knew why I had never returned ("The Moths" 29).

Abuelita shapes herself as both follower and source of divinity, an alternative to the religious institutions that show up within the story, similar to how Campbell describes the shamans' gods as exclusive to them, in opposition to the gods shared by the religion that a priest worships. The protagonist starts following in her footsteps after her being healed by her grandmother from where scarlet fever granted her great physical pain, mimicking "the traditional schema of an initiation ceremony: suffering, death, resurrection" (*Shamanism* 33). She even undergoes a metaphorical dismemberment and renewal of the body, highlighted by Eliade as a common part of the aforementioned ceremony, as her hands "began to fan out, grow like a liar's nose until they hung by my side like low weights" ("The Moths" 24), only for Abuelita to reshape them back to their usual size and shape, a process described as feeling "like bones melting" ("The Moths" 24). Obtaining a deep spiritual devotion to her grandmother as a result of this healing, the protagonist undergoes a learning process that culminates with her donning white towels akin to a priest's robes at the end of the story as she tends to Abuelita's dead body. Through this, she creates her own, individual religious existence.

This shamanic association with alternate ways of living also shows itself within the familial and social level. The main character's father constantly admonishes his daughter and

his wife for what he perceives to be a failure at femininity, representing what Yvette Flores-Ortiz calls a batterer, the abusive member of a family that resorts to physical and emotional threats alike to keep his family in line, showcasing a belief in "rigid sex roles, and rigid efforts to maintain family cohesion" (Flores-Ortiz 171) that even puts the household's female members against each other. The main character's mother is resented by her daughter for seemingly not doing enough to protect her, even though the act of sending her to Abuelita's house can be read as a way to "shield the children from his violence by interfering with *any* direct communication between them and her father" (Flores-Ortiz 175). The protagonist's sisters actively admonish her for making things harder for Amá, their mother, through her rebellious spirit, leaving it clear that the violent patriarch puts all other members of the household in conflict with one another. In spite of all this, at no point in the story does the father voice any frustrations towards Abuelita, not even indirectly. In fact, though both the main character and the mother constantly talk about her, the father does not so much as mention her. The father also constantly attempts to force his daughter to go to church, something noticeably inspired by Viramontes's own life experiences, as she has gone on record that her "father, for me, was the symbol of male privilege, the symbol of Catholicism, because he was also a very, very dominant Catholic and so we all had to go to church" ("Social and Political Perspectives of a Chicana Writer" 236), this being something she explicitly connects to the process of writing "The Moths". It is fair to say that this connection between the patriarch and the church similarly strengthens the connection between Abuelita and alternate sources of religion.

Abuelita is fully outside his sphere of authority, similar to how the original shamans were to the societies they eventually integrated. Not only that, by being older than the father, she reflects the way many of said shamans followed lifestyles that preceded that of the societal

norm. The patriarch, even in his desperate attempts to solidify his family's existence into what he believes to be right, has no choice but to allow her existence, knowing she is required.

The housekeeping chores that the protagonist executes in her relative's house are a better fit for her strength and relative lack of dexterity than the delicate, feminine ones her sisters can do. Previous literature has already described this process of alternative construction of gendered identity[8], but I once again highlight how it is connected to the mythological presence of the curandera-shaman: the protagonist's identity is not only an alternative to the societal standard femininity that does not suit her, it is one that originates from a tradition older than her current one, with its own religion and culture.

I mention here one can read Don Serafin, a character from "The Long Reconciliation" who does not appear in-person, only mentioned by other characters, as possibly connected to the shaman archetype. This is due to his function in the narrative of offering Amanda means with which to perform an abortion she desires, an action that puts him in contrast to the Church who preaches that she must continue her pregnancy to completion. Don Serafin, therefore, is a member of his society that is under heavy scrutiny from others, but nonetheless relied upon by the desperate thanks to his unique skills and knowledge, one that enables Amanda to kill "for life" ("The Long Reconciliation" 72), saving her unborn child's soul. His existence as opposite to the Church brings to mind a pagan heritage at the same time it gives him religious existence in and of itself, doubly so from his name, Serafin, calling to mind seraphs of Christianity even if he pointedly is not counted as being part of that religious institution.

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[8] See Colón, Jennifer A. "Gendered Spaces and Subject Formation in 'The Moths' by Helena María Viramontes". *Label Me Latina/o*, vol II, 2012, pp. 1-13 and Denney, Ashley. "Cultural Reclamations in Helena Viramontes' 'The Moths'". *The Oswald Review: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Discipline of English*: vol. 12, 2010, pp. 57-68.

One cannot extrapolate much more from the character, given his limited existence, but said existence, and the way his gender makes him exist as a shaman but not a curandera, must be mentioned as a comparison point to Abuelita. After all, you could also argue that Don Serafin does not save Amanda the way Abuelita does to the protagonist of "The Moths". The act of inheriting knowledge and power only exists in "The Moths", while Amanda's emotional strength in "The Long Reconciliation" is near-fully independent from the man and far more destructive to herself and others than the protagonist of "The Moths"'s initiation process is. The shaman of "The Long Reconciliation" grants Amanda tools, but leaves her to fend for herself. The *curandera* of "The Moths"'s, symbolic guardian of womanhood, offers the protagonist actual emotional comfort and connection with others.

By making use of attributes connected to that figure and its relative independence from religious and social norms, Viramontes's manages to create an existence for her female protagonist that is built in the Chicana's existence and its tradition of curanderas and pre-colonization shamans, and also one that speaks to a tradition of womanhood inherited by the younger generation, rather than existing in isolation. In doing so, she also highlights that this new mythology is not born instantly: it is the result of generations upon generations of work, and that history is one that must be relied upon.

3.4."Growing" into la facultad

The short story "Growing" is about a female main character named Naomi, who, after the onset of puberty and its bodily changes, suffers restrictions from her parents by virtue of being a woman. Deemed untrustworthy because of that, she is forced to take her younger sister

with her to all locations, said family member unknowingly acting as a chaperone keeping her in check. Through the story, we see Naomi's inner narration and interaction with her sister and neighborhood kids, discussing her own relationship with her physical growth and associated societal expectations. It is appropriate to see a thematic connection between this story and the previous one, "The Moths", something picked up by writers such as Mah y Busch and Moreira. The action of comparing-and-contrasting the two can offer interesting results, and it is something that I recommend keeping in mind during this subsection of the chapter.

Through the story, we see Naomi go back and forth on her internal realizations, regarding whether she blames her younger sister for the situation or not, what she feels about her gendered status and age, the relationships she carries with others, along other topics. As an example, let us look at two moments in which she addresses the first discussion subject highlighted here:

> Well, Naomi debated with herself, it wasn't Lucía's fault, really. She suddenly felt sympathy for the humming little girl who scrambled to keep up with her as they crossed the freeway overpass. She stopped and tugged Lucía's shorts up, and although her shoelaces were tied, Naomi retied them. No, it wasn't her fault after all, Naomi thought, and she patted her sister's soft light brown almost blondish hair; it was Apá's ("Growing" 30).
>
> Naomi reconsidered: Lucía did have some fault in the matter after all, and she became irritated at once at Lucía's smile and the way her chaperone had of taking and holding her hand ("Growing" 31).

Naomi's thoughts are inconsistent through most of the story as a result of the emotional state that results in them. Nonetheless, she manages to end the narrative having built a view of her sister and their relationship together that sticks to the compassionate, empathetic side,

caring after her chaperone properly after reflecting on the way her body has grown and aged, making those around her treat her differently due to her maturing into a woman.

> As Lucía fell asleep, Naomi wondered why things were always so complicated once you became older. Funny how the old want to be young and the young want to be old. She was guilty of that. Now that she was older, her obligations became heavier both at home and at school ("Growing" 36).

The matter of growing into the social role of a woman is something discussed by many authors, among them Gayle Rubin. The author summarizes psychoanalytical writing on women, discussing the general at-the-time belief in the field that children are not born with inherent gender, most of what we consider male or female being, instead, socially arranged.

> [...] the creation of 'femininity' in women in the course of socialization is an act of psychic brutality, and that it leaves in women an immense resentment of the suppression to which they were subjected. It is also possible to argue that women have few means for realizing and expressing their residual anger (Rubin 196).

Anzaldúa also talks about female existence within the Chicana community, highlighting that women are taught from a young age to never be left alone with men, and how "selfishness is condemned, especially in women" (18). La Malinche, Cortes's historical translator and consort, is often part of this cultural condemnation, associating feminine sexuality with evil and trickery. All of the above is seen in Naomi, the way she was treated as one of the kids until her menstruation, her puberty and growth into womanhood began, at which point friends and family alike treated her as *mujer*. In doing so, they sentenced her to be chaperoned, never to be left alone, by herself, her attempts to do so being seen as a selfish, irresponsible act. The character understandably, as Rubin predicts, reacts to her situation with anger and resentment, struggling to achieve some revelation until her emotions come down from their fever pitch.

All of this, together, makes it even more impressive that Naomi seems to be able to achieve any sort of psychological or emotional resolution, given how often odds are stacked against her capacity to do so. I consider that the protagonist's capacity, which one could call exceptional, can therefore be considered the start of the manifestation of two concepts utilized by Gloria Anzaldúa: *la facultad* and *mestiza* consciousness.

Anzaldúa describes the concept as a sixth sense of sorts, "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface" (38), with it being something that more commonly manifests itself in the excluded, such as women, people of color or queer individuals. The way these groups are removed from society and/or subject to traumatizing events sensitizes them, easing them into developing *la facultad* that will help them visualize incoming danger, understand the moving parts behind people's actions and even their own self, anxiety and loss of innocence further powering their awareness.

I believe *la facultad* can also be connected to Barthesian concepts of myth awareness. Barthes describes how myths are always used with the objective of making a historical happening be naturalized and that myths do so by applying further meaning, a "concept", upon an initial word, from the combination of the two obtaining a "signification". By becoming aware of the concept's existence, Barthes argues that mythologists become aware of myth, stripping off its powers through awareness, something *la facultad*'s shift in perception can cause.

Through the short story, we see Naomi develop increasing awareness of the cultural myths in her life. Her Apá's verdict, sentencing Naomi with the words "TU ERES MUJER", as pointed out by Christina Marie Buckles points out, has mentions of thunder and heavens which, alongside stylistic formatting choices, "suggest they are linked to a higher power" (35), showcasing a connection between the patriarchal leader and a divine power not unlike the one

present in "The Moths". In fact, the connection is arguably more explicit and noticeable in this text. Norma Alárcon also highlights the extreme importance of his choice to say this in Spanish, a language in which he has more power than he does in English, while Naomi appeals to a foreign conceptualization of womanhood and independence.

The father also aligns with Flores-Ortiz's description of batterers, the harmful party in abusive family relationships. The batterer attempts to soothe his low self-esteem by establishing control over his family members, with the Chicano context adding the layer of cultural freezing, an attempt to preserve a flawed version of the Mexican culture within their family unit. This often results in rigid sex roles, in which "they view women as treacherous, thus in need of being controlled, protected, guided" (Flores-Ortiz 172). Naomi's parents' anger with her inability to take care of her younger sister also aligns with the idea of parentification of children and the resulting frustration when the child inevitably fails, another aspect of batterer families mentioned by Flores-Ortiz.

All of this is combined with the concept of *mestiza* consciousness, the new racial existence born from races and cultures mixing, "a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 78). Aware of the need to balance, to unite the conflicting cultures she is a part of, the *mestiza* develops a tolerance for ambiguity, for the uncertainty that surrounds her and other people's lives, healing her relationship with herself and other people[9]. Naomi already carries a deeper understanding of the flawed logic in her father's ways, her existence as a Chicana woman allowing her to explicitly compare existence as female in the United States and in her home country in order to elaborate alternatives. This brings us back to Malinche's mythical presence, this time within

[9]The topic of the *mestiza* is also present in Ermilia, a character from *Their Dogs Came with Them.* The character in question and the *mestiza* are further explored in the following chapter of this dissertation.

the Feminist context. Mother of the mestiza, Malinche is, in Chicana Feminism, seen as "intercessor (translator)" (Rebolledo 65), a woman with knowledge and, consequently, power. It is via this type of burgeoning knowledge that Naomi begins to establish herself as a person.

Her reasoning, however, is still interrupted by her youth and her remaining emotional baggage stopping her from finishing her train of thought. It is only after she works out her residual anger by watching and partaking in a game of stickball that Naomi is able to truly use *la facultad* and uncover this particular myth surrounding her. The sixth sense, which in her likely bloomed due to the traumatic experience of the beginning of puberty, allows her to realize and come to terms with how the gendered verdicts society and her father throws at her accompany a series of concepts she is still unfamiliar with.

