TELLING STORIES – EMPOWERING GENERATIONS:

Minority American Women and

Their Cultural Stories

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the ways minority American women take stories from their cultural pasts and refashion them into uniquely, contemporary American tales. By examining specific cultural myths and legends throughout multi-ethnic women's literature, which emerged from the Civil Rights and Women's Right Movements, I show how cultural myths reflect both the writers' own ethnic, cultural and familial backgrounds and their broader social American identities.

Moreover, throughout this research, I examine the cultural myths in literature written by Chinese American authors Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, Mexican American authors Sandra Cisneros and Gloria Anzaldua, and African American authors Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall. The cultural myths and legends examined are the myths of Fa Mu Lan, the Kitchen God, La Llorona, La Malinche, and the Flying Africans.

Further, by adapting these tales, this dissertation shows how these women authors, are seeking voice, recognition, and perhaps, even their own share of power in American society – for both themselves and their sisters. In addition, they are adding cultural flavor the American literary scene while also healing themselves and the reader. Above all, the work these women have produced has influenced the generations that have followed them and has allowed them to speak up and assume their rightful places in society.

DEDICATION

To my brilliant brother Donald. As long as I am, you are.

To my wonderful sons, Kyle and Graham. I am very proud.

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INTRODUCTION:

Making a Long Story Short – Stories, Voice and Power

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you" (Maya Angelou Brainy Quotes)

In the wonderfully entertaining movie *Galaxy Quest* (1999) produced by Dean Parisot, the cast of a *Star Trek*-like television show is employed by the alien group the Thermians, to help them fight their nemesis, General Sarris, leader of a reptilian race who seeks to destroy these peaceful and innocent aliens. While *Galaxy Quest* is a parody of the *Star Trek* series and even the show's fans, the premise of the story is that the Thermians, who have been watching the "historical documents" – episodes of the series that have been sent off into space – do not understand that the show is a *fiction*. The Thermians have come to beseech the "crew" of the NSEA Protector for their help because they believe them to be real Space Heroes, brave men and women who have travelled through space protecting and aiding all those in need. The Thermians do not understand the concept fiction; every story of theirs is *truth*. What a sadly limited existence.

Humans tells stories, lots of stories, all the time. It is how we communicate with each other; it is how we gain power, how we educate ourselves, how we pass along our culture, how we entertain ourselves, how we heal ourselves and it is how we comfort others. From something as simple as telling the story of the car's flat tire on the way to work, to reading the voluminous *War and Peace*, humans want to hear a story and

humans want to tell a story. That is probably why one of the most recognized phrases in the English language is: “Once Upon a Time.”

In this dissertation, I will be chronicling how minority American women take stories from their cultural past and refashion these tales into newer versions. In these retellings, these female authors are showing America the importance of their family or ethnic culture to their identity, while, at the same time, they are letting the reader know that they are decidedly *American*. By adapting these tales, they are seeking a voice, recognition, and a little more power in American society for both themselves and other women, who, like themselves, may also feel voiceless in American society.

Stories transform us and lend agency to the teller; in addition, a change can take place in the listener who is hearing the tale. In his book, *The View from the Cheap Seats* (2016), author Neil Gaiman writes that reading builds empathy, saying, “You get to feel things, visit places and worlds you would never otherwise know. You learn that everyone out there is a me as well. You’re being someone else, and when you return to your own world, you’re going to be slightly changed” (8). By stepping for a time into the worlds created by these women, by an immersion into their cultures, we have the opportunity to see the world from their perspectives and realize that, perhaps they want the same things as the rest of the residents of the country. They are no longer ‘other,’ they are ‘us.’ We need more ‘us’ in the conversation and many women are working toward that end. When our society works, through our shared stories, toward inclusion, toward making everyone feel worthy of attention and acknowledging everyone’s value, we will move closer to human autonomy and harmony. Exclusion diminishes the human experience; thus adding

the voices of these women to our collective consciousness enables each reader, each listener, to participate in the shared human struggle.

While this project is mainly focused on the stories of minority women, and not feminism, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, editors and contributors of the text, *This Bridge Called My Back* (4th edition 2015), offer some excellent examples of how minority women feel left out and disenfranchised. They produced this text to give women of color (minority women) a voice in the feminist movement. Moraga and Anzaldua had come to realize that there was racism in the feminist movement and these women needed to be heard. They stated that the feminism of these women comes out of their culture and they should not remain "invisible" or in the shadows. For the feminist movement to succeed, it needed all women to be included (xliv). An aspect of this racism is the societal norms that these women cannot ever hope to achieve. The idea of "'not white enuf, not dark enuf,' always up against a color chart that first got erected far outside our families and our neighborhoods, but which invaded them both with systematic determination" (3). This is a problem addressed by Toni Morrison in her novel *The Bluest Eye*, which I examine in chapter three of this paper. Societal norms cause those who cannot meet those norms to feel that there is something wrong with them, not something wrong with society. Nelly Wong, a Chinese American writer, talks about this in her poem "When I was Growing Up." She begins, "I know now that once I longed to be white. / … // When I was growing up, people told me / I was dark and I believed my own darkness / in the mirror, in my soul, my own narrow vision …" (1, 4-6) (5). Wong goes on to explain how the white girls had better clothes and hair, which she envied, and how she began to be ashamed of the Chinese men because they were so small and thin (6). When one culture

is so heavily featured in the media, the standards that define that group will become the norm in the minds of many, especially impressionable children.

This skewed perception of young girls, that their culture is not good enough, may sometimes be formed in their family home. Families, who want their children to be successful in the United States, who have bought into the American Dream, know their children must fit in in America to achieve that dream. Cherrie Moraga writes about her experience with this in her essay "La Guera[1]". Moraga writes, "No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew that being light was something valued in my family … . In fact, everything about my upbringing … attempted to bleach me of what color I did have" (23). She listened to her mother disparage darker Chicanos, those with a lower income than her family, farmworkers; essentially, she was working to "'anglocize'" her children (23). In trying to please her mother, she cut off her culture, even her mother-tongue. Moraga's awakening to her situation came in a series of light-bulb moments, but the awakening came. She writes, "We are afraid to see how we have taken the values of our oppressor into our hearts and turned them against ourselves and one another. We are afraid to admit how deeply 'the man's' words have been ingrained in us" (27). Women must work together to bring everyone's voice into the conversation. Stories create community.

Oral vs. Written Storytelling

The women whose work I am examining in this paper are, of course, published authors, but there is also a time and place for the oral tradition in the telling of stories.

[1] Fair-skinned

Silko and Hirsch (1988) note, “though it [the written word] potentially widens a story’s audience, writing removes the story from its immediate context, from the place and people who nourished it in the telling, and thus robs it of much of its meaning” (1). This is a valid point, but these women want to reach a greater audience, they want to go beyond the people who nourished the story in the telling. They want the wider world to know and understand the depth, validity and texture of their cultures; thus, they publish their newer versions of their stories, versions that have been updated so that Americans of other cultures can explore, or as Neil Gaiman wrote, become someone else for a short period. They want Americans to understand the journey that they’ve been on since birth.

For this task, I will be examining the Chinese American writers Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, the Mexican American writers Sandra Cisneros and Gloria Anzaldua, and African American writers Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall. While there are hundreds of writers I could have chosen, I have attempted to select works that allow the reader easier access due to their general familiarity; this will permit us to explore a different perspective on the material with a straightforward purpose.

Storytellers

Prior to stepping into this examination, it would behoove us to have a general understanding of the place and importance of storytellers in various societies over the course of history, the general types of stories told and the function of these tales.

In the article “The Law as Bard: Extolling a Culture’s Virtues, Exposing Its Vices, and Telling its Story” (2008) author Adam MacLeod writes, “Before literacy rates in the English-speaking world reached their apex …, our cultural forbears appointed a

rather singular individual to preserve for their children a record of their values, rituals, institutions, and assumptions: the bard" (11). MacLeod goes on to say that beyond the entertainment aspect of these stories, they "also served a much more lasting purpose, that of teaching, and in teaching, affirming, what choices his society valued" (11). Indeed, in cultures throughout the world, in a time when the populous could not read, there were storytellers. Sometimes these people would stay in a specific village, other times they would travel the country or a specific area. These storytellers had all their tales memorized and this oral tradition of handing down tales, legends, myths, and cultural phenomenon began, and continued for more than a millennium.

Ireland

The oral tradition of storytelling continued in some areas long after what many would consider the age of literacy. One such place was Ireland. "At a time when the Irish society was largely illiterate, isolated from the outside world and lacking modern communications, people looked to the shanachies[2] for their entertainment" (Breslin). Breslin goes on to write that these storytellers were all over Ireland and their repertoire included, "the body of myths and history, folk- and fairy tales, the knowledge of herbs, of medicine, ways of caring for animals or predicting the weather, the poems, prayers and superstitions." They would tell stories, but also would gather new stories and gossip along the way, and then carry these new additions to the next village. By the 1950s these shanachies were becoming but a memory, but the Folklore Department of the Irish government, understanding the cultural importance of these stories, made every effort to

[2] Pronounced 'shawn-a-kee'

record the knowledge dispensed by these bards and retain an important part of Irish history and culture. They dispatched "a handful of eager young men" (Breslin) to go out into the countryside, especially the areas where Irish was still spoken, and record stories, tales, legends. These young men also spent a great deal of time with the shanachies, carefully preserving their wisdom and lore. It is now stored at University College Dublin in "more than 2,100 …volumes containing a million and a half pages" (Breslin).

Native American

If we continue to consider areas that may have an illiterate population long after other parts of the world were being educated and lettered, we can look at many of the Native American people. Some Native American groups had a written alphabet (the Iroquois), but most nations relied on the oral tradition to keep their culture and pass along wisdom. The article "Acculturation Into the Creek Traditions: Growing in Depth and Breadth of Understanding Within the Environment" (2011), by Margaret B. Bogan, examines Creek teaching stories by examining the histories of two different groups of Creek Indians. Bogan took "oral histories" from "many elders" in her research and she discovered, "When learning in the Florida Creek Indian culture, you learn history, language, organizational structure and the concepts inherent in their cosmology all at the same time" (549). In the Creek tribe, there are various elders who are entrusted with important parts of the Creek culture and tradition with the most important being the "chief or Micco." The Micco is elected from among the people and "will serve to keep the oral tradition alive and the traditional church and the knowledge held by the elders safe and available to American native people" (550).These stories contain the culture and the culture is entrusted to the chief, who may be male or female.

The idea of the oral tradition is, ironically, an important thing to poet and novelist Leslie Marmon Silko. By trade she is a Laguna storyteller, but she also sees herself as "an outsider because of her mixed heritage" (Thompson 22). Everyone tells a story in her / his own way and "[Silko] believes that the old storytellers do not think of their stories as versions or variations, but tell a tale 'according to how their family or village tells it' as well as according to the particular situation" (Thompson 22). Thus, the lore mirrors the teller, her / his background, the village and the circumstances. This does not diminish the validity of the story. Silko says, "what matters is to have as many of the stories as possible and to have them together and to understand the emergence." These variations help the listener to understand better the core of what is being related (Thompson 22). Thompson goes on to note that "change and fluidity" are "important characteristics for maintaining oral tradition" but "are difficult to preserve in written form" because it "is a more permanent medium" and "written tales often lose meaning through loss of context" (Thompson 22). Thompson says, in Silko's text *Storyteller* she "writes from memory and imagination rather than from written sources and by including variations as signifiers of change, Silko moves her stories and poems closer to the intent of oral tradition" (23). This makes the reader feel more involved in the story and helps the reader empathize more, which helps create an entrance into a new culture.

The article "Spoken Words: Storytelling Festivals Continue the Griot Tradition" (2003) by Judy D. Simmons, reflects and builds on the ideas of Silko. Simmons quotes master storyteller, Rex M. Ellis, saying, "The spoken word is taken from the page and made alive and vibrant and faithful to the exact time and moment that it is spoken." This sentiment is also reflected in the article "The Art of the Tale: Story-Telling and History

Teaching" (1998), when author David M. Kennedy writes, "There may be twice-or even thrice-told tales – indeed the re-telling, or, as we sometimes say, re-vising, of well-established historical tales is in some ways our principal professional pursuit – but the repetition is in their telling, not their happening" (319). As Silko noted above, the various versions of a story help the listener gather as much data as possible to arrive at the truth. We have the Folklore Department in Ireland, Bogan, and Silko recording the stories that were transcribed from the oral tradition and Ellis is making them oral again, creating a cultural, mutable circle. Every story told has a part of the teller in it, and the best storytellers know how to make the stories work for their audiences. Kennedy says, "The story-teller, and where he or she sits, is no less important than the story itself" (319). It can be said, then, every time we read a bedtime story to a child, we are keeping the oral tradition alive.

Griots - Africa

Another area where the oral tradition continued long past the time when the literate world gave up all but its mere vestiges is Africa. This is the continent of the griots. In the book *African Oral Epic Poetry: Praising the Deeds of a Mythic Hero* (2013), author Fritz H. Pointer, et al, writes that the term griot is difficult to define. He writes, "One might simply replace it with *poet*, as I have often done here, or *bard* or some other term; …" (29), but it is not that easy. He notes, "Griot and Griotte[3] are not simple terms. Nor is theirs a simple profession. Griots and Griottes are part of a major professional class of artists and specialists that includes: blacksmiths, leather workers,

[3] A female griot

and weavers… and the profession goes back many hundreds of years before 1352" (31). In Niger, "The list of functions of a griot – genealogist, historian, adviser, spokesperson, diplomat, mediator, interpreter and translator, musician, composer, teacher, exhorter, witness, praise-singer, poet, story-teller, both extraordinary and incomplete, belies any oversimplification of the tradition" (32). This description recalls that of the shanashies of Ireland. The Griots, in their African environment, are an essential part of their society, just as the shanachies were in Ireland. The article "History Tellers: The *Griots* Keeping Popular Narratives Alive" (2014) by Denise Marcos Bussoletti and Vagner de Souza Vargas, notes "The *griot* practice has strong traditions in Western Africa, with special emphasis in the regions of Mali, Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea." They continue saying, "They travel within their communities, the region, to other countries, singing and telling their stories, in search of information for their genealogies, or in the name of a diplomatic mission" (179). In the United States we tend to think of the word as referring to someone who is a storyteller. Pointer goes on to note that in the United States "African Americans are adopting the term *griot* as a sign of respect for those who know about the past, are artists in various media, or are simply high achievers" (33). This part of the African culture is important enough to be kept alive and it is imbued with respect and tradition.

The art and craft of telling a story has been around for a long time. These are but a few cultures from around the world who have kept the tradition of the storyteller alive. Because it is a more fluid way to tell a story, many authors try to imitate the style. Toni Morrison, in her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" writes, "To make the story appear oral, meandering, effortless, spoke – to have the reader *feel* the narrator with *identifying* that narrator, or hearing him or her knock about, and to have the reader work

with the author in the construction of the book – is what's important" (341). These authors know that the written word is static, so they try to permeate it with aspects of the oral tradition to have the reader become more involved in the text and, as Gaimen suggests, become empathetic to the plight of the characters.