As a last mention, I return to the comparison with "The Moths". Naomi, unlike the other short story's narrator, does not have an Abuelita of her own. Without a figure to guide her in spiritual enlightenment, Naomi's philosophical endeavors are nearly fully internal to her psyche. Without the ancient figure of the shaman alongside her, Naomi instead walks a new path, that of the *mestiza* and her future

By doing so, Naomi obtains peace of mind regarding her relationship with her sister, sublimating her frustrations towards her. With this in-depth view of her internal narration and emotions, Viramontes thoroughly explores how the *mestiza*, simultaneously coated in multiple mythical codes, continuously develops *facultad* awareness of said codes and how they affect her and other people within her culture, increased tolerance for ambiguity supporting her.

3.5.Historic repression in "The Cariboo Cafe": emigration and mourning

Mythology often carries a goal of suppressing history, making whatever information it transmits be accepted as eternal, unchanging nature. One may ask, though, what would happen when conflicting sets of myth interact with each other. The idea is somewhat briefly discussed by Barthes, who points out, for example, that the hairstyle American movies use to mark an actor as playing an ancient Roman falls flat in front of a French audience, who see the actors primarily as Americans, the hairstyle being comic in its ineptitude, "the combination of the morphologies of these gangster-sheriffs with the little Roman fringes" (*Mythologies* 24).

Arguably more relevant for this section is Horkheimer and Adorno's *The dialectics of enlightenment*, where they describe the "well-meaning advice frequently given to emigrants that they should forget the past because it cannot be transplanted" (179), in other words, forget and abandon their previous myths and history, lest their conflict against the destination's existing myths give anxiety to both sides regarding due to the history they repress into mythic.

This description is posited as an extension of society's relationship with mourning, with ghosts and the many ways to grieve them, "one of the symptoms of the sickness of experience today" (Horkheimer and Adorno 178). The authors posit no thoughts must be spared to the dead or to the land inhabited before this one, for acknowledgment of these thoughts damages the functional society we live in. "The dead are in truth subjected to what for the ancient Jews was the most grievous curse: To thee shall no thoughts be turned" (Horkheimer and Adorno 179).

It is, therefore, fair to say that myths carry unique, unstable relationships with borderland societies, as the junction of cultures forces all sides present in said societies to let go of their past in shared repression, in Horkheimer's and Adorno's description, or unite their myths in mutual healing, in Anzaldúa's hopes. However, focusing on this intersection within *The Moths and other stories* is somewhat difficult due to most of the short stories focusing on

intracommunity aspects of Chicano existence, rather than intercommunity ones. One can see hints of it in some of the stories, such as “Growing”, in which the main character and her father indirectly discuss the different mythical charges of being a woman and being a *mujer*, the daughter desiring to adopt the construct created by Anglo cultures. “Neighbors” can also be discussed to follow this train of thought, as the Mexican neighborhood is forced to let go of their shared community as the surrounding city suffocates them, both directly and indirectly, all the while one of the main characters remains aching for the loss of his son, decades after the fact.

However, the main short story in which this conflict of mythologies can be found and discussed is “The Cariboo Cafe”. The narrative alternates between three characters’ points-of-view, a “maybe five, maybe six” (“The Cariboo Cafe” 60) girl named Sonia who attempts to take care of her younger brother, a divorced cook that owns the titular cafe and a mother who, having lost her son to the dictatorship of an unspecified in the text Latin-American country, moves to the United States. There, she takes in the lost Sonia and her brother, Macky, mistakenly believing him to be her own child, until, recognizing the kids as those present in a missing person report on television, the cook calls the police on them, the story ending with the mother dying, killed by the local police force as she mounts futile attempts to protect the kid she believes is hers.

Each of the main characters represents a different ethnic identity, though they do so by implication rather than explicit mention: Sonya and Macky are marked as Mexican immigrants by their usage of “Chicano Spanish nomenclature for family members, food, and the police” (Cussel 76), the cook is similarly marked as White due to his slang-laden usage of English and contrast with the other characters. Meanwhile, the woman has been confirmed by Viramontes to be from El Salvador, in spite of how “there is nothing in the text to place her there”

(Fernández 78) due to mistaken usage of Nicaraguan terms (in fact, academic articles I have consulted, such as Cussel's, have confidently pointed Nicaragua to be her motherland).

Horkheimer and Adorno's view of immigrant and mourning historical repression alike can be seen in the short story. The cook spends his existence within the story haunted by mourning, lamenting the loss of his son in Vietnam and mentioning his son from the very first paragraph in which he is the narrator, mentioning that he inherited the titular cafe "before JoJo turned fourteen even" ("The Cariboo Cafe" 59). Similar reference to his son and the ex-wife he had him with being made until it culminates at his emotional outburst.

> He can't believe it, but he's crying. For the first time since JoJo's death, he's crying. He becomes angry at the lady for returning. At JoJo. At Nell for leaving him. He wishes Nell here, but doesn't know where she's at or what part of Vietnam JoJo is all crumbled up in. Children gotta be with their parents, family gotta be together, he thinks. It's only right ("The Cariboo Cafe" 68).

As Horkheimer and Adorno mention, mourning is "something which cannot even contribute to a psychological restoration of labor power" (179). It is forbidden in modern society for great emotional heights, of which mourning is one of the greatest, to interrupt the productive work journey any more than necessary. In fact, even actual dedicated moments, such as funerals, order a composure that cannot be broken by emotion. The cook is still disturbed by grief and its effects, in spite of his attempts to suppress the feelings as much as possible.

This becomes all the more noticeable by the mother, who faces the double repressed grieving of immigration and mourning. After a loss, "bereaved people entirely reorganize their lives after the death of one close to them, the busy cult of the deceased or, inversely, the forgetting rationalized as tact" (Horkheimer and Adorno 178). If the cook generally attempts

to ignore his grieving and keeps going whenever possible, the woman fully swings into a simultaneous reorganization and cult. Her son, Geraldo, vanished in El Salvador, presumably taken by the dictatorship, resulting in emotional distress that makes her family help her move to the United States, where she works menial jobs in order to pay back the money spent on her.

It is worth noting that Maria, a friend she left behind in her country, cries as she leaves, "not because I am going, but because she is staying" ("The Cariboo Cafe" 65) and the woman similarly fears her son will do the same in case he is found. "The abandonment of the living in death seemed necessarily like a betrayal" (Horkheimer and Adorno 178), something seen as Maria mourns and resents her closest friend leaving her. To emigrate is to both die and kill the memories you have of those you left behind.

The act of moving to an entirely new country, one whose language she cannot even speak, manifests a reorganization of the self. However, even after this change, she keeps alive a full cult of her lost son, hoping to see him return home in El Salvador while simultaneously fearing that she has abandoned him by moving to a different country, and mistakenly taking in Macky, thinking he is her Geraldo. This grieving, active and present, harms her capacity to work. Before she finds Macky, her "heart wills only to watch the children playing in the street" ("The Cariboo Cafe" 66), her visible distress also affecting her relationship with other people: both the cook and the wife of the man that is hosting her see the washerwoman as a bad omen. If acknowledging history is taboo, acknowledging death is one of the worst types, subjecting the griever to being judged by the people who interact with them.

Therefore, it seems that "The Cariboo Cafe" wholly agrees with the view that, within modern society, death and the emigration it is compared to are extremely destructive to self and others. Outside of the specific, ritualistic arrangement of a funeral that sends a loved one to the next world, one is not supposed to acknowledge that passing, that death and the way they

break both mythical time and the productive needs of capitalist society. To do so is to be ostracized by those around you. However, Viramontes objects to this idea, turning the relevant emotions into a productive one via inclusion of a particular Chicana mythical figure: La Llorona.

La Llorona, an important creation within the Mexican-Chicano context, is "a syncretic image connected both to Spanish medieval notions of *animas en pena*, spirits in purgatory expiating their sins, and to the Medea myth" (Rebolledo 63) alongside pre-colonization, Aztec stories of women who died at childbirth. Anzaldúa also connects her to previous Aztec deities, describing her as a "mother who seeks her lost children" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 30), as she wails through the night, the crying of the character and her previous versions becoming the wailing rite that Anzaldúa claims "Like la Llorona, the Indian woman's only means of protest was wailing" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 21). Except this time, it is not just lamenting.

> La Llorona undergoes a change from passive mourner to active accuser and we, the readers, must decide where we wish to position ourselves in relationship to the fight against injustice suffered by women (and the poor) in Third World nations as well as in our own backyard (Fernández 83).

One can and should question the effects of applying this Chicana mythical construct to a Central American character, especially one who, as mentioned beforehand in this chapter, has her identity so uncertainly marked. However, that does not erase the significance of Viramontes making use of death rites' forceful uncovering of mythology in order to ask her readers to recognize the information that was being hidden, suppressed. No longer are these histories from previous places and people forgotten. Rather, the disruption, the wailing, the shouting, all is necessary when seen from the point of view of a community who needs their

existence recognized. And if the cook was truly as fair as he claims, if law enforcement organizations of both countries in the story were as fair as they claim, they would have understood the displacement, born from foreign existence and mourning, present in the washerwoman.

3.6.“Snapshots” against mythical time

“Snapshots” is a short story about Olga Ruiz, a woman who copes with the emotional effects of her divorce by indulging in television and attempting to piece together remnants of her past through vicariously analyzing her old photograph albums. Through the story, her daughter, Marge, attempts to establish some sort of connection with her mother, being rebuffed every time only for, at the end, the reverse to happen, with Olga attempting to contact her daughter at the late hours of the night before her son-in-law stops the conversation. Somewhat infamous within the collection, with Norma Alarcon mentioning “virtually all the readers I have talked with are put off by the story” and “neither older women nor young women students like Olga Ruiz” (223), in spite of nothing being wrong with either part as story or character, I would say it is worth it taking a closer look at the story, uncovering the structures thereof.

The constant mention of televisions and photographs, the titular snapshots, adds interesting layers to the story’s thematic message. To address that, I will take a quick look at another of Barthes’s books, *Camera Lucida: reflections on photography*. The author mentions how photography exists “to attest that what I see has indeed existed” (82), therefore being a concrete, visible evidence of the past without repeating it. This directs itself to Barthes arguing photos have an inherent level of temporality and mortality attached to them: by forcing one to

accept that something was made in and recorded the past, one is forced to confront the passage of time and even the possibility that the photographed subject may have died since it was taken.

This digression is relevant because Barthes also posits the relationship photographs have with myth. First, he says that the photos always carry their operator's myths, at the same time they are coated with a particular function, "to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause, to signify, to provoke desire" (*Camera Lucida* 28) that serves as justification for that transmission of myths. Mircea Eliade actually agrees with this assessment, mentioning "the mythical structures of the images and behavior patterns imposed on collectivities by mass media" (*Myth and Reality* 184) carry goals such as promoting exceptionalism and a need for success.

Secondly, Barthes, like other authors who discuss the topic of myth, argues that humans hesitate to interact with the past unless through a mythical lens. However, "the photograph, for the first time, puts an end to this resistance: henceforth the past is as certain as the present" (*Camera Lucida* 87-88). Photos, by carrying a perfect record of a given event, force people to acknowledge the past, in spite of their preferences for remaining under a cyclical view of time. As a small addendum, I highlight *Camera Lucida* also suggests that cinema, or video records as a whole, do not have as strong a mark of mortality and temporality in them, thus being more tamed by myths and society than their static counterparts.

These topics are extremely relevant for discussion of the short story. Throughout her life, Olga performed her daily routine almost automatically. She requires the extreme s*tatus quo* change of a post-retirement divorce to realize she has repeated her daily cycle forever and, even then, she still follows said actions out of instinct while carrying no evidence of all she has done.

> But I haven't a thing to show for it. The human spider gets on prime-time television for climbing a building because its there. Me? How can people believe that I've fought against motes of dust for years or dirt attracting floors or perfected bleached-white sheets when a few hours later the motes, the dirt, the stains return to remind me of the uselessness of it all? ("Snapshots" 85)

The daily routine of house work was, effectively, the entirety of Olga's life before her photography obsession, as she confesses most of her time "was spent working part time as a clerk for Grants, then returning to create a happy home for Dave" ("Snapshots" 85), which aligns with Flores-Ortiz's description of Chicana socialization as encouraging them to "attempt to make the home a haven from stress" (173) for the men, shielding them from any threats to their well-being. However, in spite of her admittedly flawed efforts, it is as Virginia Woolf says in *A room of one's own*: most of the time, nothing remains at the end of a woman's workday. "All the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished" (65). Very curiously, I must mention, Olga describes her ideal, surprisingly detailed safe haven through language that is very affected by photography and television, beginning the description with "this is the way I pictured it" ("Snapshots" 85) and then proceeds to describe an image comparable to that of the ideal American dream life. Olga becomes part of what Eliade describes as an "obsession with 'success' that is so characteristic of modern society" (*Myth and reality* 186).

Olga possessing no records of her hard work, which is also unacknowledged by her family members, is part of why she so obsessively pores over her family's old photo books, attempting to recollect her sense of self through those even as she cannot find evidence of her daily work. After all, she is aware "the past did exist – independently of our capacity to know it", even if "the absent past can only be inferred from circumstantial evidence" (Linda

Hutcheon 78), in this case, photographs. However, those attempts to face the past work perhaps too well:

> Looking at the old photos, I'd get real depressed over my second-grade teacher's smile or my father's can of beer or the butt-naked smile of me as a young teen, because every detail, as minute as it may seem, made me feel that so much had passed unnoticed. As a result, I began to convince myself that my best years were up and that I had nothing to look forward to ("Snapshots" 86).

At one point of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes says "I derive my existence from the photographer" (11), and such a statement is very much what happens in the story. Olga depends on pictures other people have taken of her to attempt to construct herself, even though they only show select moments of her life. Not only that, as Susan Sontag, who is referenced by *Camera Lucida*, points out, photographs inherently make one aware of "how much younger I (she, he) was then. Photography is the inventory of mortality" (54). To acknowledge the pictures is to build the entirety of one's existence from them, as well as one's end.

The story therefore shows the connections that photographs have with myth. First, the matter of photographs unveiling history. For Olga, a woman who has been stuck in a daily routine of labor since her early adult years, a cyclical repetition she executed faithfully, whenever she interacts with the pictures is an extreme confrontation with the years of her life which she feels like she lost, something that, as established, human beings avoid doing precisely due to the mental turmoil it causes.

Both the photographs and the previous case of obsessive cleaning call to mind Anzaldúa's mention of the Chicanos' tendency to develop "compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness at bay" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 45). This is seen in Olga's devotion to her actions and her daughter's attempts to give

her further hobbies in order to "keep as busy as a bee" ("Snapshots" 84). The cleaning, the television watching, the photo album, all serve to obscure the main character's rationalization.

As one thinks of the topics above, continuous reading of the story may raise a particular question: has Olga ever taken any of the pictures she peruses obsessively? The text does not answer that, but I believe that it hints at the main character never having taken any of the photos she obsesses with. This is because there are only two moments in which their authorship is discussed, first when she laments that her daily work taking care of the house never manifested in the shape of her idealized, perfect picture (therefore suggesting she never took that photo) and secondly when she mentions the first time she saw a photographic camera was when her grandfather brought one home and immediately set to take a picture of the family, an action he did ignoring objections from his wife. In fact, Olga's grandmother went out of her way to cut part of her granddaughter's hair in a ritual after the fact, intent on keeping her from having her soul imprisoned in the image, which Susan Sontag mentions is common among what she calls primitive people, who "fear that the camera will rob them of some part of their being" (123).

Olga's grandmother implicitly takes curandera-shaman attributes not unlike "The Moths"'s Abuelita. As Eliade says, "the shaman is the great specialist in the human soul" and we see this in action through the grandmother's attempt to save the protagonist's soul. This curandera-shaman does not focus as much on a transmission of knowledge the way Abuelita did, but it is relevant that remembering her motivates Olga to rip apart any picture of her grandmother that she may possibly find, which could suggest a permanent change in behavior.

When we put together the times in which the authorship of a photo is proclaimed, it is implicitly suggested only men have ever taken pictures in the family. Women have never been the operator, only spectator or spectrum, to use Barthesian terms. Consequently, only men have been able to select what pictures to take and for what reasons. As Sontag says, "to photograph

is to appropriate the thing photographed" (2), "it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (11). I add to this Linda Hutcheon's statement that "All past 'events' are potential historical 'facts,' but the ones that become facts are those that are chosen to be narrated" (80), in other words, that the process of choosing what to photograph, to record and narrate, creates historical fact. This way, when men select what memories shall be recorded, they create a sense of past and solidify myths they pass down, both of which go back to Olga's relationship with the pictures: the photos not only force her to face her own temporal existence in a way that causes great emotional tension, she is unable to find the memories she is looking for as she does so. Instead, the myths and memories are transmitted further feed her anguish and serve as basis for other people's dismissing emotional state, as they become evidence she never accomplished anything meaningful. When looking at Sontag's previous quotes, the authorship of the photographs holds a clear message: Olga, the women in the story, never owned anything themselves, only existed around that which the patriarchy afforded to grant them.

Myths are transported and retold to the next generation in various ways, photography being but one of them, though one extremely relevant in the modern day and also one that connects to mythical time in an erratic way. "Snapshots" shows those interactions in conjunction, from the unnerving method that photography can force an acknowledgment of the past, to the way the operator transmits their myths in each picture they take or do not take, and even the way older people and societies looked at the technology and its effectively soul binding existence. Viramontes's Olga invites readers to acknowledge that transmission through the multiple generations of elderly matriarchs that many families ignore, as well as make the readers reflect in how pictures and myth transmission interacts with family ties, above and below in the genealogy, and with photographic and video media present in their daily lives.

4. Stories from within: study of *Their Dogs Came with Them*

Their Dogs Came with Them is a novel set in the Los Angeles of the 1960s and 70s, a time in which a Chicano neighborhood in the city suffers after the construction of a new highway going straight through it suffocates the lives of the inhabitants with excess traffic, light and noise. Not only that, but a fictional rabies outbreak, created for the book, is used to enforce a rigorous quarantine in the community, warning that all mammals seen outside during the helicopter patrol of the Quarantine Authority, a police force charged with enforcing the quarantine rules, shall be shot.

The novel makes use of an ensemble cast and anachronistic progression, going back and forth across characters and time periods as the chapters change. A Julia Kristeva polylogue, multiple existences sharing the same stage within "an unlikely 'topology' that totalizes every possible and imaginable zone" (*Desire in language* 201), highlighting infinite parts and times. Because of this, there is not a singular, definite main character, although Viramontes and most academics posit a particular four character group consisting of Ermilia, an orphaned girl taken in by her grandparents, Tranquilina, a Church worker who assists her mother with service and caring for the visitors of their Church, Turtle, a homeless male-identifying gang member and Ana Brady, a half-White girl who cares for her brother while attempting to survive within her career (Olivas 2007). There is some contention, however, with at least one academic suggesting the fourth main character is not Ana, but her brother, Ben Brady (Moya 2020). The way the two alternate story relevance carries interesting implications, this being something that will be addressed in this Chapter, especially since some previous literature considers Ben as surprisingly "absent from the scholarly literature" (Garcia 2021). I personally apply that

statement to Ana, who I would say is the most understudied of the main characters, even when one includes her brother alongside her in that category.

Besides that, as a general comment on the story, the novel's greater size as a narrative as well as geographic expanse of its Los Angeles setting makes it so the characters' traversal of the city gains significant meaning. In some ways, this is similar to Hutcheon's statement that "the novel has been inherently ambivalent since its inception: it has always been both fictional and worldly" (24), the great size of the city creating a full fictional world. Not only that, but the way characters traverse it makes *Their Dogs Came with Them* a novel that lives up to Anzaldúa's description of the Chicano people as having "a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 11), something acknowledged by previous literature and to be addressed later in this chapter.

With its very title being a reference to a written record of the Spanish colonizers' dogs assaulting the Aztec land (León-Portilla 41), the book carries a deep connection to the trauma inflicted by colonization, something discussed by previous literature. Paula Moya, for example, mentions how the dogs in the novel "connect the damage caused by the freeways and the fictional rabies quarantine to a longer history of militarized violence and conquest" (151). Moya also defends the novel's multiple point of view structure as essential for its thematic functioning, allowing the writer to fully showcase each character's personality and biases in a way that fosters empathy within the reader[10]. Therefore, I will proceed to analyze some character and story development aspects of *Their Dogs Came with Them*, showcasing mythical charge, its presence in characterization construction and how Viramontes uses them to communicate Chicano and Chicana ideals.

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[10]See also Seliger, Mary A. "Racial Violence, Embodied Practices, and Ethnic Transformation in Helena María Viramontes's 'Neighbors' and 'Their Dogs Came with Them'". *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2012, pp. 262–278.

4.1.Center of the world and in the novel's Los Angeles

I begin this chapter by performing a general analysis of "center of the world" configurations in *Their Dogs Came with Them*, similar to the one I made on the previous chapter. To review what I established about Mircea Eliade's definition of the concept, center of the world myths refer to the role cities, houses and temples play in rituals, a repeatable action in pursuit of a definite end. For this subsection, I will primarily focus on the main characters of the novel, with occasional mentions of other characters.

Tranquilina's church is a reasonable place to begin, and quite important due to its contrast with our previously seen depictions of religious institutions within Viramontes's texts. Throughout the entirety of *The Moths and other stories*, the Church is consistently unhelpful, its presence often used to reinforce societal norms that hurt the protagonists, even if it does not quite cross the threshold into being actively harmful towards them. It is very fair to diagnose Viramontes as being critical of religious institutions, especially Catholicism, this being an assessment I, myself, agree with and also one that the author herself has recognized and admitted to being guilty of[11]. However, I do not think it is fair to say she is exclusively critical of the relevant institutions, something seen by interviews in which she fondly describes how, during her college studies, she highlights, alongside her colleagues and professors, "the nuns, who were just absolutely fabulous. I mean, they really gave me back my faith in the public imagination" as well as how "the Bible for me was the most beautiful book that I've ever seen, with these gold-leaf pages and these stories and things like that…[I] realized that, in the printed

[11] See ---, Interview by Carmen Flys-Junquera, "Helena María Viramontes: social and political perspectives of a Chicana writer". *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*. Volume 5, pp. 232-8, 2001.

page, I would always get information or always get wisdom" ("Fiction and Social Justice"), and this is reflected by *Their Dogs Came with Them*, where the Church is represented in a complex, layered manner that addresses both the positive power and conflicts surrounding its existence.

The physical church is manned by Tranquilina herself in conjunction with her parents, a recent development for them since, until not long ago, they were preachers living a life of "rigorous traveling, the endless list of hostels" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 35). The family built a life on missionary work, until returning to Los Angeles following a case of sexual assault against the daughter. Her mother, Mama (who, alongside her husband, suffered severe physical harm during the assault), hoping that the action would help soothe mental and physical pains. This happens in spite of the objections that her father, Papa Tomás, raised, knowing that "no routine or familiarity, no wishing to return Tranquilina to the safety of her womb, would erase the assault" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 36).

This description feels similar to how Mircea Eliade describes Christianity as a religion of the "historical man" and of "continuous time" (*Cosmos and History* 161), preaching history as an existing concept that cannot be repeated. Time only ever goes forward. In contrast, the Aztec part of their family's religion would support the idea of repetition and renewal. Although not the focus of this section, this can also be connected to Anzaldúa's "tradition of migration" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 11) focused on returning to the mythical Aztlán in the US. Though the religious pilgrimages and return to Los Angeles are smaller in scale, they are connected to that "tradition of long walks" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 11) in hope of a sacred solution.

The family's faith was born alongside Tranquilina. "Mama promised her baby to God. 'This child is Yours,'" was a promise she made begging for divine intervention, the moment

"when 'we became Messengers of God'" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 43). Conception and the moment of birth, once again, performs a complete change on the life of a woman, in this case, motivating Tranquilina's mother to escape indentured servitude and enter willing a devotion.

George D. Greenia describes how Christians have a "foundational myth of travel as creating a nation of the faithful and a faithful nation" (8). This idea of a nation of faithful Christian people is relevant here for it is the main motivation of Tranquilina's family, both in travel and at home. Tranquilina's mother spends the entire novel attempting to recruit new members to her faith, even holding an impromptu baptism the moment their service ended in order to do so, in one scene. Their center of the world seeks to incorporate ever more people within it, in any way possible, repeating their initiations with whoever walks in, something that has happened enough times for the children of the parish to recognize it on sight. "I invite you into the Lord's home, Mama said, a banging thump of her ladle inside the empty pot [...] In recognition of Mama's prayer work, the children stopped their rascality and circled the two women" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 102).

The aforementioned children being present with their parents seemingly nowhere in sight, alongside the act of preparing food for the parishioners to enjoy after the service, marks their Church as part of what Jina B. Kim calls "infrastructures of care" (20), informal safety nets that keep a community afloat when government institutions fail to do so. Very significantly, this type of supportive action has been previously used by religious institutions within a Mexican context, Matthew Butler mentioning times in which they "competed directly with the state in the fields of education and social welfare" (529), in order to increase control and support of the masses. This text, alongside Mama's pushiness regarding new arrivals, could field an interpretation that puts Mama's humanistic actions in doubt. The main objective of all

Catholic rituals within the parish becomes the expansion of its reach, paying the characters' debt to God.