From Oral Geographies to Global Audiences

Who makes up the audience for most oral stories? Children, of course. Researchers Rufan Luo, et al, (2014) examined storytelling in "ethnically diverse, low-income families" (402) and acknowledge that culture is an important aspect of "parent-child interactions and child development." Thus, "… an important form of sociocultural practices, parent-child book-sharing interactions familiarize children with the social rules of literacy and scaffold children into becoming 'cultural narrators'" (403). Along the same lines, researchers, Malka Muchnik and Anat Stavans, in their article "Telling the Same Story to Your Child: Mothers' versus Fathers' Storytelling Interactions" (2009), report that when parents read to their children, each parent displays a different style of reading and they also read differently depending on the gender of the child. "[M]others invest more efforts in the storytelling interaction with their children. …these efforts are not primarily directed to teach them new information, but rather to reinforce their emotional experiences while listening to a story" (68). Thus, when children are listening to these stories, they are not only being entertained, they are learning various aspects of family culture, societal culture and gender differences.

The human race has kept the oral tradition alive simply because we love to tell stories, and as noted above, part of the storyteller goes into every story told. The article "Mother Tongues and Native Voices: Linguistic Fantasies in the Age of the Encounter"

(2001) by Scott Manning Stevens, offers an excellent example of this idea. Stevens writes of Columbus's venture into the new world (America) and how he "moves through the islands, renaming them as he goes." Stevens then writes that Columbus "inexplicably passes from speculating that the Natives have no language to claiming that he now understands their language." Columbus is the story teller and he gets to tell the story of the conquest of these islands in a way that casts him in the best light. If he understands the language of the Natives, then he is getting their approval to take their land and natural resources, because he explained the situation to them and they agreed. As we're discussing fairy tales, Bruno Bettelheim writes in *The Uses of Enchantment*, that each storyteller must have the listener in mind when weaving the tale and have an idea of how the story will affect that person (151-152). In the case of Columbus, he was writing for the Spanish royal court and he knew what they wanted to hear and how they would react to this news of new lands and riches. The king and queen would also want to be cast in a positive light. Columbus knew his audience.

Stories that teach

In the collection of stories known as *The Arabian Nights* or *The Thousand and One Nights of Scheherazade* are brought together under the premise that these are the stories that Scheherazade, the current wife of the king, related to the king to keep herself alive. This king weds a new woman each day and the next morning he has the young women killed. In the paper "Scheherazade's Secret: the power of stories and the desire to learn" (2011) author Peter Willis writes, "Scheherazade…, offered herself to the king and held him in thrall with her stories so that he delayed her execution, and slowly modified his approach to life as he reflected on the mystery, excitement and grandeur of her tales."

He goes on to note that Scheherazade was able to bring forth the king's "undeveloped capacity for wisdom and compassion through her use of imaginal and archetypal stories" (111). Willis suggests that Scheherazade, through her use of stories, was able to use the "truth and wisdom" (111) in them to teach the king to become a better person or maybe even just a person. Bettelheim suggests that a better word for this is healing. He writes that yes, Scheherazade naturally wanted to live, but she also wanted to save the king. "She attains her goal through the telling of many fairy tales; no single story can accomplish it, for our psychological problems are too complex and difficult… It takes nearly three years of continued telling of fairy tales to free the king of his deep depression, to achieve his cure" (87-88). Bettelheim goes on to note that "in Hindu medicine … the mentally deranged person is told a fairy story, contemplation of which will help him overcome his emotional disturbance" (88). Stories can hold us under their spell, so it is conceivable that an intriguing story could provide a period of respite for a deranged mind.

It is not only the words of the story that convey meaning and instruct children; in "Emotions in Storybooks: A Comparison of Storybooks That Represent Ethnic and Racial Groups in the United States" (2018) Jessica Stoltzfus Grady, et al, contend "that these cultural differences in portrayals of emotion are linked with cultural values and contribute to differences in emotion learning and preferences" (2). We read stories to our children that reflect the emotions that relate to our cultural background. Thus, as "Asian and Asian American families value interdependence among people … and emphasize harmony through dependence and cooperation," these parents "may be less likely to model emotions or discuss emotions with children" through their storytelling (2). Anger

is also discouraged in this community; this lack of emotional display is what Maxine Hong Kingston says perpetuates the stereotype of Asians as inscrutable, making it more difficult to break out of that stereotypical prison. (Cultural Misreadings 57)

Grady, et al, goes on to report that "Hispanic and Latino cultures also value interdependence but… [they] emphasize harmony through openness, friendliness, and shared emotion." They also note, "Hispanic and Latino storybooks may portray more high-intensity positive emotions than do Asians American storybooks" (3). The Hispanic and Latino group is the outlier in all the groups as Grady reports, "African American families tend to be both individualistic and collectivistic" with, "for example… African American parents discussed minimizing the expression of pride," and how "African American mothers [believed] that negative emotions should be hidden" (3-4). While this was the trend of their research, they also found examples of this suppression of emotions becoming less frequent, where "mothers encouraged toddlers' displays of aggression" (4). This cultural suppression is what Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote about in his poem "We Wear the Mask" in which he talked about the 'mask' that Blacks had to wear around whites, always pretending to be agreeable and never angry, so that the dominant culture would not feel uncomfortable.

It would be hard to find a person who would contend that reading storybooks to small children is bad and should be stopped, but at the same time, many of our minority female writers are trying to break out of the cages in which they have been placed because of the stereotyping associated with various ethnic groups. Some of this cultural stereotyping is being passed along in children's storybooks, but fortunately, as we move

forward, more books and films are showing active, stronger, intelligent young women (and men) of all backgrounds for children to learn from and emulate.

Myths and Fairy Tales

What else is being passed along in these stories? The article "Origin Stories: Geography, Culture, and Belief" (2010) by S. Kay Gandy and Kathleen Matthew examines the use of myths and their importance in not just children's literature, but in literature around the world. They say, "Myth is a shared heritage of ancestral memories and a thread that holds past, present and future together. Speculation about how the world came into being appears to be a basic element of all human cultures" (28). The authors also note that we can learn more about our own culture and that of others when we discuss and compare our origins. James Peterson asserts in his article "Once Upon a Time" (2002) that "when a child says, 'Tell me a story,' the request is more profound than one might imagine" (33-34). He says that the child is "searching for human contact" but also setting off on "her quest, her journey to find out her identity" (34). He goes on to report that in "ancient tribal cultures one could not identify oneself as a member of the tribe until you (sic) knew the stories of the tribe" (34).

Jack Zipes, an authority on fairy tales, in his essay "The Meaning of Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture" (2011), likens fairy tales to a "gigantic whale" swimming around the seas and consuming everything in its path and growing larger and larger. Saying, "To grow and survive, it constantly adapted to its changing environment" (221). In fact, Zipes conjectures the fairy tale has:

> disseminated information that contributed to the cultural evolution of specific groups. … it continues to grow and embraces, if not swallows, all types of genres, art forms, and cultural institutions; and it adjusts itself to new environments through the human disposition to re-create relevant narratives and through technologies that make its diffusion easier and more effective. (222)

In some respects, fairy tales sound like a type of virus, and no aspect of storytelling is immune to the influence of the fairy story.

The name fairy tale or fairy story came into being when "Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy included the fairy tale 'The Isle of Happiness' in her novel *Historie d'Hippolyte, comte de Duglas* in 1690, she was not aware that she was about to set a trend in France that became epidemic …" (Zipes 223). Zipes goes on to explain that these stories were circulated in the salons of upper-class French women who had "few privileges in the public sphere." These women used these stories to show "their resistance to the conditions under which they lived" (224). Quite often the fairies in the stories, "with their kind and nasty personalities, stood in opposition to the court of Louis XIV and the Catholic Church" (225). In a society in which women had little power, they used the power of the fairy story to show their displeasure with their situation and diminished voice.

Changing the story

The text *Fairy Tale as Myth: Myth as Fairy Tale* (1994) has Zipes quoting Mircea Eliade, "one of the great scholars of religion and myth," who says, "myth tells us how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence." Zipes

extrapolates the following, “Since myth narrates the deeds of supernatural beings, it sets examples for human beings that enable them to codify and order their lives. By enacting and incorporating myths in their daily lives, humans are able to have a genuine religious experience” (1). An interesting idea. The myths that most people are familiar with involve gods and goddesses, and as Zipes points out, “Myths and fairy tales seem to know something that we do not know. They also appear to hold our attention, to keep us in their sway, to enchant our lives” (3). An examination of these stories shows how, over time, they have melded and become intertwined, and Zikes says, “The fairy tale is myth” (5). Essentially, these stories: myths, folk tales, and fairy tales are all interconnected. The Disneyfication of America has been going on for years and for many, it is a religion.

Returning to Zipes’ essay “Fairy Tales and the Evolution of Culture” he quotes Kate Distin from her book *Cultural Evolution,* where she states, “’Cultural evolution has taken off precisely because of this unique human ability to extract information from one context and manipulate it in another, which brings with it the possibility if new species emerging from the convergence of old ones (209)’” (239). People are always taking things from one topic, idea, song, story, whatever, and changing to fit their time period and their culture. We adapt things, we allow them to evolve to suit us at the time. Zipes, in *Fairy Tale as Myth…* says, “To duplicate a *classical* fairy tale is to reproduce a set pattern of ideas and images that reinforce a traditional way of seeing, believing, and behaving.” He goes on to write:

> Revisions of classical fairy tales are different. … The purpose of producing a revised fairy tale is to create something new that incorporates the critical and creative thinking of the producer and corresponds to changed demands and tastes

> of audiences. As a result of transformed values, the revised classical fairy tale seeks to alter the reader's view of traditional patterns, images, and codes. (9)

This is what these women writers are trying to do: alter the traditional patterns that have kept too many minority women writers creating work that reflects what society expects from them. When they are able to control the narrative, rather than have it control them, they will be better able to gain power and voice in a society that Michelle M. Espino, in her essay "Seeking the 'Truth' in the Stories We Tell: The Role of Critical Race Epistemology in Higher Education Research" (2012) tends to give more credence to "dominant ideologies or 'master narratives'" (32). What Espino is examining is "Critical Race Theory" and how it "pertain[s] to the Mexican American community" (32). She explains that "The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a 'collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power'" (32).

Over the course of time, these researchers, following trends in law, education, civil rights and the judicial system established:

> four themes [which] are commonly noted as the foundation of CRT scholarship: (a) racism is ordinary and not aberrational; (b) U.S. society is based on a "White-over-color ascendancy" that advances White supremacy and provides a scapegoat (i.e., Communities of Color) for working-class communities; (c) race and racism are social constructions; and (d) storytelling "urges Black and Brown writers to recount their experiences with racism … and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess … master narratives". (32)

Espino goes on to write that the "counter-stories are sites of resistance" and "when constructing a counter-story, one must consider its 'revealing function, one that contains critique of domination and provides theoretical opportunities for self-reflection … self-emancipation and social emancipation" (33). These counter-stories are important because of the voice they are providing to the writer. These women are writing counter-stories, but for them, there are various master narratives. For some of the women it is the White dominant culture, for others it is the males of their own ethnicity, for still others it is cultural stereotyping, and some it is their own culture.

Culturally Specific Stories

These stories must be written. JoAnne Banks-Wallace has studied and written several articles on how telling stories can be "Health-promoting …in a group of women" (17). In the article "Emancipatory Potential of Storytelling in a Group" (1998), Banks-Wallace, despite the fact that she specifically studies African American women, writes that "the rules and styles for storytelling are culture-specific," so those listening from outside the culture may have difficulty following the story being told (18). Often, in school, children are taught stories from a European American perspective in which, "storytellers customarily provide information regarding the meaning or purpose of a story" (19), and when a child may tell a story from her / his own culture, the teacher may try to delve into an area where s/he may not be welcome. Banks-Wallace writes, "storytellers from other cultures may tell a series of seemingly unrelated stories and leave it up to the storytakers[4] to connect each story into a coherent whole," thus, "researchers

[4] One who hears a story

and practitioners should exercise caution when trying to fill gaps or interpret stories" as what the teller is relating may be different from what the taker is gathering (19).

Native American scholar, Dr. Terry Tafoya illustrates this point beautifully in the essay "Coyote's Eyes: Native Cognition Styles" (1982), in which he begins by telling part of the myth of coyote's eyes but stops part way through the story to explain all that is not being said, because for Native Americans, all this backstory is understood. He explains that Native American children are taught this way; they are taught to "watch and listen and wait and the answers will come" (24). It is also about how "one's knowledge must be obtained by the individual" (28), and when this knowledge comes, the child, or even adult, then owns it. Tafoya says by writing out stories in the European American style, he must "rob the reader from the 'Ah hah' experience by summing up conclusions in neat packages" (24). This idea of waiting, biding one's time, listening and observing is a rather foreign concept to an American ear; an ear that wants the information now and by the easiest means possible.

If, as the research suggests, cultural stories are meant to be understood by those of that culture, can those outside the culture ever fully understand them? In "Talk That Talk: Storytelling and Analysis Rooted in African American Oral Tradition" (2002) author JoAnne Banks-Wallace concludes that, "Story creation and storytelling enable us to give unique expression to our experiences, the wisdom gleaned through living, the truths passed on from generation to generation" (424). While we can enjoy the story, and gather more data about a particular culture, sometimes it is more about the storyteller telling her story while healing and validating herself. Tafoya says that because of these cultural differences it is "nearly impossible to do a highly structured analysis of Native American

teaching and philosophy" (28). But, he does not want us to despair; he says he is trying "to point out some areas of interethnic confusion in communication in dealing with cognitive schemes. …One must be flexible enough to be able to switch world-views when appropriate" (32). In addition, Angela Khristin Brown writes in her essay "Black Culture" (2013) that because "African-American literature is within the framework of a larger American literature, it is independent. As a result, new styles of storytelling and unique voices have been created in relative isolation. …[which have] help[ed] revitalize the larger literary world" (109). So, the addition of all these voices on the American literary scene can help us to grow and learn, even if we are not of the culture from whence the story came. By partaking in these stories, we are still learning about that culture and recognizing the value and humanity there.

Brown also contends that African-Americans are trying to disrupt the "literary and power traditions of the United States," since their culture was steeped in the oral tradition and some scholars viewed writing "as a white male activity" (109). This idea of "disrupting the literary and power traditions" of the United States is also an aspect of what Brown says when she writes about some "unique voices" of African-American [hyphen her's] being 'created in relative isolation.' In a sense, these literary works are looked upon as something different, not 'American.' Which is what Maxine Hong Kingston is writing about in her essay "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" (1982). She wants them to view her as an American writer, not an Asian or even Chinese American writer. Kingston says, "I am an American. I am an American writer…" (57). She feels that the labels diminish the work and taint the reader's expectations of it. Why do we have Asian American literature and African American literature and Mexican

American literature, but no White male literature or white female literature, though we do have women's literature? Should these women writers be happy that their work is so special that it is not categorized in a generic box? At the same time, labeling the works in these ways may rob them of readers who may otherwise have picked it up because it had an interesting title or amazing description blurb.