Rather fittingly, given the way their devotion began with Tranquilina's birth and the Catholic church focuses on historical progression, Papa Tomás quietly dies after he finishes his mass, relatively early into the novel, while his wife and daughter care for the parishioners. The church, center of the world, fulfills its duty also as a passageway towards the next one.

With the parish being so important as a source of physical and emotional sustenance to the community, it is of no surprise that other characters seek its services. Ben Brady, who suffers from a fluctuating, unstable mental state, made it part of his routine, it being mentioned that "to avoid bad days, Ben meekly attended church services" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 125). This showcases the effect of the church as a place of "regeneration of the human individual" (*Cosmos and History* 129), its mythical status alongside mundane physical and mental boosts allowing Ben to consider the struggles of trekking to the nearest available Church still worth it most of the times. Regardless of the intent behind its organizer, attending the Christian Church remains a ritual of revitalization.

Ben is relevant not only for his usage of the Church's services, but also because his center of the world, his apartment, is both well-described and host to another meaningful ritual of the character. Eliade discusses how centers bring forth "*imago mundi*, the idea that the sanctuary re-produces the universe in its essence" (*Cosmos and History* 17, italics from original text), while Sarah Balstrup mentions that place and person inevitably affect one another, making it so people "are shaped as much by place as by their personal choices" (79).

Therefore, the fact Ben's apartment continuously falls into disrepair as his physical and mental conditions stop him from giving it proper maintenance is an important indicator of how his thought processes see the world around him. The apartment is described as carrying an

overpowering stench, smell, garbage and "cluttered reminder of isolation" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 217) attracting cockroaches, "earwigs, silverfish and dust devils" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 219). Ben's mental state is cause and effect of his apartment's condition, both permanently worsening as his center of the world mimics his greater, wider world.

> He forgot simple things others took for granted. He forgot how to expand his lungs to breathe, how to swallow, how to sleep, how to speak, how to put water to skin, soap to clothes, Pine Sol to floors. To eat a meal sitting down, enjoy a song on the radio (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 126).

However, the relevancy of Ben to this section does not end here, as the character does manage to perform a creative ritual constantly, that of writing. Indeed, Ben has access to not only a room of his own, but an entire apartment enabling him to dedicate himself to it.

> She who was not old, Ben began to write. The old woman was not old. If one stopped to look while pressing a quarter in her filthy hand and stare at the smile the donation created, one would see she was in her late forties (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 127).

> Ben's hands surprised him. In a bewildering sort of way his longish and dirt-encrusted nails had the capacity to mold a mother's life (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 129).

Writing is highlighted as type and source of mythical rituals by Anzaldúa, who compares the obtaining of inspiration to a shamanic state. "Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 73) is what calls people to write, the images that come from said unrest being equaled to shamanic enlightenment for their capacity to change people, to transform both reader and writer into someone else, not unlike how shamans are sometimes described as being capable of shape-shifting. In doing so, they produce change, whether for the worse or for the best, but one way or another, they help the person make sense

of their existence, aligning with another text's description of the shaman as similar to "a view of the artist as an isolated seer and healer" (Lima 51).

Defining the shaman via their mental instability or even as someone "whose delirious personality makes him believe in achieving altered states of consciousness through which he deceives his whole community. A figure on the verge of schizophrenia" (Lima 6) certainly can be applied to this character. Ben, however unconsciously, attempts to make sense of his lot in life through writing. The catalyst for his burst of inspiration in the novel is witnessing a homeless woman in the Church and commenting "she could be anyone's mother" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 127). After this, he strives to create a fictional account of what he imagines her life to have been like. It is not difficult to see this fixation as an attempt to incorporate his feelings regarding his own mother somewhere, especially as he gives his creation a pair of boy and girl children, akin to Ben and his older sister. As said by Anzaldúa, "to write is to confront one's demons, look them in the face and live to write about them" ("Speaking in tongues" 171).

This writing as a ritual act to be established in the center of the world is further established by metaphor and sacrifice. Anzaldúa discusses how the Aztecs considered metaphor an essential part of communicating with the divine and with the dead. Similarly, Ben, regarding the woman he saw and is writing about, concludes that "*one would need metaphor to love her*" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 132, italics from original text), which brings its own set of interesting implications when Ben says the woman "could be anyone's mother" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 94). With Ben's missing, effectively dead mother being a significant part of his character, I believe that such a statement serves to approach the two women, the act of writing about the homeless woman becoming also a ritual to communicate with his own.

When it comes to sacrifice, an important part of Aztec culture and its Templo Mayor to the point of impracticality, León-Portilla mentioning times where the reason they did not

overwhelm their enemies "without too much difficulty [...] is probably that it wanted a nearby source of victims for the human sacrifices" (xli), Ben's writing also incorporates it, his pencils being obsessively sharpened via knives and referred to as weapons[12]. At one point, he questions "why had he set them [pencils and notebook] out like a dinnerware setting" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 127), while in another, he intentionally pricks his thumb with the aforementioned pencils in order to make the "blood in his thumb to rise like dark sacrificial ink" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 134), both associating with the blood sacrifices common to the Aztecs. Ben is even marked by his writing at one point, after he falls asleep on top of his text, which writers such as Hsuan L. Hsu and Dean Franco reference to argue Ben becomes "metonymically stamped by his own text" (Franco 350) and I use to highlight it as similar to how some Aztec sacrificial rituals involved having the victim stained with blood, or having said blood be spread all over the surroundings of the ritual[13]. In every way, writing is held to be a ritual Ben commits to inside his house, the only one he consistently performs and also one that nonetheless saps away his life.

Another main character of the novel, Turtle Gamboa, similarly has important rituals associated with her existence. Turtle is character assigned female at birth who presents herself as a man, up to and including being part of a gang. Her house, consequently, carries attributes of what Campbell calls "men's secret ceremonies and puberty rites" (178), initiation rites often

[12]Although the text does not state what material the knife Ben uses is made with, I find it relevant to say Conner et al mentions "flint knives […] signify male gender variance" (352) and those, alongside knives as a whole, are associated with Xochiquetzal, Aztec Goddess of Poets. lyricists, among other artists, while Johanna Broda considers that "flint knives, with and without faces, would thus seem to belong to the cult of Huitzilopochtli at the Templo Mayor" (86).

[13]For examples, see Scolieri, Paul. "Coyolxauhqui's impact: Aztec historiography and the falling body", *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory,* 2004, pp. 91-106 and Broda, Johanna. "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space". *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World*, University of California Press, 1987.

opposed to the female sex that Turtle distances herself from that, from the initial location of her house, expands into other places of her life.

"In the rituals of initiation they [children] are reorganized and implicated in a system of social duty, with such effect that the individual thenceforth can be safely trusted as an organ of the group" (Campbell 118). This initiation into manhood certainly applies to Turtle and her brother Luís, beginning in a small scale with the tent they build in the backyard of their house.

> Alone on a campout, they smoked frajos and conducted farting contests, burned plastic toy soldiers to see how long they took to melt and made fun of just about everybody over fifteen with the exception of Tío Angel […] Turtle tried to pee like a man, standing up, legs apart, and peed in the darkness like her brother, who stained the back plywood panels of the toolshed (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 165).

The tent is a part of the house exclusive to them, their mother and relatives implicitly excluded from it as the Gamboa siblings use it for the purpose of masculine posturing and bonding activities. And then, seeking higher power and status, Luis commits to an evolution into *cholo* gang membership.

> Tonight the McBride Homeboys would claim Luis Lil Lizard by searching out the freshly laid cement of the freeway bridges and sidewalks in order to record their names, solidify their bond, to proclaim eternal allegiance to one another so that in twenty, thirty years from tonight, their dried cemented names would harden like sentimental fossils of a former time (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 174).

Luis is, from that point onward, part of the McBride gang, their nonchalant masculinity replacing his previous, childish one. In fact, his authority as member of the group is recognized to the point he is able to invite Turtle to be part of it and "chose the time and place for the McBride rites because those were the rules" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 241). Inside the

Chinese cemetery that was the chosen place in question, Turtle is beaten with an inch of her life by the other McBride boys, cementing "a ritual death and resurrection" (*Cosmos and History* 80) that is further shown in an out-of-body experience when Turtle "saw another self run away, another Turtle jumping the gravestones like a gazelle" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 242) while her damaged body lays on a grave. Her brother even reminds her not to tell anyone who hurt her this badly, making sure their society and its secrets remain exclusive to them.

The Chinese cemetery is an interesting part of Turtle's male initiation rites since, come the modern-day time of the novel, it is the only place of Turtle's old neighborhood that remains accessible and recognizable to her. The cemetery is the location Turtle infiltrates to obtain some level of safety, given its "obscurity provided a few hours of temporary shelter" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 228), repeating the initiation act she once performed. Having such a location associated with her and as a place of rituals underscores how Turtle's gender non-conforming, queer existence lives in contrast to the Chicano society she is from, as well as her awareness "that the longevity of her life will not be determined by herself or by natural causes" (Esparza 151).

At this point, I find it relevant to say that characters such as Ben and the gender non conforming, male presenting Turtle are an important evolution and contrasting point for Viramontes's writings in comparison to *The Moths and other stories*. The author herself has admitted, in an interview released before *Their Dogs Came with Them*, that "there was a long period of time in my writing that I simply either ignored the male figures, as for example in the collection of 'The Moths', or I just couldn't deal with them in a very honest way" ("Social and Political Perspectives of a Chicana Writer" 237) and that she does not possess a singular

redemptive male character across her writing[14]. Later, in an interview made after the release of *Their Dogs Came with Them*, she would affirm that "if I didn't want to recognize the redemption of their [her character's] everyday ordeals, why write about them in the first place", this act of redemption at least partially being, according to her, the acknowledging and honoring of people's everyday lives and struggles, citing her brother as an example. I mention this not to deliver a definitive statement on whether she succeeded in performing such an action for Ben and Turtle or not, but because I believe this to be something worth keeping in mind as we further discuss the characters.

Ermila, the remaining main character, has one thing in particular she performs regularly in her center of the world configuration, her house: "Why did she make it a ritual, a habit, a routine to pincer the slats apart each morning and observe men wearing their butcher whites, others with paper-boat hats or baseball caps, passing her window alone or in pairs?" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 184) The ritual, followed by a page of prose describing the commute of Chicana workers, serves to showcase Ermila's developing social awareness and the possible hints at a historical one. Oscar Muñoz posits "an action is historical to the extent that belongs to a sequence of actions being known through an investigation" (113), in other words, an active intellectual effort from an observer. Though not with the full extent of historical analysis, given I would argue that, at this point, Ermila is subconsciously following instructions she received as a child that "it was important not to forget" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 19), the implication lends itself nicely to the growth in awareness Ermila develops through the novel. Her daily ritual amounts to a process of historical investigation, committing the daily commute she witnesses from her window to memory in order to never forget it.

[14] I believe one can argue that "Neighbors"'s Fierro and, more contestedly but, at the same time, arguably the point of his short story, "The Long Reconciliation"'s Chato, would qualify for some of these definitions.

I return to Tranquilina's Church to address the way the center of the world mimics the greater world. The narrator unflatteringly describes it as such: "their church consisted of a small boxlike kitchen attached to three other rooms that doubled as their living quarters by day, their ministry services by night, and all the rooms smelled of lard" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 44), with accompanying minute descriptions in the same chapter calling it stuffy and prone to being overrun by unpleasant smells from the outside. As a representative of the world thereof, that is, East Los Angeles, the Church successfully describes the state of the Chicano community: cramped, under-equipped and environmental factors greatly hampering the quality of life. Nonetheless, it is a holy place, for all who believe in it to follow their daily rites.

4.2.*Mestiza* and Malinche: female cultural myths and active modification thereof

Gloria Anzaldúa discusses the necessity of a *mestiza* future, contrasting with a patriarchal, Aryan one. It is "*una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 77), that breaks conventional paradigms of existence, allowing healing via "uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 80). This requires not only personal awareness of the state of the world, but also for the *mestiza* to be ready to, someday, cease being in opposition with the oppressor, instead focusing her energy on uncovering what is it she truly wants to do and wants to live for, besides fighting. I believe that, within the world of *Their Dogs Came with Them*, the main character Ermila is the one who best fits this *mestiza* consciousness.

Ermila possesses a special place within the novel's revolving cast, being not only unanimously considered a main character by author and critical reception, but also being the first point-of-view character we meet in the narrative. We are introduced to the setting, the

world of *Their Dogs Came with Them*, by Ermilia when she is a young, non-verbal girl who others call the Zumaya child. Her time in the novel is split rather evenly between her existence as a child, in the 1960s, and her existence as a growing teenager, in the 1970s and her arc is described by Viramontes herself as that of a "young woman whose feminist consciousness is growing, and who begins to ask 'what's wrong with this picture?'" (Olivas 2007), this being something she showcases since being a young kid. When one of the Gamboa kids plans on cutting a lizard's tail in front of her since it will just grow back, she mentally protests "it's not right, she knew, even if they witnessed a miracle" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 11), juxtaposed with the narration's description of the type of young woman Ermila will be in the future.

At first, it may seem that Ermila fails to grow into what was promised to be her eventual development, with the girl and her group of friends pointedly divorced from Chicano and/or student cultural movements, treating them as a fun distraction at best as they go around to have fun and drink. However, she truthfully does keep her acute sense of morality and capacity for reading surrounding social injustices. For example, she is well-aware of the struggles of living in a Los Angeles that overwhelmingly favors car owners over pedestrians, "four freeways crossing and interchanging, looping and stacking in the Eastside, but if you didn't own a car, you were fucked" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 184), as well as the accompanying struggles for Chicano/a laborers commuting to work, in no small part from being someone who already commutes every other day of the week to make her own money at work.

Ermila also is keenly aware of female expectations in her societal context. At work, she is often annoyed by the way her workplace has pin-up advertisements featuring naked women spread in every direction, dreaming of "hanging a bare-bottom man with a cannon of an erection and balls of iron advertising La Pelota Bakery" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 71) as equivalent revenge. Further ahead in the novel, a billboard featuring a girl embarrassed by a

dog pulling down her underwear causes her to physically react in anger, her "dog bite beneath the sandy gauze had begun a renewed throbbing as if Ermila's eyes reminded the wound of its pain" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 255).

The more the story goes by, the more Ermila's emotional anger translates into actual physical pain, her body reacting instinctively to injustice, such as with the previously mentioned dog bite. I believe this associates with Anzaldúa's belief that "the body is smart" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 37-38), capable of noticing things that other parts of a person would not realize. Anzaldúa recommends listening to the body, its signs and how it interacts with one's spirit soul. Even if she is not yet fully attuned to it, Ermila's body noticeably has its own intelligence.

> Lollie's mother slowly filled up with the fatty tires of family responsibility while Concha emptied because of family abandonment and Ermila had thought, what kind of fucked-up options are these? She felt her chest collapsing to her stomach, bulking around the ledge of her waist like powerful menstrual cramping (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 202).

Ermila's appearance also identifies her as *mestiza*, to the point of being named as such by the narrative and other characters. "Raven-black and as straight as an arrow, her hair was proof of her father's mestizo blood" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 64), something her grandmother heavily dislikes. In fact, the relationship with said grandmother brings curious associations. As mentioned before, Anzaldúa believes that for the *mestiza* consciousness to truly flourish, it must let go of the counter stance of opposition and build a different relationship to the other side. I argue Ermila's development is locked by her counter stance to two other people, both of which view her with a particular cultural lens: that of Malinche.

As previously mentioned, Malinche is a contentious figure within Mexican, Chicano and Chicana cultures alike, and one arguably implicit within the *mestiza* even though Anzaldúa does not mention her when discussing the concept, what with her often being considered a symbolic mother of the mestizo race. Fittingly Anzaldúa mentions, patriarchal society uses her "to make us ashamed of our Indian side" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 31), subjugating both women and Indian groups and heritages.

Ermila's association with the historical figure comes in association with the two places where she is locked in counter stance. First, her grandmother's relationship with her. Said relative looks at her "not seeing a granddaughter but a female with such wicked potential that even her hair […] boldly defied bobby pins" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 74). For grandmother, the *mestiza* sexuality growing in Ermila, one inherited from her parents, makes her fully untrustworthy. On top of her granddaughter, she sees Malinche, a young girl sold as a slave and used as a mistress that "was also used as an object of sexual desire" (Tey Diana Rebolledo 64).

This association with sexuality is one that must be punished. Grandmother, fulfilling Anzaldúa's statement that women receive cultural beliefs and "transmit them" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 16) has bought patriarchal Malinche and *mestizaje* myths, seeing her granddaughter's appearance and sexuality as proof of her inevitable doom. She only sees Ermila's parents' alleged sins in Ermila, like others project Malinche's sins onto every Chicana.

Secondly, we see this in Ermila's romantic and/or sexual experiences, which I feel is the best way to describe them due to Ermila's conflicted, ambiguous feelings towards them. If Malinche as object of sexual desire shows up with grandmother condemning Ermila's sexuality, with Ermila's relationships with her boyfriend and her cousin, it shows up on their expectations of owning her or expecting her to be sexually available. Alfonso, her boyfriend,

has sex with her because he demands it, not because she enjoys it. Instead, "all she encountered was intolerable guilt, a filthy feeling that bathing couldn't cleanse and the fear that her body would someday call for mutiny" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 81).

Similarly, her cousin, Nacho, reads the sexual desire she does, to some extent, feel for him as an invitation for physicality, which results in Ermila telling him off when he acts upon it. This is something he attempts even when his personal experience tells him that "a woman like Ermila would never appreciate a man, a healthy and talented man like him, at least until she grew older" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 250). The second time he acts upon it, the strength of his offensive is subconscious, even, as he "had not realized until he saw his own knuckles whiten that, in fact, he was grasping her very tightly" (Their Dogs Came with Them 258). Even if in a different way from her boyfriend, both men treat Ermila following the way "consciously and unconsciously the Mexican/Chicano patriarchal perspective assigns the role of servitude to woman" ("Chicana Feminist Literature" 186), in matters of obedience and sexuality alike.

At this point, it may seem Malinche's cultural presence stands entirely as a hurdle for Ermila and the *mestiza*, but I argue otherwise. Rebolledo mentions "Chicana writers do not view La Malinche as the passive victim of rape and conquest but instead believe her to be a woman who had and made choices" (64), those choices allowing not only her survival, but that of her race and people. Similarly, Ermila makes choices at every step of the novel, evaluating the protection from other men that dating a known gang member gets her, the financial independence she achieves from her job and other factors in her constant thought process.

I highlight a moment in which she gets held up by the Quarantine Authority's roadblocks. Managing to strike a rapport with one of the QA officers over the fact he acquired his first car from her workplace, Ermila leverages that connection to get a mother and her child

that carries "the violent chaos of an unknown sickness rattled in his throat" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 302) across the roadblock, in the process sacrificing an opportunity to cross the threshold herself. The *mestiza* "learns to juggle cultures […] operates in pluralistic mode" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 79) to safeguard herself and her people, the same way Malinche mediated languages and cultures to do so. Anzaldúa calls part of the process "a tolerance for ambiguity" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 79), a tolerance for the contradictions that come from putting two cultures next to one another. Through her skills, Ermila keeps her people safe as her predecessor, Malinche, once did, even if she abandons her own well-being in the process.

As the novel progresses, Ermila begins to grow past her counter stances, accepting "no words of promise, no exacting behavior would ever please Grandmother again. What was the use of even trying" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 80), showing recognition there is no point in fighting or contorting herself for acceptance. Her experiences with the two boys also lead her to make her peace with and let go of them. However, her charge into political activity only truly happens through shock.

Anzaldúa says the *mestiza* "can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 79), enabling her to turn that stasis into something productive. Ermila has one, non-traumatic, moment of shock in her past, and one, likely highly scarring, in her near future, that would cause this effect. The first happens when she witnesses her first teacher, Miss Eastman, share a tender moment and kiss with her romantic partner, a shock which "precipitates Ermila's transition from the traumatized and silent 'Zumaya child' to the thoughtful young woman whose burgeoning political consciousness is grounded in a desire for social justice" (Moya 147), taking her "through the long dark corridor, and out from the other end of hollow silence" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 161)

It is uncertain whether that second event shakes her out of ambivalence, however, as it is only a possible consequence of the novel's ending, though one raised by previous literature and which I find to be relevant for this chapter. At the finale of *Their Dogs Came with Them*, Turtle is shot down by the QA while Tranquilina ambiguously, but very likely, follows suit. As Moya mentions (leaving here a reminder Moya considers the missing Ben, not Ana, the fourth main character), "Ermila is the one major character who remains available to absorb the enormity of the slow violence that has been done to her community" (150). Moya is uncertain of whether Ermila will follow and truly begin a life as a politically active community organizer after this event, but I would say that, under Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza*, it is very likely. Ermila already feels strongly about the injustices her community faces on a daily basis, even if she does not have the exact vocabulary needed to comment on it. The ending of the novel only presents exactly the type of intense, painful event that knocks one out of ambivalence.

In making one of her main characters represent this archetype and development, Viramontes ensures the reader's political awareness and tolerance for ambiguity, grow as the story progresses. At the same time, she weaves in the cultural attributes associated with Malinche, mother of the *mestizos,* showing them as strength, not a curse. Ermila becomes a burgeoning mythical *mestiza*, whose coming-of-age within the story is but the beginning of her life or that of the Chicanas reading her.

4.3.Hierogamic turtle: the girl who wished she was a boy

Present in the novel from the very first chapter, Turtle is a homeless gang member who spends most of the story wandering from place to place in order to survive. Turtle is also biologically female, something that generates friction within her family and other gang

members. The novel is inconsistent regarding whether it refers to the character with male or female terms, but, since Viramontes herself refers to Turtle as a girl in interviews and the character never uses specific queer identifiers, I will use female terminology through the remainder of this subsection.

A considerable amount of previous literature talks about Turtle and her non-conforming gender presentation. Keri-ann Blanco argues the character's gender cannot be defined in any meaningful way, instead being an open possibility that "reroutes the way readers understand the intersection of race, ethnicity, class, gender, biological sex, and sexuality" (233) and that Turtle's main link to her male presentation comes from a desire to take after her brother, rather than an explicit rejection of femaleness. In contrast, Paula Moya briefly highlights how Turtle's "no longer feels part of the McBride Boys gang they joined together" (141) without her brother being in it with her. Cynthia Garcia discusses queer time, by her defined as a view of temporality used by those who live outside societal organizations of money meant to protect only the rich, and how Turtle showcases the dangers that come from being a pedestrian in the novel's setting and how Turtle's unequal capacity to traverse the city informs her every move, making her rely on "a mental map containing her own spatial logics and temporality" (2021).

There are, however, study-area intersections not approached by previous literature, such as the mythical view of queerness proposed by Anzaldúa. In *Borderlands: the new mestiza*, Anzaldúa conceptualizes the queer existence by view of Hiero Gamos, the sacred union between man and woman, focusing on its existence as a being that is both. To be queer, to be man, woman, both and neither, is a divine blessing. Present and rejected in all places, the queer is the "supreme crosser of cultures", meant to "link people with each other" (*Borderland/La Frontera* 84). Following Borderlands theory, Robyn Henderson-Espinoza argues that transgender and queer identities "destabilizes the dominant ideology that subordinates body to

mind" (91), making the body itself and its changes a source of religious spirituality and societal change. Within classic mythology, Vanda Zajko posits an interpretation of the myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis which argues that the first character's resulting androgynous existence is a sign of plenitude, one that gives modern day queer and/or intersex people some type of protection via establishing their existence as mounting back to ancient mythological traditions. Conner et al similarly mentions gender non-conforming or transgressing people in mythological systems all over the world, some of the relevant mentions for the Aztec and Mesoamerican people being that of Malinche's associations with gender variance (225), Xoquipilli and Xochiquetzal (351) and "a mythical race of giants inhabiting sites in Mexico and in northwestern South America" (24). Given Viramontes's status as a Chicana writer creating a gender non-conforming character (even though Viramontes is not queer herself, as far as it is publicly known), I see value in analyzing Turtle from this viewpoint of queer existence.

As previously mentioned, Turtle is a character assigned female at birth (AFAB) which dresses and presents herself in a masculine manner due to personal preference and external encouragement. This grants her an unique way of interacting with society due to different perceptions of the male and female genders. Turtle has already "learned the hard way that to render someone invisible was more painful than a cracked skull" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 21), being fully capable of exercising her masculine appearance to do so through intimidation. Christina Marie Buckles argues Turtle "seeks invisibility, as she snakes her way through the city" (60) and also that management of visibility and invisibility would greatly benefit the character, as that, alongside being socially read as male or female, can save her from confrontations or put her in new ones. If through intimidation she makes use of her masculinity to become hyper-visible, by the end of the novel, Turtle does play into her femininity to reduce

her visibility, reducing the fear a store owner has of her by encouraging him to acknowledge her womanhood. There are actual, situational benefits to having access to both genders.