Cultural Boxes

Another aspect of the power structure, as noted previously, comes from within that culture. Susan M. Rumann and Rudolpho C. Chavez (2001) conducted a study of a group of women in a literacy program who were primarily of "Mexican American heritage" and through listening to their stories and shadowing them in their lives, the researchers began to "understand the role that myth plays in the everyday of one's life." Rumann and Chavez maintain that "the telling of one's everyday, permits an individual to maintain subjectification," and when these women do so, they get to be individuals, rather than what others think they are. Most of these women dropped out of high school because they did not see it as a part of their story, mainly because of culture. "Emma saw herself following in the footsteps of her female ancestors; therefore, school became an entity of little importance. 'It wasn't interesting for me because I didn't have a goal. My goal was to be a mother, have kids, and stay in the kitchen all day …because I knew I couldn't do anything else. I thought I couldn't do anything else.'" The primary socialization of these women, the home, stressed certain behaviors and expectations, but their secondary socialization, school, was based on a quite different construct, "Eurocentric myth" and these women did not know which model was correct. Rumann and Chavez suggest that this group of women need to change the myth, they need to

move toward "critical consciousness" so as to "[debunk] the perception of self as object of one's reality and [redefine] oneself within a subjective reality." The women in the study continued to experience "conflict between self and social goals" Gloria Anzaldua writes in *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* (2012), "For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could 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" (39). These women are caught between their ethnic culture and the culture of the United States, who is not very welcoming to them; and so, they must work to change the mythology. By sharing these new stories with the world, they have the opportunity to bring about that change.

The Cultural Need to Tell the Story

What compels a person to write a novel? A story? Banks-Wallace (1998) says "Storytelling was a way to share their knowledge and wisdom with the group" (20). While Banks-Wallace was working with a small group of African American women (28 participants), to study "the health-promoting functions of storytelling" (17), this idea of sharing the knowledge and wisdom of one's culture is important. Playwright August Wilson spent a good portion of his life writing about the African American experience in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area. In his play, *King Hedley II*, the character Stool Pigeon could be thought of as the wise fool. His part is, obviously, part comic relief, but there is a seriousness to his words that can be easily missed. In the Prologue, Stool Pigeon enters carrying scraps to feed the stray cats. He begins speaking some nonsense about getting

the cats better food tomorrow and then segues into how there is a change coming and "God is gonna tell it" (7-8). He then tells the audience:

> The people wandering all over the place. They got lost. They don't even know the story of how they got from tit to tat. Aunt Ester know. But the path to her house is all grown over with weeds, you can't hardly find the door no more. The people need to know that. The people need to know the story. See how they fit into it. See what part they play. (8)

This becomes Stool Pigeon's rallying cry throughout the play, "you got to know!" He is a man who is generally ignored or, at best, just tolerated. His neighbors think he is a little crazy, but Wilson is telling the audience that their history is important. They need to know their past, where they came from, before they can go forward into their lives. Their backstory shapes them and helps them to know who they are in the great story of life, but too many people are ignoring the past and trying to jump right into the future. Stool Pigeon is there to try to get them to slow down and learn from the past. These women authors understand the importance of their culture and past, which is why they are incorporating it into their stories, but they are also changing it to fit the evolving circumstances of modern American life.

For Maxine Hong Kingston, her book *The Woman Warrior* is an attempt to tell her story and to show that, like all the other writers out there, she is a person. She writes, "I hope my writing has many layers, as human beings have layers" (CM 65). This is in response to critics, who, when the book came out, were greatly surprised that she was or was not the stereotype that she should have been. Examples of this are seen when they comment that she married an American man (60), implying that she in not American,

despite being born in Stockton, California, to appearing "inscrutable" (56) as those people from the East always seem to be. Kingston says:

> … I am an American. I am an American writer, who, like other American writers, wants to write the great American novel. *The Woman Warrior* is an American book. Yet many reviewers do not see the American-ness of it, nor the fact of my own American-ness. (57-58)

Amy Tan, unlike Kingston, does not call any of her books memoirs, but she says that most people consider them "memoirs disguised as fiction" (OOF 108) and these readers offer up the stories of their lives to her for when she runs out of material. While she says she is not writing memoirs, she does admit that aspects of her writing have been autobiographical, but not in the sense that her readers believe. Tan says that inside each "story is an emotional truth" and this "emotional memory" can be placed into a story, a narrative and "as I write that possibility, it becomes part of me" (109). It is the telling that becomes important and its effect on the teller and reader. Tan writes that people want other "people to know what they have been through. They want witnesses, because it's lonely to go through life with your heartaches" (108-109). So, Tan tells her stories, shares her heartaches, and educates the world about her culture one book at a time.

For American women of Asian backgrounds, the need to break the stereotype is an important part of their writing. In the essay "Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster," college professor Mitsuye Yamada writes that while she believed she was "resisting" the stereotypes about Asian women, she was "so passive no one noticed I was resisting." She goes on to say that by being so passive, she realized that she had "been contributing to [her] own stereotyping" (31). Yamada's realization caused her to examine the way, in her

case, Japanese American girls were raised and how they were taught that they were not born into a world for them to change, but a world in which they should try to fit in (33-34). She likens herself, and her fellow Asian American girls to Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (31) and ends her essay by stating, "Invisibility is not a natural state for anyone" (35). For these women, it is vital to speak up, to come out of the shadows of culture and stereotyping, to show America who they are, not what we think they should be.

These women "need to create a bicultural identity if they are to retain their sense of self-esteem and belongingness" (Chin 3). Chin goes on to tell how, though it is male figures – warriors – who are generally told about in stories, in immigrant Chinese American families, the women have been "the anchors" (9), keeping culture and family alive and well. This is why, according to Chin "The story of Hua Muk Lan[5] persists in popularity among the Chinese. … She is celebrated particularly because this image is at odds with the subordinate roles of women during Confucian China" (13). With their stories, which contain the Chinese aspects of their culture, they are incorporating their American-ness, they are adding to the multi-colored and textured tapestry that is the United States and showing that their contribution will make the final product that much better.

Why? Because We Must

Gloria Anzaldua considers the art of writing an essential part of everyday life and culture. She writes:

[5] Another variation of Fa Mu Lan

> In the ethno-poetics and performance of the shaman, my people, the Indians, did not split the artistic from the functional, the sacred from the secular, art from everyday life. The religious, social and aesthetic purposes of art were all intertwined. …The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shaper-changer, is a *nahual,* a shaman. (88)

Anzaldua is trying to change people, herself and others. She goes on to say, that her "work has an identity; it is a 'who' or a 'what' and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers" (89). By using the goddesses and gods, reminding people of their past, Anzaldua is able to work to change people and their attitudes toward Chicanas/os, and women, in general. Anzaldua goes on to say she is "challeng[ing] the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos. … [by] participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that bind us to each other and to the planet" (102-3). While Anzaldua loves her culture, she also says she abhors the part of it that elevates the value of men over women and the "tyranny" the men hold over the women. "Culture," she says, "is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them" (38). Thus, if women are the ones transmitting the culture to the next generation, perhaps, they can begin to change it, one story at a time. They can create a more equitable world where every voice is valued. As we have seen, storytellers around the world are valued as an important part of society, so these women and their stories, should be valued and

respected, as well. Then, the phrase "'You're nothing but a woman'" will no longer "[mean] you are defective" (Anzaldua 105).

Stories give us voice. Stories give us power.

Chapter One – Growing up Chinese American

"It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys." **(**Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* 15**)**

During the twentieth century, a generation of American girls born of Chinese immigrants spent a good part of their lives trying to outlive and transcend the perceived stereotype of quiet, tractable and submissive Asian women. Two of these women, authors Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, both grew up in Northern California, but because of the circumstances that their mothers experienced in China, Kingston and Tan had rather different childhoods. What these women had in common, though, were the stories their mothers told them. Fantastic stories that entered their consciousness and became the vehicles that enabled them to inform the country of their identities and add their voices to the American literary tapestry. For Kingston, this was her book *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (1989), a refashioning of the Mulan story. For Tan it was *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), a retelling of her mother's story in China. Prior to delving into these works, let us take a brief look at the history of the Chinese in America.

The Chinese in America – a bit of history

During the California Gold Rush, through the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, and up until the Chinese Exclusion Act[6], many Chinese men came to America,

[6] "In the spring of 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Chester A. Arthur. This act provided an absolute 10-year moratorium on Chinese labor immigration" ("Chinese Exclusion Act." Ourdocuments.gov).

the "Golden Mountain[7]," to seek their fortune and escape the wars and famine occurring in their homeland. Following the Exclusion Act, these men still came; it simply proved more difficult to get here. The appeal of leaving their small villages and travelling thousands of miles into the unknown was presented as an opportunity to make more money in the United States than they ever could in China. After making their fortune, some would return to their respective villages.

In the opening chapter "No Name Woman" in her memoir *The Woman Warrior (1989),* Maxine Hong Kingston writes, "…our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings – to make sure that every young man who went 'out on the road' would responsibly return home" (3). The relatives left behind in China did their own part in helping these young men by choosing them a family, in the form of a new bride, which would anchor them to the village and ensure their return. But not all of them did. Those Chinese men who decided to remain in America would assist other Chinese men who were trying to get into the U.S.A. by providing 'paper' relatives for the immigrants – drawing up legal documents saying certain Chinese immigrants were their 'sons' or some other male relative. This could be a long and arduous process, but once the (generally) young man got his foot in the door, and wanted to stay, it became a little easier for him to bring into America his wife and children. Certainly, these immigrants from small villages in China came to America with their superstitions, beliefs and culture intact. Kingston's parents were of this group. Patricia Lin Blinde, in her article "The Icicle in the Desert:

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[7] "The phrase 'Golden Mountain' … summarizes the dream of the first Chinese who came to America in the pursuit of frankly materialistic goals-to get rich quickly and to retire to their native villages" (Chua 61).

Perspective and Form in the Works of Two Chinese-American Women Writers" (1979), writes on this phenomenon:

> …migrant Chinese families … tried desperately to conserve manners, habits, and values of a country they had left behind. Like other migrant groups, these families attempted to create a separate world of their own as a kind of bulwark against an essentially hostile world. Part of this self imposed isolation was due at least not only to the segregation effected by the general American public but to the prejudices on the part of the Chinese themselves in regard to white Americans. The isolation of the Chinese in their own communities, the injunctions against adopting the ways of white Americans levelled at their young are all efforts… at stemming the encroachment of American ways of life into their own existences. (57)

For the American born Kingston, and other women writers of Chinese descent, this meant she could either live in her parents' past or forge an American identity for herself. With the creation of China Towns in large cities across America, it became much more difficult for these young American born girls to escape their parents' small village mind-set and the cultural expectations they held for their daughters. This is especially obvious if the immigrant parents were of a lower economic status, as was the case with Kingston's parents. Amy Tan's mother, from a well-to-do family in China, married an American born man of Chinese descent. This gave Tan an advantage with regard to her parents' expectations.

Chinese Culture – sexism

Indeed, growing up female in a Chinese family meant, for many girls, the knowledge that they were not as valuable as boys and had no real control over their own lives, including personal decisions like choosing a spouse. Kingston's chapter "No Name Woman" begins with the author relating a story her mother told her about an aunt, of whom she, Kingston, had no prior knowledge. To illustrate this point, Kingston writes of her aunt, "When the family found a young man in the next village to be her husband, she had stood tractably beside the best rooster, his proxy, and promised before they met that she would be his forever" (7). Unfortunately, her aunt became impregnated while in that small village in China, despite the fact that her husband had been in America for more than a year. Kingston's mother tells the story as a cautionary tale conveniently accompanying the arrival of Kingston's first menstrual cycle – don't let this happen to you! (5). The details of the aunt's story are mostly withheld, though Kingston would like to ask her mother for more information, but "My mother has told me once and for all the useful parts" (6). Kingston tries to imagine how this could have happened. She knows that her parents, from the same village, do nothing for fun; she says her mother lives a life "powered by Necessity"[sic] (6). Imagining her aunt in this small village, Kingston cannot believe that this woman would have had an affair, saying, "Women in the old China did not choose. Some man had commanded her to lie with him and be his secret evil" (6). When the family allows the young woman to commit suicide with her newly born child, Kingston, who has heard about the worthlessness of females for her entire life, finally understands the depth of that sentiment.

Affirmation of this belief may be found in E.T.C. Werner's book *Myths & Legends of China (*1922), in the chapter "The Sociology of China," when Werner writes, "As was the power of the husband over the wife, so was that of the father over his children. Infanticide (due chiefly to poverty, and varying with it) was frequent, especially in the case of female children, who were but slightly esteemed" (26). This esteem of male children has ancient roots in Chinese society and in Mencian thought. Mencius, according to the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, was a "Chinese thinker" from the fourth century BCE "whose importance in the Confucian tradition is second only to that of Confucius himself." He interpreted the master's thoughts while "simultaneously impressing Confucius' ideas with his own philosophical stamp." In his teachings, compiled in the book titled *Mencius* (2016), he makes clear the importance of sons in section 4A.26, "Mencius said, 'There are three forms of unfiliality [sic], and bearing no heirs is the worst" (Eno). Filial piety is considered a cornerstone of Confucian belief and practice[8]. As an obedient and respectful child, one is expected to produce sons. An unspoken aspect of this is that the daughters must agree to their parent's choice of a spouse.

Fa Mu Lan

In Kingston's following chapter "White Tigers" she further chronicles the complexities of being a woman in her culture by telling the reader how she was often told, not only by her parents, but also the emigrant adults in her community, how useless girls were: "'[f]eeding girls is feeding cowbirds,'" and "'[b]etter to raise geese than

[8] Filial Piety. "The virtue of being a dutiful and respectful son or daughter, considered by Confucius to be the key to other virtues developed later in life" (Slingerland 238).

girls,'" and "'[w]hen you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers'" (*WW* 46). The girl tried to win her parents' approval, but when she realized that the only way to do that would be to become a boy, she "stopped getting straight A's" and would crack one or two of the dishes when she had to wash them; she decided to become a bad girl (*WW* 47). As a child she would listen to her mother 'talk-story[9]' about women in old China who had power and those who were powerless. Kingston said of her mother, "She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan[10]. I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (*WW* 20). It was this legend that most closely aligned with her desire to become a boy to win her parents' approval. This is also the legend that would enable her to acquiesce to her culture, while at the same time, refuse the parameters placed upon her by that same culture.

The "Poem of Mulan" is believed to have originated in the "Northern Wei period (386-533)" because of the reference to the term "'khan' that suggests the northeastern conflicts" (Kwa xiii). Kwa also notes in his text that over the course of the centuries, while the core of the story has stayed the same, details of the tale have changed, often in response to what is going on in the political landscape.

The original "Poem of Mulan" is fairly brief, only eight stanzas, and does not have a great many details. In fact, Shiamin Kwa, author of *Mulan: Five Versions of a Classic Chinese Legend with Related Texts* (2010) says in his introduction, "In the rich Chinese tradition of tales and legends that originated centuries ago and survives to this

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[9] Kingston uses this term often, usually when her mother was imparting important information in the form of a story, Chinese legend or incident from her childhood.