Her acquaintances generally acknowledge and respect her decision, though non-inconsistently ribbing on her gender of birth in a way that leaves clear a lack of respect towards her and conditionality regarding their willingness to tolerate her. Within her family unit other than her brother, Turtle is openly punished or judged for not acting as a woman is meant to be, even when it comes to things beyond her control such as her physical height, continuously described as abnormally high, unfitting in the context of womanhood. This unstoppable growth alongside her already shaved hair causing them to start calling her *malflora*, a derogatory Chicano term for lesbian, a word that "sounded so sad to Turtle, it was a word you shouldn't be left alone with" (*Their dogs come with them* 176), planting immediate emotional impact.

Her brother Luiz is very important for the topic, being the one who shaved his sister's hair against their mother's wishes, making "chestnut curls fell like commas on the tiled floor and then Luis took the dull razor from the soap dish in the tub and rasped it against her scalp" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 30). The two are also treated as a matched set most of the time, being explicitly called the Gamboa Brothers, not the gender neutral Gamboa siblings. In their tent, Turtle "so close to her brother Luis, they became one instead of two" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 165) and her Tío Angel regularly ask her and her brother "where's your other half?" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 167), leaving it clear Turtle is not only her gender, but also her brother's. Turtle's great association with her brother also aligns with Jody Norton's beliefs.

> In my own theoretical work, I suggest that to understand gendering at the individual level we should devote less attention both to gross anatomical characteristics *and* to culturally sex-stereotyped behaviors, and look much more closely at patterns of affinity

> and affiliation (identification and group belonging) as signs of materially influenced, but situationally enacted, social identities (147, italics from original text).

Although Turtle does like her female family members, she is much closer to her male brother and his friend group. He is the one she is affiliated with and, even around those who are aware of her assigned gender at birth, her affinity with her brother and the *cholo* gang usually carry greater importance when it comes to reading her gender identity.

Her family eventually disowns her and takes extra steps to prevent contact. As Anzaldúa says, part of the queer experience is the "fear of going home. And of not being taken in" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 20), and Turtle has, in fact, been fully rejected by her family for being who she is, both queer and member of the gang that has taken her in, one past transgression culminating in her mother deciding "to give her up to the courts" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 279). As a result of this family relationship, Turtle spends her trajectory in the novel homeless, wandering from place to place in an attempt to tend to her physical needs and find ways to survive. Absent public infrastructures to help her, she has to, at best, rely on informal structures manned by people "given little to no financial compensation" (Kim 27), such as the ones responsible for the "lukewarm broth at the Little Brothers of the Poor Rest Home" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 23).

Turtle is constantly on watch to "stay informed about the shifting rules and entities who enforce them" and "evade these regulations by taking detours and identifying safe spaces of harbor" (Garcia 2021). Her very name, Turtle, interacts with this, as she carries independence and resilience while also having to withstand the limitations that come from having to carry "all her possessions with her at all times" (Esparza 142). There is no home for her, it having been repeatedly shut off multiple times, her only trajectory being to go through the streets, attempting to live her life in "a city large enough to swallow them in anonymity" (Norton 149).

Very curiously, however, is the way that Turtle carries a surprisingly present association with Asian spaces thorough her existence in the novel. As previously mentioned, her initiation into the McBride Boys Gang happened inside a Chinese cemetery, one that she ends up entering for shelter during the novel's present-day time and using it to geographically locate herself. The cemetery becomes a source of familiarity for Turtle, in spite of it being racially distant and the initiation in and of itself being a source of bad memories, being one of the few locations from her old neighborhood that is still present and relatively accessible to her, as well as one that, as kids, she and the others would regularly try to enter. Not only that, but, nearing the end of the novel, she has an extremely meaningful interaction with Ray, a Japanese store owner:

> Come tomorrow in the morning, Ray said. Maybe I give you a job.
>
> Turtle wiped her nose with her leather sleeve. She heard the crisp of Ray's windbreaker against the chinking chain. They both stepped through the doorway and stood under the store sign. Turtle said:
>
> What time you want me here? (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 271).

I argue that these interactions have Turtle represent Anzaldúa's vision of the queer as unifier of cultures. Abandoned by her people, she transgresses boundaries for survival, eventually reaching a different racial border, and having the person within it see her as one of their own, both in regard to extending protection towards her and acknowledging her masculinity. After all, "Ray has firsthand knowledge about the life altering consequences of gender and racial classification, having been interned during WWII under Executive Order 9066" (Esparza 137). When seeing Turtle and her attempts to present herself as masculine, he sees someone undergoing similar struggles as he once had.

> Ray wanted to correct the newspaper typo, the misprint of the name Antonia. No, it was Antonio, with an o at the end, brother of another Gamboa. Yes, he knew the brother of

> this Antonio too, didn't he just say? That one, Ray would never forget (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 268).

Turtle unites within herself male and female, visibility and invisibility, and, by having no culture, all cultures with which she interacts, transitioning across them as needed, whether actively or not. All these layers give us infinite possibilities to analyze her character with, and I conclude this section of the chapter by arguing that, even if Turtle dies at the end of the novel, she succeeds in her story role. Turtle is "someone who, despite her violence, growing social abjection, and concluding nihilism, is—miraculously—a subject of some sort of grace" (Dean Franco 345), her mythological existence as a Borderlands Hieros Gamos, making the reader aware of the transient, homeless, ever mobile queer in their society, as well as their capacity for love and unity, a capacity that needs only the faintest bit of support that is often denied them.

4.4.Tranquilina: the passive saint of Chicana religions

One of the novel's four main characters, Tranquilina is the daughter of a Church Pastor (Tomás, Papa or Papa Tomás) and his wife (only ever referred to as Mama), assisting them with maintaining their mission. The family, being a group of traveling preachers, once lived in Los Angeles and moved out of the city long ago, only to return by the start of the novel after a traumatic event when Tranquilina was raped and her parents were significantly hurt attempting to stop the aggressor. Throughout the novel, Tranquilina deals with the emotional scars of her assault, as well as a crisis of faith in religion and other humans, resulting from said incident, the overwhelming amount of work that goes into the mission and caring for her family and friends.

> The rigorous traveling, the endless list of hostels, the constant flow of pitiless doubters and forever larger supply of ravished believers had worn on Tranquilina, though she refused to admit this to Mama and Papa Tomás, even to herself. Her vigilance of years past had somehow corroded, dedication buried in layers of decaying convictions. She had allowed this to happen almost organically, over a period of time (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 35-36)

Tranquilina, carrying conflicted feelings about the institution herself, is deeply tied with the Catholic religious context of Chicana culture as well as some interesting characteristics about the way it interacts with pre-colonization aspects of said culture. Therefore, I will perform an analysis of such religious attributes of the character in conjunction to relevant texts about religious ritual practices and Chicana culture.

Although Tranquilina's family is piously devout, their faith needs extra context. As Anzaldúa says, "most Chicanos, did not practice Roman Catholicism but a folk Catholicism with many pagan elements" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 27), a description which is completely correct for Tranquilina's family. Their piety does not stop the parents from associating themselves with the *voladores* of ancient Mexico, people who were said to develop the gift of flight as, in ritual worship, they "attach themselves to a pole with cords then descend from its platform in a whirling motion" (Scolieri 102) steadily gliding downwards, with a significant moment of the family's backstory consisting of Tomás miraculously taking flight in order to save himself and Mama from servitude. Similarly to her crisis of faith regarding Catholicism, Tranquilina has doubts regarding the veracity of these claims.

> She tested Mama: If Papa Tomás could fly away, why didn't he just escape the Horseback's ranch?

> I don't know, Mama replied, rubbing her swollen ankle. Your papa didn't want to leave me behind. Maybe because humans have little control over the divine. Maybe because miracles happen when they choose. (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 50).

Despite all her hesitation, Tranquilina spends the entirety of the novel dutifully performing all her functions, reaching levels of effort seemingly superhuman in her determination. Her external actions marking her as selfless, generous and eternally caring towards her ministry, it is not hard to see these actions as a stand-in not only for the idea of the Church, but also very specifically for the Virgin, Mary and Guadalupe alike.

The Virgin of Guadalupe, effectively the Mexican version of the Virgin Mary, is by many critics immediately considered a symbol of passivity. Rebolledo sees her as an "one-dimensional figure. She is pure and free from sin" (52), which is often used to project a cultural ideal of the woman as passive, nurturing figure, "docile and enduring" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 31) with little to no power of their own. Docile and enduring are certainly proper adjectives to describe Tranquilina, who accepts all troubles thrown at her in spite of grievances and own personal problems, one of the few characters to be aware of how overworked she is being utterly befuddled by her capacity to withstand stress: "How does Tranquilina get from A to Z each day without going bonkers, Ana thought, without being shredded apart like the dead dog near her doorstep?" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 289).

Her saintly patience and demeanor are highlighted at different points in the novel. Early on, another Turtle sees Tranquilina as "the taller woman turned and smiled at Turtle with incredible delight" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 33), an impossible apparent innocence. At the end of the novel, as Tranquilina and her friend, Ana, search for the latter's missing brother, the former "approached their darkness with an aura of light behind her and to Ana, she became someone else, some*thing* else altogether, a stenciled gray dazzling figure" (*Their Dogs Came*

with Them 290, italics from original text), in fact, a "mythic figure" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 293), making homeless people regard her with awe as they plead for her to grant them salvation, which can be compared to Guadalupe's original appearance to the humblest classes of her time and place. And yet, both of those are calculated, active decisions, Tranquilina's point of view revealing she spent the entire interaction with Turtle afraid of the *cholo*, and the aforementioned aura of light comes from her explicit instructions to "high-beam the darkness between the warehouses while she entered the alley" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 290). Even them, despite Ana's explicit recognition of this saintly persona as uncanny and unnatural, she lets herself hope it will be what brings her brother back home.

I believe one can also connect her association with the homeless and animals to Guadalupe. Anzaldúa translates Guadalupe's original names, Coatlalopeuh or Coatlaxopeuh, as "the one who is at one with the beasts" and "she who crushed the serpent" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 29), respectively. A chapter of the book in which Tranquilina gives a bone to a dog who is promptly killed by a pack has the action juxtaposed with her traumatic memories of the sexual assault she went through, the crushed canine being then compared to her by Ana. The Chicano and homeless community as a whole are compared to dogs by the Quarantine Authority, with its instructions to kill any unchained mammal, and Tranquilina possesses full religious control over the homeless people surrounding her, while also consistently being the only one to rouse Ben from his self-destructive mental state.

I must quickly highlight the interactions between Turtle and Tranquilina, particularly interesting for the purposes of this research. Turtle is present in Tranquilina's first and last scenes in the novel and also has a moment where she gathers flowers within her jacket and lets them fall to the ground, potentially mirroring Juan Diego and Guadalupe. This is a connection first raised by Dean Franco, although he did not realize the presence of Tranquilina as a

Guadalupe figure, only that Turtle collected flowers in a similar manner to Juan Diego. Franco mentions having once had the opportunity to directly ask Viramontes about it and, according to him, the writer answered that "she hoped the flowers would call Mary to mind, and she also affirmed that she only hoped the reader would see it- that she did not want to over draw the picture" (345n1). The wording of this statement is a bit ambiguous in how much intent there was behind this association between the characters, but I do believe the connection to be possible.

One way or another, Tranquilina remains only human, not divine. During the previously mentioned first interaction with Turtle, the smile is offered as a "way for this gangster youth to forgive her immediate condemnation, her abrupt suspicion" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 37) after Turtle's masculine presentation and gang member aggression make her fear another assault. Her every interaction with said homeless and parishioners is filled with exhaustion one way or another, and none of the awaited for miracles happen to sustain her for it: the novel ends with Ben, in spite of the girls' best efforts, still missing, nowhere to be seen.

Tranquilina embodies the conflicts that Chicanas carry with Guadalupe and the wider Catholic church as a whole. The ideals of forgiveness, passivity and endless compassion preached by Guadalupe are impossible to be reached within a community so filled with struggles, and Tranquilina's attempts to do so bring to mind Luce Irigaray's description of female suffering in front of a "God".

> She takes on the most slavish tasks, affects the most shameful and degrading behavior so as to force the disdain that is felt toward her, that she feels toward herself. […] She is pure at last because she has pushed to extremes the repetition of this abjection, this revulsion, this horror to which she has been condemned, to which, mimetically, she had condemned herself (*Speculum of the other woman* 199).

As much as Tranquilina presents a mythical figure, she is still a living human. As Mircea Eliade mentions, myth and its absolution of presence is only the last step in a person's existence. Tranquilina is incapable of suppressing her frustration and is incapable of using her influence on any extent that feels meaningful. Beneath the saint and the myth, lies a real person.

Helena Maria Viramontes masterfully uses her character to deconstruct the restrictions imposed upon Chicanas by religion, the way it flattens people into never expressing themselves aloud. If Tranquilina becomes a platonic ideal of the Virgin, it is through endless self-denial first and foremost. However, I also do not think she fully condemns religion as a whole, or even Catholicism specifically. For, at the very end of the book, a miracle does happen.

> Shouting voices ordered her not to move, stay immobile, but she lifted one foot forward, then another, refusing to halt. Two inches, four, six, eight, riding the currents of the wilding wind. Riding it beyond the borders, past the cesarean scars of the earth, out to limitless space where everything was possible if she believed (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 337).

The scene at the end of the novel not only calls back to Tomás's Aztec heritage of *voladores*, but also the Catholic one. In the scene, Tranquilina is the one to witness the dead bodies of two other characters, Turtle and Nacho, making it so she "transforms into the mourning Mary and gives tribute to bodies considered either invisible or disposable" (Kim 29). And, through the ambiguous, fantastic, miraculous ending, her presence witnessing the other characters' death enables them to achieve their own salvation.

As mentioned before, Chicana writers carry varied views of Guadalupe, some openly adoring her, some rejecting her, but many reaching a conflicted yet nuanced view of Guadalupe, acknowledging her pre-colonization existence, influence, her restrictions, her power and her genuine capacity to inspire change alike. Tranquilina is an interesting means

through which to obtain that genuine, if conflicted, respect for the power of Guadalupe and her institution. Viramontes uses the character to fully discuss the emotional suffering that comes from religion, its position as an infrastructure of care and the connection between Catholic and Aztec cultures within the Chicano context. It is only when Tranquilina embraces the miracle of both sides, not only the saintly presence that is something else, that she achieves emotional peace-of-mind once more, enabling her to live her life and her spirituality free of the constraints they shackled on her.

4.5.Ana and Ben Brady: reversing Coyalxuahqui

As mentioned before, Ana and Ben are a pair of siblings present in *Their Dogs Came with Them* who are subject to some academic inconsistency regarding whether they count as main or side characters. Viramontes and most writers consider Ana to be the fourth main character of the novel, while one article by Paula Moya includes Ben as that character and Cynthia Garcia describes him as being “the most understudied major character” (2021) of the novel. Personally, I mention that I did not register Ana as one of the main characters during my first reading of the book, believing that such a spot was more fitting to Ben or to no fourth character at all. However, I have since changed my initial opinion and I believe some interesting discussion can come from their shared relevancy.

Within the story, the Bradys are a pair of half-Chicano, half-white siblings raised by their white father after their mom vanished without further explanation. Ana, the older sister, inherits her father’s skin tone and hair color, eventually growing into becoming a competent, but exhausted, career woman. Meanwhile, Ben inherits his mom’s appearance, which is cause of bullying from Chicano classmates when connected to his white last name. Not only that,

Ben is host to unspecified mental illnesses of a debilitating level. As a child, he already suffered from crippling anxiety, and the state only becomes worse when, after an accident where he was gravely hurt and another kid died, the physical consequences and survivor's guilt further harm his emotional state, to the point of requiring psychiatric assistance through his adult life.

> Unlocking his door, the two women realized they were in over their heads; Ben's condition was beyond love and prayer and beyond a cocktail of experimental medication, even beyond the saving grace of poetry. He cowered in the corner of his bedroom, an army blanket wrapped around his shoulders. Within the apartment gunk, Ana uncovered the phone and dialed the Psychiatric Emergency Team to come and rescue her brother (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 95).

I believe the Brady siblings can be thematically compared to the myth of Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli. In it, Coatlicue, an Aztec's Earth Goddess, gets pregnant from a ball of feathers she held close to her body. Considering this a disgraceful happening, her children, Coyolxauhqui and her 400 brothers, decided to kill Coatlicue, in some versions succeeding at cutting her head off, which kills her and/or makes twin snakes emerge as her new head. One way or another, Huitzilopochtli emerges from his mother's body fully formed, killing his siblings before they can do the same to him, Coyolxauhqui's decapitated head becoming the moon who chases after the sun while her brothers other than Huitzilopochtli become the stars.

The story consists of a symbolic "transference of power" (Scolieri 93) from older members of the pantheon to the new deity, Huitzilopochtli. This aligns with Anzaldúa's mention that the God was a relatively late addition to the Mexican region's pantheon, and one heavily pushed to justify the Aztec's warring actions and regular expansionist advances. In the process, "they drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous

attributes and by substituting male deities in their place" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 27), turning the region's gender balance into a patriarchal organization.

With Chicana culture being host to such a noticeable pair of opposite gendered siblings, I believe it makes sense to suspect they appear in the Bradys, though with some interesting caveats. First, I highlight the parental expectations their father had for them: that one sibling would succeed at the expense of the other. "Moneymaking career for his brilliant, brave son; a job for his daughter" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 123). Therefore, Ana was set from the beginning to be the one that would be forgotten, becoming but a secondary character to her brother's success. She is expected to "renounce herself in favor of the male" (*Borderlands: the new mestiza* 17), a relevant representation of Chicana existence through the character's struggles, even if, within the context of the story, it is being enforced by the White patriarch.

However, that is not what happened. As mentioned, the Ben who had anxiety attacks as a child when told to buy a pair of shoes for himself, only became further dysfunctional as he grew up. At the present time point in the story, he remains a university student in some unspecified medical major, but everything outside potentially his finances (Ben is mentioned to have a full scholarship in the University of Southern California, but the book does not fully detail what that entails, leaving Ben's monetary well-being ambiguous even though he does not seen to concern himself with it[15]) and his academic life (once again uncertain, given how it is scarcely shown, even if he makes himself present for at least some classes and showcases basic medical knowledge on occasion), stands in tatters. In fact, his father has long given up keeping in touch with him and never shows up in person on the present day of the novel. In contrast, Ana holds on to her job through all the difficulties that come with it and the other

[15] Garcia mentions Ben "advances disabled queer readings of space and place" (2021) by living a life outside the priorities of capital accumulation, and I believe the ambiguity regarding his financial state, in contrast to how much of a priority such a topic is for most other characters, contributes to that.

parts of her life, possessing a level of agency and resources that, although small due to her existence as a low-class working woman, is still higher than that of her brother and most other characters in the novel.

Huitzilopochtli was a God of war and human sacrifice, something that greatly hampered the Aztecs, who "probably could have wiped out the Spaniards to the last man [...]but the ceremonial elements in their attitude toward war prevented them" (Léon-Portilla xliii), let alone the fact said thirst for sacrifices made other Mexica cities greatly dislike them. Although Ben does not enter fights himself, his internal narration is plagued by irregular, instantaneous anger as well as other irrational mood swings and dysfunctions.

Similar to the Aztecs under Huitzilopochtli, Ben's life is governed by unsustainable whims. One can even say that not only the previously mentioned writing rituals, which are portrayed as sustained via weapons, such as his knife and writing utensils, and an offering of blood, but his life as a whole is fueled by sacrifice. Ben's sections of the story are underscored by the time and effort other characters put into supporting him, some, like the kid he led into traffic, actually dying within the narrative.

Huitzilopochtli is also associated with the sun, something worth mentioning due to the celestial body in question being, in turn, often equated to masculinity[16]. However, similarly to how he many times is unable to achieve the masculinity his father expects of him, Ben has a tumultuous appreciation of sunlight, with descriptions of how "the new morning, compassionate in its sheer lightness, greeted him and made him smile" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 132) juxtaposed with Ben, within but a couple hours, judging himself unworthy sharing sunlight with other people. This instability in which Ben reacts to sunlight is all the more

[16] See, as example, Conner et al's statement that it was believed by astrologers that "persons ruled by the Sun, that is, born under the sun sign of LEO, will tend to behave in a 'masculine' manner" (313)

noticeable because the story applies a significant focus towards associating Ana with the nighttime, via Ben's descriptions and by the moments of the narrative in which she appears. Her first appearance in the story consists of her joining her brother in their house's rooftop, talking to him as they watch the night sky filled with stars that she calls "God's little eyes" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 112). Later, during the final chapters of the story, Ana's job forces her to wait until nighttime comes in order to search for her missing brother. The character's most noticeable moments happen within Coyalxauhqui's domain, as Ana chases after her brother through the night akin to how Coyalxauhqui does so every night.

I focus here on the mention of Ana being a viewpoint character during the novel's climax, for I believe this is part of why the two siblings seem to share a main character position: Ben has two chapters in which he is the viewpoint character, both of them happening about one third of the way into the book, exact location varying depending on the edition. This is relevant because although Ana already shows up as a character in those chapters, she only becomes a viewpoint figure after Ben ceases to be one, and around the time one would expect to see him again. Once he vanishes from his apartment with no prior warning, the novel transfers Ben's presence and power in the narrative to his sister.

The Bradys' relationship with their parents is a particularly interesting point of paralleling. Their father explicitly wants his son to follow on his path as the man of the house, but his daughter is the one that inherits his appearance and anger. She frequently showcases frustration in her internal narration and visibly voicing it towards other people. I also put a small side-note on the fact Ana very crucially inherited his appearance, becoming a White passing mixed race woman. Although she still visibly suffers the struggles of class and womanhood, I believe it to be fair to say this inheritance is a significant part of her, as she implicitly carries more power in specific areas than the non-White passing characters. Ana is a

competent worker and, pulling from Wendy McGahey's analysis that Viramontes makes use of specific objects that "helps to bring us inside the traumatic experiences of her characters, expanding our understanding of their individual and cultural suffering" (2), I highlight the fact Ana has access to a car, something otherwise restricted to men or people foreign to the neighborhood, an object that she does extensively use for transportation, but nonetheless grants her great stress as she navigates the messy, cramped streets of the city.

As Renée M. Martinez says, "passing is always a palpable privilege, but, ironically, passing is not a painless privilege in a racist society" (49), something seen as these signs of power and competence that Ana gets to make use of are not only not enough to solve her problems within the novel, but bring with them an amount of stress and responsibilities that further hamper her capacity to achieve her own goals, financial restrictions, workplace problems and familial obligations constantly present in her narrative. However, arguably the most significant part is in regard to their mother who, having long disappeared, is functionally dead, akin to how Coatlicue dies in Coyalxauhqui's hands on many versions of the myth.

To Ben, she is a figure of protection, the one person who truly, earnestly cared for him, everyone else who interacted with her having "remained unkind and undeserving of her" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 112). To Ana, however, she represents failure. Her strongest memory of her mother comes from when, in Ana's eyes, she almost let her daughter drown "because her mother had stood motionless, the incapable savior" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 292) while Ana desperately tried to hold on to her for survival. The mother, Coatlicue, protects and is held as holy by the son, while being forsaken by the daughter.

It must be noted, however, that, even with the increasing connections between Ana and Ben with the cosmic Aztec siblings and the frustrations that the two have with one another, the story ends with Ana actively searching for him out of genuine worry. In fact, through the entire

story, from childhood to adult age, Ana can be considered his primary caretaker, a role that historically falls to women relatives of disabled people[17]. In spite of everything, she never stops looking after his brother with dutiful affection, even as both sides of the familial relationship develop grievances with one another.

As mentioned in previous parts of this dissertation, Pavletich and Backus argue that, in the short story "Neighbors", Viramontes manages to create a version of the *corrido* narrative that increased in thematic richness thanks to a main character whose gender and age generated multiple points of conflict. I believe a similar thing happens with the Bradys: the characters are associated with Huizilopochtli and Coyalxauhqui, but the layers of their relationship expand within the novel. By applying the Aztec deities to a context actively marked by race, Viramontes changes the foundational myth of the Aztec into one of complicated, nuanced relationships, in which both siblings' individual struggles are given full weight and importance. No longer is the myth about subjugation, but rather about their existence on equal ground, even though the world around them fully desires one of them to vanish for the other to thrive.

5. Conclusion

This Master's Thesis had the objective of analyzing Viramontes's short stories and one of her novels in order to evaluate the presence of mythical references thereof and how this can assist readers (both of the primary material and this thesis) with understanding Chicana culture and livelihood. With that knowledge being obtained, one can build a broader connection with the people who are part of it. Through the multi-analyses focus of this research, I also hoped to offer an expansive, but not exhaustive, starting point for further research on the author,

[17] See Diniz, Débora. *O que é deficiência*, Editora Brasiliense, 1st ed, 2010.

especially for aspects of her short story and novel that were previously understudied, making it easier for future academics to dive into her literature.