[10] This is the Cantonese pronunciation of Mulan's surname and the name Kingston uses. Kwa notes that in "most accounts of … Mulan in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the name 'Mulan' is treated as a single word, and Mulan is provided with a surname, either Hua or Zhu" (xxiii).

day, the story of Mulan, with its utter lack of supernatural demonstrations or interventions, is one of the most mundane" (xi). He goes on to say that there are so many other, more exciting and fantastic Chinese legends, but it is Mulan who has captured the world's imagination. He conjectures that Mulan becoming the Woman Warrior was simply a matter of her changing her clothes, an act that many young girls could accomplish, whereas most other tales relied on magic, the supernatural, or the gods stepping in to help make a change in a young girl's life.

Mulan is a legendary heroine, the only record of whom is a 360-word poem by an anonymous poet. This is a translation of the oldest known text of Mulan:

A sigh, a sigh, and then again a sigh -
Mulan was sitting at the door and weaving.
One did not hear the sound of loom and shuttle,
One only heard her heave these heavy sighs.
When she was asked the object of her love,
When she was asked who occupied her thoughts,
She did not have a man she was in love with,
There was no boy who occupied her thoughts.

"Last night I saw the summons from the army,
The Khan is mobilizing all his troops.
The list of summoned men comes in twelve copies:
Every copy lists my Father's name!
My father has, alas, no grown-up son,

And I, Mulan, I have no adult brother.

I want to buy a saddle and horse,

To take my father's place and join the army."

The eastern market: there she bought a horse;

The western market: there she bought a saddle;

The southern market: there she bought a bridle;

The northern market: there she bought a whip.

At dawn she said good-bye to her dear parents,

At night she rested by the Yellow River.

She did not hear her parents' voices, calling for their daughter,

She only heard the Yellow River's flowing water, always splashing, splashing.

…

In this beginning section of the poem, we meet Mulan, sitting in a doorway weaving; she is doing women's work, but she is also sighing. The young girl is not sighing because she is in love; she has weightier things on her mind. Her old father has been drafted into the army, and with no son to take his place, Mulan is steeling herself to replace him. Upon making her decision to take her father's position in the Khan's army, she travels to all corners of the city to gear-up for the journey, with no one questioning her or barring her from buying these necessities. She says goodbye to her parents and sets off.

Kingston takes the premise of the Mulan story, her father drafted into the army, is too old to fight and she goes in his stead, and bulks it up for an American woman who

attended college in the 1960s. Kingston's Mulan has the full blessing of her parents, has fifteen years of training, and a white horse shows up at her door to carry her off to war.

The poem continues:

The Khan asked Mulan what he might desire --
"I, Mulan do not care for an appointment here at court.
Give me your racer good for a thousand miles,
To take me back again to my old hometown."

Hearing their daughter had arrived, her parents
Went out the city, welcoming her back home.
Hearing her elder sister had arrived, her sister
Put on her bright red outfit at the door.
Hearing his elder sister had arrived, her brother
Sharpened his knife that brightly flashed in front of pigs and sheep.

"Open the gate to my pavilion on the east,
Let me sit down in my old western room,
I will take off the dress I wore in battle;
I will put on the skirt I used to wear."
Close to the window she did up her hair,
Facing the mirror she applied makeup,
She went outside and saw her army buddies --
Her army buddies were all flabbergasted:

"We marched together for these twelve long years

And absolutely had no clue that Mulan was a girl!"

"The male hare wildly kicks its feet;

The female hare has shifty eyes.

But when a pair of hares runs side by side,

Who can distinguish whether I in fact am male or female?"

Translated by Wilt L. Idema (Kwa 1-3)

The ending of the poem focusses on the blurring of gender lines and the idea that women can do many of the things that men can do. When Mulan says, "Open the gate to my pavilion on the east" (49), she is taking about access. Now that she has gained access to this exclusive world of men and achieved success, she can say, "I will take off the dress I wore in battle; / I will put on the skirt I used to wear" (51-52).

Foremost in this poem, is the Confucian ideal of filial piety; Mulan will go to war because her father cannot. In later versions, this ideal, filial piety, will be made even more apparent. Kingston's iteration of the tale, while containing the basic plot, is much richer in detail than this original account and also contains aspects of later versions of Mulan. Kingston's Woman Warrior displays confidence and is equal to any man, yet she knows the importance of certain aspects of her culture.

Kingston's *Woman Warrior*

Wildly different from the original, in Kingston's version, a seven-year-old Maxine imagines that she follows a bird over her house and into the mountains where she

meets an old couple who teach her the martial arts, survival skills and patience. Her training takes fifteen years and she leaves only after she sees, in an image in the water inside a drinking gourd, her father being conscripted for the army. He is old and she knows he cannot go to fight. Returning home, the twenty-two year-old Maxine tells her father that she will go to war in his place. Her parents readily agree to this plan and they have her remove her shirt and then "carve revenge on [her] back" and "write out oaths and names," so wherever young Maxine goes, "people will know our sacrifice" (*WW* 34). When she "could sit up again," the young woman, looking at her back using two mirrors, says, "I saw my back covered entirely with words in red and black files, like an army, like my army" (35). After the carvings on her back heal, she dresses in a man's armor and, leading some of the village boys (the villager's real gift to her), heads off to war. In old China, it would be unheard of for parents to carve characters on a daughter's back, equip her for war and then have the villagers entrust her with their sons. Kingston is bringing Mulan into the twentieth century.

In the persona of Mulan, Kingston, the woman warrior, was a good leader and an excellent warrior; as word of her goodness and military prowess grew, more men joined the ranks of her army. Her army did not harm the villagers and only took what could be spared to feed themselves. Because she fought for so long and the group continued to grow, they soon no longer realized or remembered she was a woman. Except for one young man. Over time, a young man from her village approached her; he had been in love with her since before she flew off to be trained by the old people and he joined the army to be closer to her. They fell in love and had a child. When their baby boy was a month old, she sent the child, and her husband, back to her in-law's home in the village.

Kingston, the general at the head of her army, finally took the royal palace and killed the evil emperor. It is upon this act that she told her army that they could then go home. Her final stop on the way back to her village was at the home of the baron who had drafted her brother. She demanded payment for his crimes against the villagers, but he refused to give her complaints any merit. When she told him that she was a woman, he made the mistake of telling her "'Girls are maggots in the rice'" (*WW* 43), so she quickly beheaded him. The young warrior woman helped the villagers restore order and harmony before she went home to her own husband, son, and parents-in-law. She then "knelt at my parents-in-law's feet, as I would have done as a bride. … 'I will stay with you, doing farmwork and housework, and giving you more sons'" (*WW* 45). This is a return to the original Mulan poem. She has proven herself to her country and her people and now she will return to her proper place in society.

The irony of this statement, after her complaints about her treatment as a girl and subsequent years of service leading an army as a man, is powerful. Kingston spent a great deal of her childhood trying to please, and be noticed by her parents. She would get excellent grades and be a good daughter, but was still told "'There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls.'" So, when she would tell her mother that she was not a bad girl, she says, "I might well have said, 'I'm not a girl'" (*WW* 46). As a Chinese American girl, she knows that the only way to be consider good and worthy is to be a boy. In her imagination as the Woman Warrior, she assumed the role of a male, a general at the head of a mighty army. She commanded respect and loyalty, but the only way she was able to earn those things was to lie about who she really was.

Blending the cultures

Throughout her work, Kingston connects with her Chinese culture, especially in her show of filial piety upon returning to her village in her version of the Mu Lan story. She is the returning hero, yet she kneels at her parents-in-law's feet. She writes, "From the words on my back, and how they were fulfilled, the villagers would make a legend about my perfect filiality" (*WW* 45). The warrior woman reverts back to the filial daughter and, in doing so, demonstrates her value to her own parents. She wants them to see what she can do and appreciate her. Also, central to her Chinese culture is the elevation of boys over girls, so it is no surprise that the first child she bears is male and she promises her in-laws to bear many more sons. In doing so, she seems to be abetting the cultural preference for boys over girls, but perhaps this is the concession she must make to carve out her own life as an American woman.

Additionally, Kingston is fighting against her Chinese culture by writing this iteration of the Mu Lan story. In her version, her parents knowingly and willingly sent her off in her father's place in the army; in "Poem of Mulan" she goes in her father's stead without telling her parents, "She does not hear her parents' voices, calling for their daughter" (24). Kingston's Mu Lan is also well trained prior to going to war, whereas in the poem, Mulan is shown doing domestic chores, spinning, for instance. A marked difference between the Mulan text and Kingston's is the carving / tattooing of the young warrior's back by her parents. Nowhere does this appear in any of the Mulan texts, because it comes from a different legend. Carrie E. Reed writes in her paper "Tattoo in Early China" (2000) that the Chinese general Yue Fei (1103–1141) had the oath "'Jinzhong baoguo' ... (serve the nation with absolute loyalty)" tattooed onto his back, by

his mother, and some conjecture that Yue Fei's tattoo may have started other soldiers to assume this practice of military tattooing (369). Lan Dong (2006) writes of this use of marking by Kingston in *The Woman Warrior*, "…the woman warrior bears on her body the markers of cultural memory and communal history; she literally carries the historical traces on her back" (222). This woman does not have to 'talk-story' to pass on her culture; it can be read off her back. For Kingston it is, again, the power of words, plus, for her version of Mu Lan, it is her parents' acceptance of her and her sacrifice.

Another difference between the texts is that in Kingston's account of Mulan, the other soldiers did not know Mulan was a girl, but later versions have her revealing herself to the army to give them hope. In fact, in Chinese history, when hope is needed, especially in times of war, Mulan appears. Hope is what Kingston is looking for when she assumes the guise of the woman warrior. She is trying to find a voice in her family and in the country in which she was born, America not China, a voice that will allow her to be Chinese American. She is hoping that Mulan, the woman warrior, Kingston's cultural and personal advocate, will fight for her to be heard.

Kingston on Identity and Voice

What we discover, then, through the intertextual relationship between the novel and the poem, is that Mulan indeed helped give Kingston a voice, albeit not the one she was looking for. In her essay "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" (1982) the author writes:

> I have been thinking that we ought to leave out the hyphen in 'Chinese-American', because the hyphen gives the word on either side equal weight, as if

> linking two nouns. It looks as if a Chinese-American has double citizenship, which is impossible in today's world. Without the hyphen, 'Chinese' is an adjective and 'American' is a noun; a Chinese American is a type of American. (60)

Kingston wrote this piece following the publication of *The Woman Warrior* and reading its subsequent reviews. Many of the book's critics wanted to classify her as Chinese rather than American. While one reviewer went so far as to write that she had "'married an American'" (*CM-r* 60), implying that she herself was not born in the U.S.A. Kingston does not want to throw out the Chinese part of her being, but she wants to allow the American side of that same being to have a voice. Yuan Yuan writes in the essay "The Semiotics of China Narratives in the Con/texts of Kingston and Tan" (1999), that the only China Kingston knows is from the talk-stories communicated to her from her mother and overhearing her parents talk about their homeland with others, "a cultural reconstruction." Yuan goes on to say, "For Kingston, China is a territory of dream and fantasy. In her dreams, she has revenged her family, fantasizing her China experiences as compensation for a 'disappointing American life'" (216). She is an American woman who, to the point in time when *The Woman Warrior* was published, had never visited China; all her knowledge of that country is secondhand.

Maternal influence

The voice of Kingston's mother cannot be discounted in *The Woman Warrior*. While her mother does not discourage the practice of preference for sons in the Chinese household, it is her mother who tells Kingston and her sisters the stories of powerful women in old China. After her mother relates the tale of the how a woman invented the

martial art of white crane boxing, Kingston says, “This was one of the tamer, more modern stories… My mother told others that followed swordswomen through woods and palaces for years. Night after night my mother would talk-story… I couldn’t tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep” (*WW* 19). While the Mulan story may have left the greatest impression upon Kingston as a child, the blurring of the various story lines could also account for the extravagance of the story, *The Woman Warrior*, that Kingston constructs.

A doctor in China, Kingston’s mother had honor and prestige; even owning a slave who helped her in her medical practice. When she moved to the United States, she owned a laundry. Brave Orchid, Kingston’s mother, tells her daughters that they will have failed should they grow up to be wives or slaves (*WW* 19). Kingston’s mother feels the loss of the power and esteem she held in the village, and even at her medical school, where she fought off ghosts for the other students; in America she is just another owner of a Chinese laundry, and so she tells her daughters about the powerful women from the old country and plants in them the desire to be something more. Daisy Tan, the mother of Amy Tan, like Brave Orchid, knew power and privilege in the old country, but Daisy Tan would advocate for her daughter’s rights more overtly than Brave Orchid. Kingston remarks, “At last I saw that I too had been in the presence of great power, my mother talking-story” (*WW* 19-20); it was through the power of story-telling and inference that enabled Brave Orchid to teach her daughters to strive for more.

Addressing the idea of a voice in America, Kingston relates how she worked on developing the ability to speak up for herself and others while out in the work world. Bosses she worked for would make racist comments to her because they believed she was

not important enough to have an opinion, or bosses who fired her when she stood up for her principles (*WW* 49). At this point, she realized that were she to avenge all the wrongs in the world, she would be fighting all the time, and despite her daydreams of being a woman warrior, she is not a good fighter. What Kingston can do is write. She will fight back with words; she says, "The idioms for *revenge* are 'report a crime' and 'report to five families[11].' The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (*WW* 53). Kingston will put down her sword, take up the pen and join her mother in the business of storytelling.

Inside Voices / Being Seen, Not Heard

Prior to her realization that she could have a voice through writing, Kingston needed to find her voice within her own family. In the final chapter of her memoir, "A Song for the Barbarian Reed Pipe," Kingston relates a story her mother told her when she, Kingston, was older. It is the story of Ts'ai Yen, "a poetess born in A.D. 175" (207). When the young woman was just twenty years old, she was captured by a barbarian tribe of raiders and lived among them for twelve years. During the course of the time she lived among them, she married the chieftain and bore him two sons. After twelve years, her father finally ransomed her and she returned home, but without her sons (208). While Ts'ai Yen lived among the barbarians, her sons "did not speak Chinese. She spoke it to them when their father was out of the tent, but they imitated her with senseless singsong words and laughed." She believed her culture would not be passed along to her children. But one night, she heard the music of the barbarians' reed pipes. It was this music that affected her profoundly. "Its sharpness and its cold made her ache" and it disturbed her

[11] The five families were the most powerful families in China in the nineteenth century.

thoughts, but she could not escape it. Soon she was singing "a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes." Ts'ai Yen was singing about China and her family, and eventually even her sons sang the haunting songs along with her. These songs she brought back to China and are still sung today (208-209). The stories created and passed along by women, have been bridging cultures and crossing borders for millennia. It is about nuance and balance.

Kingston ends her memoir at this point, but earlier in this chapter, the author reveals many truths about her quest to find her voice. She begins by telling the reader that when a child, her mother "sliced the frenum" of her tongue, so she, according to her mother, "'would not be tongue-tied. …[her] tongue would be able to move in any language'" (164). Upon her arrival at kindergarten, Kingston went silent and remained that way for three years, mainly due to her not being able to speak English; she was not alone in her misery, as her sister would not speak either.

Over the many years that followed, Kingston gathered up complaints, problems and other things she felt her mother should know about her, until the list contained over two hundred items. The little girl decided to tell her mother the things on her list, one a day, so she would feel less burdened, but after she began, her mother found her talking an annoyance and told her to shut-up. "'Go away and work,'" her mother said (200). A while later, when young Maxine believes her mother is trying to marry her off to a retarded boy from school, she explodes at her mother while the family is having dinner:

> "…And I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories. You won't tell me story and then say, 'This is a true story,' or, 'This is just a story.' I can't tell the difference. I don't

> even know what your real names are. I can't tell what's real and what you make up. Ha! You can't stop me from talking. You tried to cut off my tongue, but it didn't work" (202)

With this outburst, the teenage Maxine begins to find her voice. Her mother responds to some of these charges and Kingston begins to understand that to get answers, she must speak up. Like Ts'ai Yen, who needed to find a way to communicate and connect with her sons and stumbled upon it through music, Kingston's outburst helped her to understand parts of her mother's culture and herself a little better. It allows her to see that her mother has been, perhaps, doing all she could within a system in which she must live, while trying to raise girls who will not just become "wives or slaves" (19).

> "In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch." (Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* 3)

Amy Tan

Not all Chinese American girls have the same experience in America. Kingston's mother was more subtle in her championing of the value of girls in Chinese culture, by carefully weaving strong women characters throughout the stories she told her daughters. For Amy Tan, the experience was quite different. Tan's mother grew up in China, the girl child in a wealthy household, whereas Kingston's mother was from a small village and her family farmed the land. The manner in which each of these mothers grew up colored the way she saw herself and her daughter(s) in the world.

Daisy Tan, Amy Tan's mother, was treated well while growing up, despite the fact that her mother (Amy Tan's grandmother) committed suicide and thus, disgraced herself and the family. Daisy watched her mother (Jingmei) die. Amy Tan writes in *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings* (2003) of what drove her grandmother, a widow, to suicide:

> … [A] rich man who like to collect pretty women spotted my grandmother and had one of his wives invite her to the house for a few days to play mah jong. One night he raped her, making her an outcast. My grandmother became a concubine to the rich man, and took her young daughter to live on an island near Shanghai. She left her son behind, to save his face. After she gave birth to a baby boy, the rich man's first son, she killed herself by swallowing raw opium… (102)

Daisy grew up seeing how unfairly women in China were treated, but it was when she was given in marriage to a man who emotionally and physically abused her, that she truly understood how powerless women were. The life experiences of Daisy Tan are the central influence in the writings of Amy Tan and how the writer views her position in the world.

Daisy Tan and the Kitchen God

The Opposite of Fate is a non-fiction text in which Tan muses on various aspects of her life including family, writing, travel and marriage. In the chapter "Last Week," Tan writes that she wrote her novel *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991) about her mother's life (82). The name of the story is derived from the Chinese Kitchen God, Zao Shen. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* this god watches the family from his "place above the kitchen stove" and then "makes an annual report" to the celestial gods on the

family's behavior. His reports will either bring good fortune or ill luck for the new year. The mother in the novel, Winnie Louie, relates a different version of the Kitchen God story to her granddaughter.

In Winnie's version of this ancient story, she recalls how a rich farmer, Zhang, was extremely lucky. His animals were healthy, there were many fish in the river and his wife, Guo, was extremely hard-working. In fact, it was because of his hard-working wife that he was so rich. Unfortunately, Zhang wanted more, so he went out and brought home a new woman, Lady Li. He made Guo cook for his new wife and soon Guo was driven out of their home. Since Zhang's wealth was a result of his hard-working wife Guo, when she left their house, Zhang and his new wife squandered all his wealth and when he no longer had any money, Lady Li left him, and Zhang, destitute, took to begging. One day, ready to die, he passed out in the street and when he awoke, he was in someone's kitchen. He asked the servant who rescued him and she pointed out the window to a woman – Guo – his good hard-working wife. He was so embarrassed, he jumped into the fireplace to hide and he burned up. When he got to heaven he told his story to the Jade Emperor and was rewarded "For having the courage to admit [he was] wrong" and thus became the kitchen god (*KGW* 54-55).

Tan's version of this legend, like Kingston's version of Mu Lan, does not correspond to any other version of this story and both show an understanding of American feminist ideals. Tan is comparing her mother to the wife of the kitchen god; in the novel, the protagonist, Winnie, in relating the story of her first marriage while she was in China, says:

> When Jesus was born, he was already the son of God. I was the daughter of someone who ran away, a big disgrace. And when Jesus suffered, everyone worshipped him. Nobody worshipped me for living with Wen Fu. I was like that wife of Kitchen God. Nobody worshipped her either. He got all the excuses. He got all the credit. (*KGW* 255)

Like Kingston mother, Daisy Tan told her daughter these stories about her past because she adamantly wanted to change her daughter's future. Ms. Tan relates a time a relative asked Tan's mother why she was constantly telling her daughter about the past, noting that it can't be changed, "And my mother replied, 'It *can* be changed. I tell her, so she can tell everyone, tell the whole world so they know what my mother suffered. That's how it *can* be changed'" (*TOOF* 103). Daisy Tan's experiences with men in China shaped her life and formed her ideas on how women should be treated and brought her to the opinion that men should not always get a pass simply because of their sex. While Amy Tan did not always understand or get along with her mother, she readily admits that their relationship had "to do with a mother who has helped her daughter see the world in a special way" (*TOOF* 109). Tan furthers the exploration of the relationships between mothers and daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), her most famous novel.

The Joy Luck Club **and Voice**

Stylistically speaking, Tan begins this novel with a story written to sound like a myth or legend. In the tale, a woman buys a swan at the marketplace in Shanghai. The woman and the swan then fly across the ocean to America and, on the way, the woman tells the swan, "In America I will have a daughter just like me. But over there nobody will say her worth is measured by the loudness of her husband's belch. Over there

nobody will look down on her, because I will make her speak only perfect American English. And over there she will always be too full to swallow any sorrow!" (3). When they arrived in the United States, her swan was taken away from her by customs, and she had to fill out so many forms that she had forgotten why she had come. The story ends with the woman, now old, wanting to tell her daughter, who does speak perfect English, about her journey and the swan, and her intentions for her daughter, but she cannot do so until she is able to tell the girl in her own perfect English (4).

This communication problem between the two generations is indeed a theme explored by Tan in the novel. The essay "Chinese American Women, Language, and Moving Subjectivity" (1995) by Victoria Chen, explores the use of language in *The Woman Warrior* and *The Joy Luck Club*. When addressing Tan's use of the myth-like story, Chen writes:

> The woman's desire for her daughter to speak perfect American English foregrounds the problems and difficulties of communicating and translating between the different languages that they speak. The American Dream eventually eludes the immigrant woman beyond her best intentions. Mastering this imaginary perfect English for the American-born daughter turns out not to be a simple ticket to American success. (3)

In the story, the mother naively believes that her daughter, simply because she speaks English like an American, will not have to deal with "the racism and sexism that belies the American dream" (Chen 4). This older generation, despite the discrimination that they have experienced, want to believe that America will be different for their daughters.

What their daughters write about tells America that it is still a work in progress; the stereotypes about Asian women are still out there, though they are slowly diminishing.

In the text *Opening Acts…* (2015), which explores the openings of different novels by different American women authors, author Catherine Romagnolo reveals how these beginnings help the women set the tone for the way they handle difficult topics. This tone setting allows them to gain some power over it. Ms. Romagnolo, choosing to address the opening of Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* writes:

> …Tan's primary discursive beginning marks the way "America" strips the [the mother] of her past and her idealized hopes for the future in the United States and excludes her from an American national identity: … . By opening with this metamyth, a narrative/myth that comments upon myths of origin, Tan's novel foregrounds the ideological implications of a search for beginnings. (87)

Tan is writing a novel that involves a generation of women who were born in China and their daughters who were born in America. The hopes and dreams that accompany immigrants to the United States are idealized and often not easily accomplished. By using symbols in her "metamyth", that of the Swan, representing China, and the mention of Coca-Cola, representing America (87), Tan is already blending the cultures. Romagnolo goes on to say that the effect of this myth, "is not a reconciliation of contradictions – assimilation and nativism – but a dialogic representation of an immigrant experience that struggles with both of these impulses" (89).

It is not just the outside world with which these Chinese American daughters have to deal; these young women are also trying to find a way to please their China-born

mothers, and as in the meta-myth that opens the novel, the two groups cannot find the words to communicate with each other. In the opening chapter of *The Joy Luck Club*, narrator Jing-Mei Woo says when remembering a time her mother tried to explain the differences between Jewish mah jong and Chinese mah jong, "These kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different languages, which we did. I talked to her in English, she answered back in Chinese" (23). Jing-Mei goes on to muse, "My mother and I never really understood one another. We translated each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more" (27). This mother daughter communication problem is felt by all the women of the younger generation in the novel and it is what Tan explores to its conclusion.

Zenobia Mistri explores the "theme of maternal heritage" in her essay "Discovering the Ethnic Name and Genealogical Tie in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club"* (1998). Mistri notes that part of this misunderstanding stems from the idea that the daughters, all American-born, do not listen, understand, or respect "the power, strength, and wisdom of her Chinese mother" (251). The daughters do not understand their mothers and are, to a degree ashamed of them and their foreign behaviors, but what frustrates the mothers is the daughters "unwillingness to see the power of combining both American and Chinese heritage." The mothers do not want their daughters to be Chinese; they want them to be the best combination of both worlds (210). These Chinese mothers fear "that the genealogical chain that links up with the foundational world of the ancestors will be broken" (212) if they cannot get their daughters to hear the wisdom they wish to impart.

Tan's use of myth and stories, from the creation of a myth to the alteration / embellishment of others, are a means of empowering women in an extremely patriarchal society. Yuan Yuan writes, "In that case [Tan's alteration of the Kitchen God's story], she has transformed an absent text into a powerful narrative for the purpose of domination. She is using the China narrative to establish and reinforce her present authoritative position in America" (215). Her mother, Daisy Tan, was able to escape China and a tyrannous marriage to enter American life as a much freer woman and she wants that same freedom for her daughter.

Literary Criticism

According to the *Literature Resource Center* biography, Frank Chin is a Chinese American writer of plays, novels and short stories, but is also a critic, especially of other Asian American writers who portray Asians in what he feels is a false and stereotypical manner. Chin's main complaint is with Chinese American women writers. He feels they have been tainted by Christianity. He writes in his essay "Come all Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake"(1991):

> Every Chinese American autobiography and work of autobiographical fiction since Yung Wing, from Leong Gor Yun and Jade Wong Snow to Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, has been written by Christian Chinese perpetuating and advancing the stereotype of a Chinese culture so foul, so cruel to women, so perverse, that good Chinese are driven by the moral imperative to kill it. (11)

He goes on to say that "autobiography is not a Chinese form," it is Christian. Real Chinese writers would not be so racist and anti-Chinese. As Christians, these writers are

all confessing their sins and apparently, those sins involve telling the public about experiences that make some Chinese look bad or stereotypical. These women writers also tend to show Chinese men as emasculated and sexually repellent (12). Of course, the flaw in his argument is that if these women are writing from their own experiences, how can their writing be wrong? Should these women continue to portray the quiet, obedient female stereotype to the world so as to not show the male one? Perhaps these women are outliers and their experiences are unusual for a Chinese American woman, but do they not have the right to report their situations as they happened?

Chin is extremely unhappy about Tan opening "*The Joy Luck Club* with a fake Chinese fairy tale" (2) and Kingston's use of, and alteration of, the Mulan myth. He writes, "Myths are, by nature, immutable and unchanging because they are deeply ingrained in the cultural memory, or they are not myths." Mr. Chin says, "Whites, settled in America for hundreds of years, have not lost track of the plots, the characters, or the authors of most cherished fairy tales and adventures told in Western childhood" (3), to which we could inquire as to whether or not he has ever seen a Disney movie? (29). This is, of course, beside the point and obviously incorrect. As Shiamin Kwa and Wilt Idema show in their *Mulan* text, actual Chinese people have been changing this beloved story, without any help from the West, for more than 1500 years. With the exception of the original text, each version of Mulan was embellished to emphasize different aspects of the heroine: she was a patriot; she knew when to act; she was the model of filial piety and loyalty. For Chin to call out Kingston for adulterating the text is prejudicial and an egregious critical misstep on his part; he specifically says, "Until her [Kingston's] first

nonfiction autobiography there was no other Fa Mulan but the real Fa Mulan of 'the Ballad of Mulan'" (50).

In her essay, "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers," Kingston has stated that these reviewers tend to stereotype her and her writing. They write that Asian writers are "inscrutable, mysterious, exotic" and this denies the writers their "common humanness" (57). Ironically, she is being stereotyped as too Chinese, while Chin is saying she is too American. Of course, it is the basic, underlying stereotypical image that White Americans hold in their minds of Asians, which arises in both cases. Yoon Sun Lee writes in the paper "Type, Totality and the Realism of Asian American Literature" (2012) that "Kingston's memoir discloses everywhere the influence of the ethnic identity movement" (423). She is American and she is ethnically Chinese, so when she changes a legend it is "not a presentation or a 'faking' of a Chinese legend but a 'combination' of her Chinese cultural heritage and her present American life into her Chinese American identity as a woman" (Dong 222). Donald C. Goellnicht's essay "'Ethnic Literature's Hot': Asian American Literature, Refugee Cosmopolitanism, and Nam Le's *The Boat*" (2012) asks, "Isn't it the ethnic writer's responsibility to remember and record oppression, abuse, colonial exploitation, murder at all costs?" (33).

Audience

As an American born woman, Kingston, is easily identifiable as Asian, but she has lived the entirety of her life in America. She writes in "Cultural Mis-readings…" how the reviewers choose to be ignorant of the fact that, "I am an American. I am an American writer, who, like other American writers, wants to write the great American novel" (57-58). Because Kingston is writing a memoir and she is the child of Chinese

immigrants, her life story and experiences would be different from the story of a child of Rwandan immigrants or the child of Haitian immigrants. Kingston's goal is to have, as an audience, all of America; now that would be quite a voice.

Amy Tan views critics in a similar fashion, but she is also concerned about how America likes to pigeonhole and label writers. Saying she has achieved the dubious – in her mind – distinction of being categorized as "Required Reading" in some schools and making the "Multicultural Literature" lists in others (*TOOF* 299), she is now subject to students all over the country analyzing and dismembering her prose for academic essays. While she is happy that people are reading her work, Tan does not want students telling her why she wrote something, nor the meanings behind the stories and language; she does not want to be classified as an Asian writer or a Chinese American writer. She writes:

> I have this attitude that American literature, if such a classification exists, should be more democratic than the color of your skin or whether rice or potatoes are served as your fictional dinner table. … Why is it that works of fiction by minority writers are read mainly for the study of class, gender, and race? Why is it so hard to break out of this literary ghetto? (307)

She too, wants to be thought of as an American writer. Admittedly, Tan is Chinese American, but she says her "emotional sensibilities, assumptions, and obsessions are largely American" (310).