I believe that the analyses performed in this thesis, even if they carried different focuses (not unlike Viramontes's claim that for each story she wrote, she had a different inspiration in mind), did achieve the intended goals. Myths permeate Viramontes's focus on the Chicana and her life, and being aware of them assists the reader with understanding the cultural representations of this ethnic group, which in turn brings new layers of meaning into the text. I do not claim to have provided a definitive, final view on any of the topics I have studied. Rather, I hope that this thesis also achieves its secondary goal of assisting with further research via its relatively expansive, but not exhaustive, analyses.

I will remind us of some of the conclusions obtained in subsections as examples thereof. Within "The Moths", I established, for instance, that awareness of the existence of the *curandera* shaman, something that may not be immediately recognizable to someone outside the culture, changes the meaning of "The Moths", making its protagonist inherit a part in an old, historical tradition, stronger than its inserted patriarchal society. The fact that *curandera* and shaman characters also appear on "The Long Reconciliation" and "Snapshots", performing similar actions focused on the well-being of the soul and being present as alternative religious and medical authorities, highlights the shared mythical background present across Viramontes's stories. In contrast, said knowledge makes its absence from the following short story, "Growing", be even more apparent, reinforcing how Naomi's development is a mostly solitary endeavor that aims at creating new ways of being, separate from the divine patriarch and his tools for domination.

Besides those interconnected, but still separate analyses, I also have been able to state that there are recurring presences across the narratives, such as the focused upon "center of the

world" structures, the matter of conception and *mestiza* consciousness. I reaffirm my belief that reading Viramontes's stories in dialogue with each other, compare-and-contrasting whenever possible, assists with increasing understanding and appreciation of them. By including a wide array of cases regarding how conception affects characters, *The Moths and other stories* invites readers to commit that sort of analysis, sparking possibilities for study of these cultural characteristics and their mythical appearances.

I do have to highlight that not all of these are necessarily intentional or positive. For example, previous research has raised the possibility of the washerwoman of "The Cariboo Café" being born from negative stereotypes associated with the Central American Latinos alongside Chicano and Chicana community seeing said group in a potentially patronizing way[18]. I argue this does not discredit the strength and importance of Viramontes's writing, which still says meaningful things about her culture and its inhabitants, never mind the fact that it is only one of the existing interpretations of the washerwoman. If anything, I see it as both an important discussion springboard, regarding how well-treated the character, in practice and when compared to authorial intent, as well as a relevant reminder that no one is immune to mythological influence, even if they are aware of its presence. The struggles of the process of individual demarcation and myth reformation are difficult for all.

Returning to the intentionally inserted mythical structures, Viramontes's game of compare-and-contrasting them causes myth to be weakened. As Barthes said, in regard to mythology and the written language, by focusing on "the distortion which the one [myth] imposes on the other [language]" (*Mythologies* 127), one can unmask myth, making its presence seen. Why does Alice manage to secure a safe, allowed abortion when Amanda is

[18] For further discussion on how translations of Viramontes's works have altered the work and the way it is interpreted, see Alvarado, Karina Oliva. "The Boo of Viramontes's Cafe: Retelling Ghost Stories, Central American Representing Social Death", *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 37: Issn. 2, Article 6, 2013.

hated by her husband for it and other characters have no choice but to undergo life-altering pregnancy to its end? Why are other female characters punished for asserting themselves in front of a society that seems to reject their every show of will? That type of questioning, coated by the author's specific cultural context, invites readers to begin their journey into mythological awareness and questioning, to discuss that which they have taken for granted as natural.

Of course, this writing pulls double duty. Once again, I rely on Barthes, who says that "the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an *artificial myth*" (*Mythologies*, italics from original text 134) through the workings of literature. Since language and literature, according to Barthes, naturally transmit myths, it also makes sense that the easiest way to alter mythological patterns is via literary creation that adds extra layers to its existence. Viramontes manages to not only communicate relevant attributes of her culture but also to advocate for its continuous transformation into something new, something focused on the Chicana and the least fortunate members of her society.

This is seen throughout the entirety of her bibliography, such as Naomi and Ermilia's representation of *mestiza* consciousness sponsoring a future free from the racial and gender bindings that restrict them, or Ana and Ben's representation of the Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli myth changing it from being a justification of patriarchal dominance to a complicated care focused situation, in which the siblings try and fail to keep up with each other and their society. The focus on empathy is also not unlike how Tranquilina constantly, actively decides to share kindness with those around her, to the point she becomes a source of salvation for them. The stories that have been analyzed all carefully employ myths in order to not only aid in characterization but also communicate sympathy towards the least fortunate members of society, inviting the readers to reflect on parts of their lives they take for granted.

Viramontes follows the path laid by Anzaldúa, that of the *mestiza* consciousness. A path that develops a tolerance for the mythical ambiguity that comes from being part of multiple worlds and cultures at the same time. At the same time that she communicates characteristics of Chicana culture and fosters myth awareness on readers, Viramontes also encourages a sense of empathy across members of society otherwise ignored during everyday life. The woman, the Chicano, the poor, the homeless, all come, front and center, in her stories. Unmasking the myths also sheds light on those that it tries to hide, spurring the construction of a new stage.

- **Future research possibilities**

As I have mentioned, part of this thesis's objectives is to be a starting point for further research on Viramontes. Therefore, I will now mention some topics that were not extensively addressed in previous parts of the thesis mostly due to falling outside my thematic scope, following recommendations to "extend your research community's conversation by suggesting new questions your research has allowed you to see" (Wayne C. Booth, et al. 221). As stated before, I hope to strengthen academic interest by doing so. This is not an exhaustive list, obviously, just a small amount that may be followed up on.

First of all, I would like to remind readers of the importance of critical engagement with the text. Out of all the texts I interacted with, "The Cariboo Café" was the only one in which I found academic texts actively criticizing Viramontes's narrative and characterization choices, something that surprised me two-fold, both in the absence of this type of disagreement in regards to the author's other texts and then when I finally found them while researching "The Cariboo Café". No academical field benefits from its area of study by receiving nothing but

unending praise. To criticize areas that may need to be improved is as important as praising those who seem to be without flaws.

A very pertinent area of potential criticism is present in the character Turtle. It is important to mention Viramontes herself counts Turtle as one of "the four female protagonists (Turtle, Ana, Ermila and Tranquilina)" (Interview with Helena Maria Viramontes) and, in fact, Turtle became a female character in order to avoid a male Latino gang member stereotype[19]. Even if Turtle is not a man, exactly, and her gender falls more in the area of queer or non-binary existence, this treatment of her as a woman can be criticized. After all, although, as both I and previous literature have mentioned, Turtle exhibits several characteristics that are emblematic of some kinds of queer existence and the way they can inspire positive societal change, ignoring this specific treatment of her character can contribute to a context in which, as said by Francisco Fernandez Romero and Andrés Mendieta, "Latin American trans* masculine individuals have often been erased from public discourse" (524) or held to be women all along instead of their own, queer existence. A full study of the topic of Turtle's identity, its place within Chicana canon or the way it is seen by the author and the readers, is certainly something worthy of being reviewed.

Another topic that can be discussed critically regards Ben and Ana, specifically Ben's status as a disabled person that requires a caretaker. Personally, I would state that the fact Ben is unable to fully care for himself is not bad in and of itself. As Débora Diniz discusses em *O que é a deficiência*, the fact of the matter is that many disabled people truly are not capable of being fully self-sufficient and may require external support. However, one can still discuss whether Ben is a good representation of disability as a whole and his specific mental struggles, as well as the ways in which Ana and other characters treat him. The topics of disability rights,

[19] Shea, Renee. "New Frontiers in Fiction." Poets & Writers, v. 35, Iss. 3, 2007, pp. 36-42

self-sufficiency of the disabled individuals and their capacity to contribute to the economy, areas in which they need external support as well as the struggles that caretakers themselves go through, are all complex topics that must be explored with care, but worthy of being discussed.

Following that, I address some topics that are not necessarily critical. Beginning with "The Moths", I believe a fair next step would be to compare its usage of the shaman to other representations of shamanistic figures, as well as more specifically the Chicana *curandera*. This text, and many other Chicana creations since then, for that matter, were absent from Rebolledo's discussions about the archetype, after all. How do other writers and characters interact with the topics of inheritance, with the shaman's connection to older powers and its contrast to current society? How has this character evolved over the years? A believe new analyses of the *curandera* and the shaman within Chicana canon is bound to be relevant.

As I have mentioned, although "The Cariboo Café" has received great amount of attention, there is some questioning about its value from a Central American representation point of view. Further study on that area, and other Borderland conflicts within Latino identities, can result in important discussions. Material for discussion regarding racial and/or nationality markers can be found in the character Alice from "Birthday", who has a noticeable lack of Chicana identity markers, neither name or her sparsely described appearance pointing towards that, or *Their Dogs Came with Them*'s Ana Brady, who, being half-white, half-Chicana, has an appearance and name that take fully after her white father, and arguably navigates the world with much more ease than the other Chicana characters in the novel.

I do not think Gender studies and all its associated roles, subversions and alterations, have been exhausted as a research methodology to be applied to these texts. I again highlight the Brady siblings as a relevant ground to do so with, one that I feel is understudied by previous

literature. As mentioned before, Ana Brady has taken symbols of competence and agency, if not power, in her family, that were expected to fall to her younger brother. Meanwhile, attention has been given, including in this thesis, to Ben Brady's focus as a writer, but surprisingly little to his relationship with the women in his life, such as the homeless woman he uses as source of inspiration, or the mom and sister he depends on for stability as both child and adult. In "The Long Reconciliation", I mention how Chato, though uninterested at first, does join the Mexican rebellion as a soldier, while his wife is to remain at home, which mimics the Aztec's and other societies' gender divisions in regards to work, military and the pursuit of accolades, especially when with the intent to make up for something else absent from what society considers mandatory for masculinity.

Further talk on the topic of pilgrimages, as well as the characters' means of physically traveling to their destination as a whole, can be done. This research has discussed the cultural importance of the immigration process into the United States for Chicanos and Chicanas, and also mentioned how Tranquilina's family moves primarily for the sake of increasing the followers of their church, but I believe more can be discussed. *Their Dogs Came with Them* may be a particularly relevant ground for this area, given the novel's size granting the characters larger mobility, which each of them executes in different ways, through different means.

Language barriers and conversation are also a recurring topic in Viramontes's writing. Some of it, like the father and daughter in "Growing" carrying different usages of the words "woman" and "*mujer*" have been previously studied, as discussed by Christina Marie Buckles. "The Cariboo Café" also has significant conversation on the topic, its characters separated across English and Spanish variations, and has been similarly discussed by writers such as Karina Oliva Alvarado and Mattea Cussel. *Their Dogs Came with Them* carries a subtle, yet

significant focus on the topic, such as a scene in which Turtle "felt as if she had to burglarize her own memory in order to get to the Spanish words" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 28) or the mention that, midst a dialogue written wholly in English, "each time Mama emphasized the word *Eres*, her *r*'s drumrolled" (*Their Dogs Came with Them* 102, italics from the original text). I would say the topic of linguistics within the novel is, if occasionally mentioned within discussion of other topics, relatively understudied and would benefit from dedicated analysis.

I make use of the topic of translation to segue into arguing that, within the physical, temporal context where I write this, the most important thing for the development of Viramontes's critical and audience acclaim is a matter of translation. At the time of this writing, her stories are not officially available in Brazilian Portuguese, keeping many from accessing them. Such an endeavor as translation is never something that can be taken lightly, whether from a financial or literary standpoint[20], but I believe that, both from personal, informal conversations I had throughout this Master of Art's program and from the surprisingly amount of academic writing focused on the author that originates from Brazil, it is something that would greatly reward whatever person or group took the job in their own hands.

Whether by means of official translations or through the original language(s), discussion about Helena Maria Viramontes's narratives is nowhere near done. This dissertation is but a source that I hope fuels many analyses to come, like how many thinkers and writers who came before me inspired others to enter their shamanic trance of knowledge, putting ink to pen and fingers to keyboard. It would be joyous to witness further literature on other mythical aspects that, unbeknownst to my attention, might have been overlooked, granting us all further connection with this creative and cultural context. After all, stories are a way for us to transmit

[20] See Cussel, Mattea. "When solidarity is possible yet fails: A translation critique and reader reception study of Helena María Viramontes' 'El café 'Cariboo'". *Translation studies*, vol. 17, 2024, pp. 70-85 for an example of how a Spanish translation of "The Cariboo Café" changed relevant implications of the story.

our knowledge, our existence, our myths to other people. Further understanding of that other can never harm us, only uplift.

Having shed some light on mythical constructs which made their way into Viramontes's works alongside their presence in Chicana community, I obtained information which I hope helps us understand more about the existence of our Chicana sisters and their mythical context. The fiction of Viramontes's is an open hand offering us this connection with fellow Latinos. It is now up to the readers to take the offer, crossing Borderlands in order to join the other in masterful, free flight.

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