Like Kingston, Tan was born in America, but she feels that literature critics who pick up a book by a minority writer immediately have a stereotypical idea of what the book should contain. Or, she writes, the author will be in trouble if the reviewer,

"champions both ethnic correctness and marginalism, and believes your fiction should *not* depict violence, sexual abuse, mixed marriages, superstitions, Chinese as Christians, or mothers who speak in broken English" (311). This list, of course, is Tan's compilation, the result of reading reviews that named all these faults in her fiction. Tan writes from her own experience and the experiences of her family members; so, while she is writing fiction, it is autobiographical fiction; she should not have to sanitize it to make it fit someone else's idea of what the writing of a Chinese American woman should be.

Tan says she writes for many reasons and one of these reasons is that writing is "the ultimate freedom of expression" (323). But, what is she expressing? Ultimately, Tan has written many aspects of her mother's story and how it relates to Tan. She continues to delve into her mother's past to help her, Tan, find her own identity and, in doing so, has found her mother.

This is Tan's journey and despite the growing number of people who read and enjoy her novels, Tan reveals in her essay "Mother Tongue", "I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided on was my mother…" (*TOOF* 278). This revelation comes back to the content of her writing. She is seeking affirmation and acceptance from the one person whose affirmation and acceptance has become the most important to her, her mother, who wanted Amy to become a doctor or a concert pianist, but instead chose to write stories about being Chinese American.

Acceptance and Success in America

The theme of acceptance runs through Tan's stories; the daughter trying to please the mother; the mother who can never be satisfied. She writes in *The Joy Luck Club*, " I (Jing-Mei) sobbed, 'I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!'" (153). Tan receives the affirmation she craves from her mother when, as she writes in "Mother Tongue," "Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: 'So easy to read'" (*TOOF* 279).

The idea of acceptance can also be seen in *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston writes in her "White Tigers" chapter, "I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I *am* worthy of eating the food" (52). After spending her childhood listening to the neighborhood emigrants making derogatory remarks about girls, she is still seeking acceptance and affirmation from her family. Feeding her will not be feeding another family's daughter; it is worthwhile to feed her. She is showing her mother that she will not grow up to be a slave for a man, and that is another sign of success.

Obviously, this pressure to succeed is not limited to Kingston and Tan. Goellnicht says of Nam Le's writing:

> Writing stories of 'boat people,' he hopes, will be a vehicle for proving to his father the value of writing as a career, itself a significant issue for many Asian American writers who are the children of immigrants and who must deal with the conflict between the pressures to be economically and professionally successful and their own desires to create art. (32)

Nam Le gave up a "career as a lawyer – a job that made his father proud – to become a writer" (32). These immigrant parents have come to a foreign land so that their children can be successful and, in general, they do not view writing as a way to become prosperous.

The Importance of story telling

While these mothers are less accepting of their daughters writing as a career, stories are the immigrants' stock-in-trade. It is Kingston's and Tan's mothers who tell them stories of China. Marc Singer writes in "Moving Forward to Reach the Past: The Dialogics of Time in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*," "Jing-mei perceives that the older women circulate these tales around the mah jong table to comfort themselves, indicating storytelling's power to reshape reality" (237). The women share stories of the past with their friends, who can relate to these experiences, but it is their daughters who are meant to benefit from the women's experiences.

All mothers want their children to have a better life than they themselves had, but in the case of Amy Tan's mother, Mrs. Tan made it her mission that Amy would break free of the patriarchal tyranny Daisy Tan experienced in China. The only way she knew to do this was through stories of the past. When Ms. Tan began to hear these stories, after a long period of childhood rebellion, she finally began to understand her mother and, ultimately, her own self. By writing, and rewriting, her mother's story, Tan has delved into her culture and her alteration of the stories reveals her understanding of her mother's mission and her complicity in helping Mrs. Tan carry it out. Singer quotes Walter Shear when he notes, "'Tan seems to place more emphasis on the Chinese identity as the

healing factor' that reunites the family unit and the fictional narrative" (234). It is Tan's exploration of her Chinese past that brings her and her mother closer together.

Maxine Hong Kingston, on the other hand, gets mixed messages from listening to the immigrants in the neighbor and her mother's stories. Kingston listened to the emigres tell her and her sisters how useless girls are, and they experienced the daily favoritism shown toward the boys in the family. But then, "Night after night my mother would talk-story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began, her voice the voice of the heroines in my sleep" (*WW* 19). Kingston's mother is planting ideas of strong women in young Maxine's mind, while at the same time, agreeing with the other neighbors about the worthlessness of girls. Kingston is confused. Yuan Yuan writes, "She has to extricate herself from the identity fabricated by her mother's China narrative and assert her own subject position by reconfiguring bicultural discourse" (217). Kingston spends her childhood, mute part of the time, trying to figure out where she fits in:

> Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is tradition and what is the movies? (*WW* 5-6)

It is this confusion that leads her to yell at her parents, "And I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories" (*WW* 202). But it is this outburst that makes her mother finally speak more plainly to her and get her to understand a little more of her culture.

Yuan states, “Kingston finds herself by negotiating her relation to her parents, to a semiotic space defined as China narrative, and to the Chinese culture” (215). It is her alteration of her mother’s stories that help her separate herself from her parents and from China. If the average American looks upon her and sees China, then it is only through her words and her stories that she can claim her American identity.

Another group of people who have a diminished voice in the United States are the Mexican Americans. Chicana women have been writing to change the way they are perceived by the dominant culture and their journey is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two – A Mexican American Female Existence

"La Gritona. Such a funny name for such a lovely *arroyo*. But that's what they called the creek that ran behind the house. Though no one could say whether the woman hollered from anger or pain." (Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek* 46)

From the mid-twentieth century through the present day, no ethnic group has endured the constant unwanted-immigrant status to the degree that Mexican Americans have. While Muslims have incurred the notice and seeming distain of the immigration department in recent years, it is our country's Southern border and the people of Mexican background that are in the news most often. Mexican Americans and Mexicans, regardless of whether they were born in the U.S.A. or in Mexico, are treated as unwanted immigrants. The poor treatment and stereotyping of all Mexicans is, sadly, not unusual; so, several American women of Mexican descent have shouldered the task of proving their worth to other Americans, both white and Chicano; they are fighting for dignity, respect and an equal voice in American society; not an image based on a stereotype. This desire to dismantle stereotypes and gain respect has led Chicana writers, Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, to resurrect Aztec goddesses and revision female legends, including La Llorona (the Weeping Woman), and La Malinche, to exhibit the power of the Chicana.

Mexicans in America

Unlike the Chinese Americans in the previous chapter, many Mexican Americans are not immigrants to this country. According to the Pew Research Center (2013),

"Mexicans are by far the largest Hispanic origin population in the U.S. …" with a total of 33.7 million people (Gonzalez-Barrera, et al). Part of the reason for this is, of course, that at one time, a good portion of the United States belonged to Mexico. Sonia Hernandez, in her essay "The Legacy of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on *Tejanos'* Land" (2004) states, "In 1846, the Americans waged war on Mexico under the ideology of Manifest Destiny[12]" (101). After the United States annexed Texas, which understandably caused considerable diplomatic problems between the U.S. and Mexico, war broke out. Hernandez states, "The Mexican American War turned out to be very costly to Mexico. In just two years, the United States acquired the entire Southwest, almost one million square miles, including the present-day states of California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and part of Colorado" (101). Thus, upon the "signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo[13], Mexican citizens were converted into American citizens overnight" (Hernandez 102). The slogan of the immigrant rights movement, Socialistworker.org, embodies this fact, "'We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us'" (D'Amato 13). Many Mexicans, living in the territory that Mexico ceded to the U.S.A. following the war, were given the option of returning to Mexican land or remaining in what was now the U.S.A. "Those who decided to stay relied on the treaty to protect their rights as citizens… The treaty guaranteed those basic rights such as liberty, property, and religion of those…who chose to remain in the ceded territory." This, of course, did not happen.

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[12] "Jingoistic tenet holding that territorial expansion of the U.S. is not only inevitable but divinely ordained. The phrase was first used by the American journalist John Louis O'Sullivan (1813-95), in and editorial supporting annexation of Texas,…" ("Manifest Destiny" Funk & Wagnalls).

[13] "The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican War between the United States and Mexico. Signed on February 2, 1848, the treaty established the southern boundary of the United States as the Rio Grande River.… In exchange the United States offered $15 million in compensation to Mexico and assumed the debts of the Mexican government to U.S. citizens" ("Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" *The American Economy*).

The people who chose to stay, lost their lands and their civil rights (Hernandez 102). Hernandez goes on to describe how the guarantee of these rights, including the right to keep their lands, were contained in "Article X" which was deleted when the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty. She claims, "…if Article X was ratified, many *Tejanos*[14] could reclaim their land grants" (103), but as the migration of white Americans to the Texas area increased following the war, the Anglos were able to wrest control of the land and thus gain control of the economy and politics (104). The Tejanos became second-class citizens in a land that they had once owned.

Discrimination

Gloria Anzaldua is one person who experienced this first-hand. She is described by the Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia (2013) as an "American writer and scholar", but she was also an activist for Chicana and gay rights, among other things. It goes on to say, *"*Anzaldúa is best known as the founder of border theory, which explores the geographical, bodily, and emotional conflicts inherent in Chicano identity" (Ranft). In the essay "The Legacy of Gloria Anzaldua: Finding a Place for Women of Color in Academia" (2012), author Melissa Castillo-Garsow writes, "Gloria Anzaldua is a US woman of color who has found a place in the academy and the English canon" (3). Castillo-Garsow goes on to say that for the longest time, if a student was attempting to study Latina literature, Anzaldua was one of the few authors put forth by the academic world (3). A prolific writer, who could easily jump back and forth between academic writing and colloquial Spanglish, Anzaldua chose to explore and expose the plight of

[14] "a Texan of Hispanic descent" ("Tejano" Merriam-Webster).

those who were invisible in American society. In *Borderlands: La Frontera* (2012) Anzaldua opens with an essay titled "The Homeland, Aztlan / *El otro Mexico*" in which she writes, "Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens – whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos[15], Indians or Blacks…. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites" (25-26). Anzaldua was born in the United States, but she and her family, living on the same land in Texas for generations, experienced prejudice because of their Mexican heritage. This treatment shaped her and her views on American minority relations and provided her with a lifetime of writing material.

Elaborating upon this point of prejudice and inequality, in his article "Mexico, America, and the Continental Divide" (2007), author Charles Rappleye, referring to the period of time from 1970 to 2005, notes, "Of all the advanced countries, the US has received more immigrants than any other by half, and most of them from Mexico. To look at it another way, close to 10 percent of all people born in Mexico now reside in the United States" (64). This is a very large group of people to marginalize and discriminate against. On the one hand, the United States talks about illegal immigrants, and how they must be deported because of the damage to the economy, while on the other hand, we rely upon these people for cheap labor, especially in farming and manufacturing. The migrant labor force from Mexico began with F.D. Roosevelt's "Bracero Program" during World War II. These workers were brought in from Mexico to keep the country running

[15] "an American and especially a man or boy of Mexican descent" ("Chicano" Merriam-Webster), thus a female would be a Chicana

while the American men were off fighting the war; but when the war was over, the farmers were happy to continue paying the migrant workers low wages and "the program was left in place" (Rappleye 64-65). Americans, to this day, continue to have a split personality when it comes to these workers.

From people of Mexican descent who were born in the USA, to legal immigrants, to illegal immigrants, the United States is the place that a great many people of this ethnic background call home. Whether native or immigrant, this group understandably clings to their Spanish tongue, as language is a central aspect of any culture. Latinos / Hispanics are easily marked as soon as they open their mouths to speak and this language barrier separates them from many Americans; too many Americans feel that people living in this country should speak English. For Gloria Anzaldua, denying her her native tongue is denying her. She writes, "if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to my linguistic identity – I am my language" (*Borderlands* 81).

Outside of language, all immigrant groups come to the United States with the culture of the old country in hand; this includes traditions, food, and stories. As first generation American women, these female children of immigrants are assimilated to American culture while deciding what aspects of the old culture they would like to hold onto. Sandra Cisneros, daughter of a Mexican American mother and a Mexican father, knew from a young age which part of Mexican tradition she could jettison. In her essay "Only Daughter" (1990), she explores what it meant for her to grow up as the "only daughter of a working-class family of nine." With six brothers, she was forced to spend a great deal of time by herself because, in her family's Mexican culture, boys did not play

with girls, but she utilized her time wisely and read and thought and prepared for her future life as a writer. The biggest barrier to her future life as a writer was her father's Mexican culture; she writes, "Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife." As noted by Kingston, from the previous chapter, whose Chinese cultural background devalued women, "when you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers" (*WW* 46), Cisneros' culture holds similar beliefs, raising the value of boys over that of girls. This is a result of the conquistadors' patriarchal society and the resulting replacement of the Aztec goddesses with gods and finally, the Roman Catholic religion. Cisneros writes that her father would say, "'I have seven sons.' To anyone who would listen. … As if he deserved a medal from the state." She describes how she felt like she was "being erased." Anzaldua, on a similar topic, writes in "La Prieta" of her mother, "Though she loved me she would only show it covertly – in the tone of her voice, in a look. Not so with my brothers – there it was visible for all the world to see. … Her allegiance was and is to her male children, not the female" (*Bridge* 201). With the burden of proving their worth to those who share their Mexican culture and the American public, Cisneros, Anzaldua and Moraga, are refurbishing some legendary and divine females, rescuing them from the slanderous interpretations of their stories by Chicanos. In doing so, they empower themselves and other Chicanas who have endured cultural disenfranchisement and personal invisibility en route to greater linguistic and cultural autonomy.

Sandra Cisneros and La Llorona

In the book *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991),* the titular story has author Sandra Cisneros exploring the marriage of a Mexican woman, really a young,

romantic girl, to an older man. This young lady, Cleofilas, must discard all her previous romantic thoughts and hopes she has ever harbored about her own wedding and marriage, and submit to the wants of her future husband: a short engagement, a home she had no part in choosing, a husband she had no part in choosing, and a move to a new country, for fiancé Juan Pedro's house was across the border in the U.S.A. Immediately following their wedding, the couple moves to their home in Seguin and not long thereafter, he hit her; "…he slapped her once, and then again, and again, until the lip split and bled an orchid of blood, she didn't fight back, and she didn't break into tears" (47). Each time he does this to her, he breaks down and cries in her lap asking forgiveness; and so a pattern is established.

The role and expectations for a Mexican woman or Chicana woman thus play out in Cisneros' short story. Cleofilas' daily existence is filled with chores and banishing thoughts of her husband's bad traits and habits because "This is the man I've waited my whole life for." She thinks, "this man, this father, this rival, this keeper, this lord, this master, this husband till kingdom come" (49). This is what she was raised to do, become someone's wife, to become a mother, to obey and not speak up, to take a beating and keep her mouth shut. She grew up wanting passion, "The kind the books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one's life, and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever the cost" (44). She wanted her life to follow the same pattern as those glamorous women, so she does not know what to do with her situation. Cleofilas knows that to return home to her father's house "with one baby on her hip and one in the oven" (50) would be a disgrace. Meanwhile, the newspapers are filled with stories of husbands killing their wives, and Cleofilas, after Juan Pedro's latest

assault on her (a thrown book, which leaves a welt on her cheek), begins to worry the same may happen to her (52). While considering her situation, she ponders the creek behind their house, "Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children" (51). She begins to believe that the legendary woman is calling to her. There must be a better way to extract herself from her present situation than suicide and murder.

La Llorona's Identity

La Llorona's origins are obscure and scholars offer different opinions on the source of her legend. The scholar of Chicano studies, Cordelia Candelaria, is one of the Chicana women trying to set the record straight about la Llorona. In her article "Letting La Llorona Go or Rereading History's Tender Mercies" (1993), writes:

> The mythic Weeping woman of Mexican-Chicana/o culture, La Llorona is, along with the Virgin of Guadalupe, arguably the most persistent and well-known mestizo[16] folk legend to have emerged from the era of the Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City) in 1521. Many historians and folklorists consider the indigenous woman La Malinche, who was given by her chief to the Spanish conqueror Hernan Cortes, as the historical source for La Llorona.

La Llorona, especially in recent years, has been studied and incorporated into a great deal of Chicana literature. Described for years as a pitiful creature, since the time of the

[16] a person of mixed blood; *specifically* **:** a person of mixed European and American Indian ancestry ("Mestizo" Merriam-Webster). Generally half-Indian (Aztec, Inca, etc.), half-Spanish.

Women's Right Movement her image has been refurbished and she now tends to denote action and independence in feminist literature. In the essay "The Evolving Legend of La Llorona" (2015) author Amy Fuller "explores the complex origins" (39) of this legend and offers this initial description:

> she is often presented as a banshee-type: an apparition of a woman dressed in white, often found by lakes or rivers, sometimes at crossroads, who cries into the night for her lost children, whom she has killed. The infanticide is sometimes carried out with a knife or dagger, but very often, the children have been drowned. Her crime is usually committed in a fit of madness after having found out about an unfaithful lover or husband who leaves her to marry a woman of higher status. After realizing what she has done, she usually kills herself. (39)

This is the stuff of horror movies and ghost tales; for generations, Mexican and Mexican American men have used her as a symbol of women's weak character and untrustworthiness.

La Llorona's Origins with the Aztec Goddesses

The origin of this woman, this apparition, this legend, varies. As noted by Candelaria above, some believe her story is based on the life of La Malinche, "Cortes' translator and concubine" (Fuller 40). Fuller also notes that there are a few Aztec goddesses on whom La Llorona may be based. "The first is Ciuacoatl (snake-woman), described as 'a savage beast and an evil woman' who 'appeared in white' and who would walk at night 'weeping and wailing'. She is also described as an 'omen of war'" (39-40). Another possible goddess La Llorona may be based upon is Coatlicue "(she of the snaky

skirt), [the] mother of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of war. … She waits for her son to return to her from war and weeps and mourns for him while he is gone" (40). The final possibility, according to Fuller, is "Chalchiuhtlicue (the Jade-skirted one) … goddess of the waters and the elder sister of the rain god, Tlaloc. She was said to drown people and overturn boats. Ceremonies in honour of the rain gods, including Chalchiuhtlicue, involved the sacrifice of children" (40). While these goddesses are often described by their evil aspects, they all had dual natures, which the Aztec believed was a part of all people. For example, Coatlicue, is also "like other Mexican earth goddesses…the great genetrix and renewer of vegetation and a goddess of death and the underworld" (Granziera 252).

In the essay "Words, Worlds in Our Heads: Reclaiming La Llorona's Aztecan Antecedents in Glorias Anzaldua's 'My Black Angelos'" (2003), author Domino Renee Perez asserts that for Anzaldua, the goddesses are La Llorona's origin. She writes, "Anzaldua recuperates the goddesses who were discredited and dispossessed of their authority following the advent of Christianity" (56). By doing so, Anzaldua is "recover[ing] displaced sources of Chicana historic power" (53). "By embracing La Llorona, the narrator [of the poem "My Black Angelos"] embraces the indigenous part of herself that she has been taught to fear" (58). Perez claims that Anzaldua, in this poem, redeems the reputation of La Llorona, and restores the honor and greatness that is due these goddesses. At the same time, in the poem Anzaldua "exorcises the patriarchal construction of La Llorona she [the narrator] has internalized in favor of an empowering construction rooted in her indigenous ancestry" (59). Anzaldua begins her poem invoking Llorona: "In the night I hear her soft whimper/ … She is crying for the dead child / the

lover gone, the lover not yet come:" *(Borderlands* 206). But in the next stanza, Llorona transforms into one, or both, of the goddesses Cihuacoatl and/or Coatlicue (Perez 56). Anzaldua writes:

> Taloned hand on my shoulder
>
> behind me putting words, worlds in my head
>
> turning, her hot breath
>
> she picks the meat stuck between my teeth
>
> with her snake tongue
>
> sucks the smoked lint from my lungs
>
> with her long black nails
>
> plucks lice from my hair. (206)

This horrifying description of the goddess(es) is quite in keeping with what is known about these scary deities and their bloodcurdling deeds. Ann De Leon writes in her article "Coatlicue or How to Write the Dismembered Body" (2010), when a statue of Coatlicue was unearthed in Mexico City in 1790, it was transferred to the university to be studied; but "the professors buried her under the patio of the university, as they did not want the Mexican youth to be exposed to such a horrible sight" (260). The name Coatlique translates to "Snakes-her-skirt" and De Leon notes that some "might be repulsed at the violent nature of dismembered hands, hearts, snakes, and skulls that configure her body" (260). Perez notes that Cihuacoatl "claims a substantial position as the most threatening and effective of all the female figures in the Aztec pantheon.… Her principal

function…was to incite war so that her son, Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, could secure victory" (55). Here, Perez makes Cihuacoatl the mother of Huitzilopochtli, whereas most scholars agree that Coatlicue was the mother of the war god, not Cihuacoatl. Anzaldua, in making La Llorona a descendant of these goddesses, rather than a woman scorned, lends her new authority and, by the end of the poem, the narrator is content to "roam with the souls of the dead" (207).

La Llorona: Her uses and need for Refurbishment

Mothers use La Llorona as a cautionary tale, telling their children not to wander off or La Llorona will take them away because she is always out searching for her lost children and will happily take any child as a replacement. Other times she serves as a balm for neglected wives when "she becomes visible to the wayward husband who is out late, drinking, and when he approaches her, she turns into an ugly horse-faced hag, scaring him into swearing abstinence forever" (Castro 140). While the Weeping Woman has been used to frighten by being made into a bogey-man type character, Candelaria writes that its real harm is:

> it teaches that girls get punished for conduct for which men are rewarded; that pleasure, especially sexual gratification, is sinful; that female independence and personal agency create monsters capable of destroying even their offspring; that children are handy pawns in the revenge chess of female jealousy; and other lessons of scapegoat morality. ("Letting La Llorona Go…")

Returning to Cleofilas in "Woman Hollering …", Ana Maria Carbonell writes, "Within folkloric literature … La Llorona emerges as *both* a figure of maternal betrayal and

maternal resistance," but Cisneros has created in Cleofilas "a defiant Llorona heroine" (54). Cleofilas, appears at the clinic for a "sonogram" after begging her husband to allow her a prenatal visit. Before he allows her to go, she must promise him that she will lie about the origins of all the bruises on her body; but while she is there, she breaks down and asks the nurse, Graciela, to help her find a way out of her situation. Graciela then calls a friend who agrees to take Cleofilas and her son to the Greyhound bus station the next Thursday (54).

When Felice, the nurse's friend, picks up Cleofilas and her son, Juan Pedrito, at the Cash and Carry, "everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleofilas." Felice owned and drove a pick-up truck, did not have a husband, and, when they drove across La Gritona, she "opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi" (55). Felice appreciated the fact that this arroyo was named for a woman, in an area where so few things were. She hollers to honor the woman for whom the creek is named. Felice's enthusiasm is infectious because soon, "Felice began laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water" (56). Cleofilas is hollering for joy and freedom. Carbonell writes that Cleofilas, "regains her voice by transforming herself from a stereotypical Llorona figure, a weeping victim, to a *Gritona*, a hollering warrior" (64). It is only fitting that the arroyo, on the American side of the border, becomes the hollering woman instead of the wailing woman. For Cleofilas, to protect her children and herself, she needs to remove the Weeping Woman from her thoughts, and learn to holler and remove herself from her destructive situation. As Monica Montelongo Flores (2013) writes, Cisneros "giv[es] agency to La Llorona's voice, transforming the tragic into the political and liberated" (44).

This transformation, maybe even redemption, of La Llorona and La Malinche, have been increasing over the past few decades, especially in Mexican American texts. Carbonell's view is such:

> This pervasive denigration of female agency in Mexican culture has created the well-known virgin-versus-whore paradigm, a dualistic structure that attempts to police female behavior by extolling the Virgin's passivity and selflessness while denigrating figures who take action, such as La Malinche and La Llorona, as selfish, treacherous and destructive. (56)

La Lorona, was said to have killed her children after she "was abandoned by her husband, or lover" (Castro 140). It is often reported that this husband or lover was of a higher status than she and he left to marry a woman of his own class. Bess Lomax Hawes (1968) found reports that would give La Llorona good reason to kill her children, "When the Spanish arrived in Mexico, they were impressed by the beauty of the Indian children. The Spanish took the children (the most beautiful) and gave them to their wives. Some of the Indian women killed their children in order to keep the Spaniards from taking them" (159). If there were any possibility that the father of her children would take those children and give them to his upper-class wife, she, the true mother, would rather they be dead. It is only after carrying out this tragic deed that she regrets her actions and goes wandering in search of her babies.

La Llorona in *Ceremony*?

Leslie Marmon Silko, generally identified as Laguna Pueblo, is actually of mixed heritage. According to poetryfoundation.org, she is "of Laguna Pueblo, Mexican, and

Anglo-American heritage." Marmon Silko's first novel, *Ceremony,* draws on elements of her varied heritage to attain healing for her protagonist, Tayo, a psychically scarred World War II battle veteran, who is also of mixed heritage. Monica Montelongo Flores, in the essay "Placing La Llorona as Curandera: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Chicana Cultural Theory" (2013), contends that "Transforming La Llorona from a binary positionality opens the possibility for La Llorona to be more than a feminist agent, but a healing figure. The healing figure I appropriate for La Llorona is that the curandera – the Mexican American folk healer" (45).

Flores explains the importance of the curandera in the Mexican American communities, noting that for many, especially the poor, these healers are their only option. She writes:

> Curandera/os serve an important role in the well-being of their patients, while re-uniting the history of the Indigenity within Mexican American communities. The Curandera, then, represents the hybridization of healing practices. Similarly, La Llorona heals via her ability to bridge past and present, Western and Indigenous, due to the elasticity of her myth and meaning. (45)

Thus, Tayo, the protagonist in *Ceremony,* who is damaged mentally and this affects him physically, needs someone who can help him achieve wellness in both realms.

In Flores's reading of La Llorona, she too, conflates the Weeping Woman with La Malinche, saying that Malinche, like La Llorona has a "villainous quality" but when Chicanas view La Llorona as Malinche, they imagine that she "drowns her children, …not out of madness," but to save their cultural identity (45). It is this idea of cultural

identity, and coming to terms with it, that helps Black Swan, a La Llorona figure, become a part of Tayo's healing, despite the fact that their encounter occurs prior to Tayo going to war.

The core of Flores's argument stems from when Night Swan, a highly skilled Flamenco dancer, tells the story of when her white, married lover left her. When he tries to blame her for the affair, calling her a "Witch" and a "Whore" (79), she will not break down. He then threatens to "run her out of town" because he is "somebody" (79). That night, her dancing takes on a maniacal "ecstacy" and she tells Tayo's Uncle Josiah:

> "I knew nothing of minutes or hours. There were changes I could feel; the boards of the dance floor began to flex and glisten. The creaking of the wood became a moan and a cry; my balance was precarious as if the floor were no longer level. And then I could feel something breaking under my feet, the heels of my dancing shoes sinking into something crushed dark until the balance and smoothness were restored once again to the dance floor." (79)

Shortly thereafter, her lover's wife came into the bar to report that he had been trampled to death by his own horses (80). Night Swan, rather than assuming the Weeping Woman mode and killing her children because her man left her, took things into her own hands and killed him; she becomes La Llorona, "an agent of resistance" (Flores 48). Flores also infers that Night Swan was pregnant at the time with her White lover's child. Flores writes:

> Silko empowers La Llorona through Night Swan's dance. Night Swan saved herself, her daughter, and ultimately her granddaughters, by ending her lover's

> life. Night Swan saved the lives of her child and grandchildren directly by changing the legacy of La Llorona as the racially-mixed child is allowed to live. (48)

Tayo, also racially mixed, and a bit of an outcast in the Pueblo community, is given value through this story and portrayed as someone worth saving.

In Silko's novel, the central healer for Tayo is Betonie. Black Swan is Mexican and Betonie tells Tayo that his grandmother was Mexican. Throughout the novel, Tayo is referred to half-white, but both Black Swan and Betonie reference Tayo's hazel eyes, telling him they are Mexican eyes. Tayo's mother, Laura, shamed the Pueblo community by sleeping with white men and then getting pregnant by an outsider. Flores calls Laura a Malinche character (44) and Tayo must try to live with the shame associated with his mother's traitorous acts and the community's view of his impure background.

In many respects, the Night Swan story is a small part of the overall healing in *Ceremony*. Flores has endowed it with more meaning and importance than it deserves. The idea that Black Swan is a La Llorona figure is understandable, but her part in the healing of Tayo does not work with the sequence of the story. It is Betonie, a medicine man, who leads Tayo in the ceremony in which he healed himself. The real importance of the small episode that contains Black Swan's story is the acceptance it shows and the value it adds to a racially mixed person who has not experienced much of that; Tayo is representative of La Malinche's mixed blood child, the first of La Raza.

La Malinche

With the La Malinche story so often fused with that of La Llorona, it is important to investigate this historical figure. In *Chicano Folklore* (2001) by Rafaela G. Castro, La Malinche, identified as an Aztec princess, who, as a child, was sold into slavery "supposedly by her own mother." When Cortes arrived in Mexico, she was given to him as a slave; because of her facility with language, she became his translator and soon thereafter, his mistress (149). She is known by several names, including: La Malinche[17], Malintzin, Dona Marina[18], La Chingada[19], La Lengua[20], and Malinal[21]. Despite her unfortunate beginnings, Chicano culture looks upon her as a betrayer of her people because she informed Cortes about "a planned ambush at Cholula, which saved his life and caused the massacre of thousands of Indians." Thus, in their culture "a person who turns his back on his people is call [sic] a *malinchero* or, if it's a woman who has betrayed her community, a *malinche*" (Castro 150). At the same time, La Malinche is considered the mother of "*la raza cosmica* (the cosmic race)", because of the mixed blood (mestizo) child she had with Cortes (Castro 150). Sometime after the massacre at Cholula, Cortes married off La Malinche to one of his lieutenants (sometimes reported as a captain), Juan Jaramillo, where she, for the most part, passed out of history (Godayol 65). With a story like this, it is easy to see why she is often linked with La Llorona. Her betrayal at the hands of the aristocratic Cortes lends support in that aspect, but history

[17] It is believed that this name came about because the Spaniards could not properly pronounce her Aztec name Malintzin (Castro 149).
[18] The name Cortes gave her at her Christening (Candelaria 1980 1).
[19] Variously translated as: the raped one (Castro 150), "the penetrated one" (Sutanto 20); one penetrated by force (Fuller); "the fucked one" (Raez Padilla 207).
[20] The Tongue, or Cortes' tongue - because she was Cortes' translator (Castro 150).
[21] "Believed to have originally been named Malinal after 'Malinalli,' the day of her birth, as was the custom of the time" (Candelaria 1980 2).

does not report her killing her their child. In fact, the Mexicans view this child, a son, as the beginning of La Raza. In this culture, unlike the dual nature of the gods and goddesses in the Aztec culture, women are depicted in a rather one-dimensional manner.

Of the three most recognized Mexican women: The Virgin of Guadalupe, La Llorona, and La Malinche, two are known for committing heinous deeds; thus, many Chicana writers have made a concerted effort to remake the tarnished images of these two women. Raez Padilla writes that because the "myths and mythological women" are colored by male perspectives, they have been read and seen "as texts of female colonial passivity." He continues:

> It is precisely from this different perspective that Chicana writers have unearthed Aztec female legendary figures as complex, active, polyvalent mythological women who integrate both life and death, womb and grave, in the same way as the Aztec goddess Coatlicue: she was a loving mother…but also the insatiable monster that devoured everything that lived. (207)

Cordelia Candelaria, in "Letting La Llorona Go…" writes, "Thus the image of La Malinche as traitor and whore, which gave rise to the Llorona folk legend … lacks legitimacy except as a reflection of masculinist versions of power." In another Candelaria essay, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype" (1980), she does conclude that without her assistance, Cortes may "not have been *the* Conqueror of the Aztecs: …[but] she does not deserve blame for the destruction of the Aztec Empire" (6). The Empire was beset by infighting and unrest, so, many contend, Cortes managed to be in the right place at the right time.

Candelaria does say that the story of La Malinche can be read "as an account of the prototypical Chicana feminist. La Malinche embodies … intelligence, initiative, adaptability, and leadership" (6). These are all traits that modern Mexican American women strive for, so why not adopt this woman as a role model? Norma Alarcon writes, "Consciously and unconsciously the Mexican/Chicano patriarchal perspective assigns the role of servitude to women…" (185), and so this idea, must be turned on its head. In the essay "Crying for Food…" (2014), Raez Padilla is making a case for Chicana writers making use of Aztec mythology and folk legends in their literature to fight the various shames held against them as a seemingly alien race in the United States and as female members of that race (206). It is via this thinking that Sandra Cisneros, also from the collection *Woman Hollering Creek*, introduces the readers to Clemencia, the protagonist of the short story "Never Marry a Mexican." Sutanto (2016) writes that Cisneros is "reinterpret[ing] the figure of La Malinche in the positive light [as] a survivor; rather than as a victim of patriarchal domination" (20).

La Malinche in "Never Marry a Mexican"

Clemencia says, "Borrowed. That's how I've had my men" (69). Swearing that she will never marry "because I'm too romantic for marriage" (69), she has affairs with various men, many married. It was one of these married men, her art teacher, who left a psychic mark and caused her to change her mind about marriage and men. Drew, the art teacher, cut off their affair because his wife had just given birth to their child. Clemencia says, "I've been waiting patient as a spider all these years, since I was nineteen and he [her lover's son] was just an idea hovering in his mother's head…" (75); Clemencia has begun sleeping with her ex-lover's son.

Cisneros is evoking Malinche in this story, but an empowered Malinche. Sutanto writes, “Cisneros’s La Malinche is no longer depicted as the victim duped by the patriarchy, but as the survivor who is able to preserve her sense of herself in the dominating patriarchal world” (20). Cisneros makes several connections between her story and the Malinche legend. Her lover called her Malinalli and she, Clemencia, thought he looked like Cortes. While they were making love, he would summon the infamous icon, “My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan” (74) and in doing so, would make Clemencia feel beautiful and worthy of his love. He, Drew, is also not Mexican, or Mexican American; he is of European descent, like Cortes. Then there is the figure of his son. While he is not the offspring of Clemencia, she does refer to herself as “mamita” while having an internal dialogue with the young man, and she says, “These mornings, I fix coffee for me, milk for the boy” (82), as though he were still a small child, while at the same time offering a maternal image of mother’s milk. She knows she has him in her power and she will just bide her time, “Before I snap my teeth” (82).

Cisneros’ story begins with Clemencia remembering her mother’s advice, “Never marry a Mexican” (68). Her mother was Mexican American, born in the United States, but her father, “he was born there, and it’s *not* the same, you know” (68). Clemencia again brings up her mother’s advice when, in her internal dialogue, she is explaining all of this to Drew’s son, describing the relationship she had with his father and “Besides, he could *never* marry *me.* … *Never Marry a Mexican*” (80). This, again, is shades of Cortes and Malinche. The conquistadors had many Indian mistresses, but they would never marry them. They generally abandoned these women when their wives finally arrived from Spain.

While Clemencia may sound like the typical woman scorned, and she does seem to be exacting revenge on Drew by sleeping with his son; Sutanto contends, “Cisneros reverses the role [of Malinche being La Chingada]. Clemencia’s sexuality is masculinized, whereas Drew’s is feminized” (22). This “sexual aggressiveness” (22) is seen when Clemencia says, “You were ashamed to be so naked. Pulled back. But I saw you for what you are, when you opened yourself for me” (Cisneros, “Mexican” 78). Sutanto states, “the negative stereotype of La Malinche as a passive mistress and sexual object of male desire” is reversed into an “active and aggressive sexual subject” (22).

Cisneros on Expectations

Sandra Cisneros published an essay in *Ms Magazine* titled “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess: Unearthing the Racy Past of Mexico’s Most Famous Virgin” (1996). This essay has Cisneros reflecting on growing up Latina and how, “Religion and our culture, our culture and religion, helped to create that blur, a vagueness about what went on ‘down there’” (43). This a culture that keeps its girls ignorant, fearful, embarrassed, and guilt-ridden about sex and what was going on with their own bodies. Cisneros writes, “So much guilt, so much silence, and so much yearning to be loved; no wonder young women find themselves having sex while they are still children, having sex without sexual protection, too ashamed to confide their feelings and fears to anyone” (43).

In this essay Cisneros describes her inability to ask for help with things like birth control, even to the point where she had unprotected sex because she was too embarrassed to speak to a doctor or clinic about birth control (44). Cisneros writes:

> What a culture of denial. Don't get pregnant! But no one tells you how not to. This is why I was so angry for so many years every time I saw *la Virgen de Guadalupe,* my culture's role model for brown women like me. She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus? I never saw any evidence of it. They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them and pointed us women toward out destiny – marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was *puta*hood. (45)

The women in the Mexican American culture were given such unattainable goals that too many of the young girls ended up pregnant and labeled putas[22]. What Cisneros decided was "Discovering sex was like discovering writing. … you had to go beyond the guilt and shame to get to anything good" (45). When Cisneros begins associating La Lupe as Coatlicue, "the creative/destructive goddess" (45), La Lupe becomes *cabrona*[23] (46) and Cisneros becomes able to adapt the Virgen / Lupe into the many types of women she has become over the years. She says, "for me to finally open the door and accept her, she had to be a woman like me," not the mother of God, and not God (46).

While most Chicana writers associate La Llorona with Coatlicue and other Aztec goddesses, Cisneros, out of a desperate need to find some respite in her culture's expectations of girls, and how they might live with these expectations, conflates La Virgen de Guadalupe and Coatlicue, as few other Chicanas do. In the essay "The 'Dual'-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisnero's *The House on Mango Street*" (2010), author Leslie Petty writes on "a conflict that is at the heart of Cisneros's

[22] Spanish – Whore, slut – considered vulgar ("Puta" Dictionary.com)
[23] Considered vulgar – "Bitch" "Puta" "Bastard" ("Cabrona" bab.la)

work: the insistence on culturally defining the world by a rigid set of black/white, good/bad, clean/dirty dualities" (113). Petty quotes an interview that Cisneros did with Pilar Rodriguez-Aranda in *The Americas Review* (1990) in which Cisneros says:

> Certainly that black-white issue, good-bad, it's very prevalent in my work and in other Latinas. We're raised with a Mexican culture that has two role models: La Malinche y la Virgen de Guadalupe. And you know that's a hard route to go, one or the other, there's no in-betweens. (65)

As Cisneros noted in her "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" essay, women raised in this culture have a difficult time coming to terms with the expectations heaped upon them and it takes some doing to escape these presumptions and accept oneself as a good woman, who perhaps, is unmarried and not a virgin. At the same time, they must do this without rejecting their culture.

Female Images in *The House on Mango Street*

Petty writes in "'Dual'ing images…" that the protagonist in *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza, "transcends the good/bad dichotomy associated with these archetypes and becomes a new model for Chicana womanhood: an independent, autonomous artist whose house is of the heart, not of the worshiper, nor of the conqueror" (118). In the third chapter, "Boys and Girls," Esperanza, even as a young girl, already sees the differences between males and females in her culture. She says, "My brothers … got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the house. But outside they can't be seen talking to girls" (8). Also, as a girl, she feels the pressure of being an older sister to Nenny; "She can't play with

those Vargas kids or she'll turn out just like them. And since she comes right after me, she is my responsibility" (8).

In the next chapter, "My Name," Esperanza, named after her great-grandmother, begins to recognize the restrictions put on women in the Mexican culture. "She [her great-grandmother] was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse – which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female – but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong" (10). She further explores this line of thought, saying, "My great-grandmother. …a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier" (10-11). Esperanza, though young, understands the wrongness of this action. Her great-grandmother was treated like a possession, not a person. Someone wanted her and took her with no repercussions for himself, while she spent the rest of her life in sadness.

When, in the chapter "Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin," Esperanza introduces the reader to Louie's cousin Marin, she describes the young woman as wearing "dark nylons all the time and lots of makeup" (23). Petty writes, "the description of Marin immediately aligns her with the darker, more sexual side of Chicana femininity." She adds, "Like Malinche, Marin is living with people who are not her family, and in a sense, she is enslaved" (121). Louie's family is planning "to send her back to her mother with a letter saying she's too much trouble" (*Mango* 26-27). They worry about her beauty and the potential problems it may cause. In addition, it is certainly no accident that her name Marin is a close relation to Marina, the name to which Malinche was baptized.

Like Marin, many of the women in *The House on Mango Street* are enslaved because of their beauty or kept as possessions. Rafaela, of the chapter "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays," is kept locked in her apartment while her husband is out playing dominoes on Tuesdays because he is "afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (79). In the chapter "Sally," the title character is described as "the girl with eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke" (81). Sally's father is afraid because his daughter is so beautiful, so he makes her stay in the house. When she goes off to school, she applies make-up to her eyes and rolls her skirt up, and the boys make up stories about her. Several chapters later, Sally, after briefly staying with Esperanza's family, returns home until "one day Sally's father catches her talking to a boy and the next day she doesn't come to school. And the next. Until the way Sally tells it, he just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt" (93). Eventually, we learn, in the chapter "Linoleum Roses," that Sally married a marshmallow salesman. Esperanza says of Sally, "She says she is in love, but I think she did it to escape" (101). Sally, left at home by her husband, is not allowed to "talk on the telephone. And he doesn't let her look out the window. And he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working" (102); she has exchanged one prison for another. Petty writes:

> Sally perceives marriage as the path for leaving behind the 'bad girl' image that links her to la Malinche as well as the violence she associates with this connection. As a wife she gains responsibility and a propriety of which her culture approves; her sexuality has been contained within the proper confines of

> marriage, and now she has the potential to recreate the Virgin's role as nurturer and worshipped love. (123)

These young women, convicted without a trial because of their beauty and all it portends, must find ways to gain acceptance, generally through marriage, and often at the cost of their own freedom.

Then there are the women in the novel who have been abandoned by their husbands. Rose Vargas, the title character of the chapter "There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn't Know What to Do," "cries every day for the man who left without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come" (29). Her children run wild and she is too tired and beaten down by life to try to get them to behave; soon the neighbors even stop worrying about the safety of these wild children. Esperanza tells the readers of Minerva, another woman on the street, who "is only a little bit older than me but already she has two kids and a husband who left" (84). But Minerva's husband keeps coming back with sorry on his lips. "Next week she comes over black and blue and asks what can she do?" (85). Esperanza, by now, knows the answer is nothing. She will continue to share poetry with Minerva, but cannot do anything else for her.

Petty writes, "Through these connections, Cisneros's text appropriates the Malinche myth, showing that this type of dependence on men for one's importance and security is what leads to violation and abandonment" (122). These women, trained to follow la Virgen, cannot imagine or manage an escape from their situation without a man. Esperanza sees how girls in her culture are treated differently from boys and observes: "In the movies there is always the one with red lips who is beautiful and cruel. She is the

one who drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Her power is her own. She will not give it away." While Esperanza knows she is not beautiful, she says, "I have begun my own quiet war" (89). She will not surrender herself to the power of a man; she will be her own woman. This is Cisneros' message in her essay "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess;" Guadalupe is a woman just as Cisneros is; someone who gave birth (4), a woman who had a real life.

Anzaldua and the Aztec Goddesses

Gloria Anzaldua evokes a different goddess, the serpent goddess, Coatlicue, in great portions of her text, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldua says that her family, like many Chicanos in the Borderlands practiced a "folk Catholicism" with La Virgen, "Indian name … *Coatlalopeuh*. … the central deity connecting us to our Indian ancestry" (49). She goes on to explain how La Virgen is descended from earlier goddesses with *Coatlicue* as the earliest. She tells the reader that Coatlicue is the "creator goddess, she was the mother of the celestial deities, and of *Huitzilopochtli* and his sister *Coyolxauhqui*… Goddess of the Moon" (49). With the coming of the Spanish conquistadors and Roman Catholicism, the Aztec goddesses were usurped by male gods and finally God. Anzaldua claims that the Spanish conquerors desexed Coatlalopeuh turning her into La Virgen (49).

Saying that *Guadalupe* is the most powerful and uniting symbol of her people, Anzaldua writes:

> *La gente Chicana tiene tres madres.* All three are mediators: *Gaudalupe,* 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. (52)

Again, Anzaldua offers another instance of tying together the various Mexican females, goddesses, legends and historical figures, to create stronger models for young Chicanas.

The subject of these goddesses and their stories continue to provide fodder for interpretations and conjecture to modern scholars. In the essay "A New Interpretation of the Aztec Statue Called Coatlicue, 'Snakes-Her-Skirt'" (2008), author Cecelia F. Klien contends that Coatlicue was not killed in the battle between her son and daughter – Huitzilopotchli and Coyoxauhqui, "Rather than dying as an enemy in battle, Coatlicue sacrificed herself voluntarily to provide the Mexica with the warmth, light, and changing seasons that brought them crops, food, and good health" (245). By allowing her own death to happen, she, in a sense, gave birth to the sun and the moon, which was a boon to her people. Patrizia Granziera (2004) asserts, "In Aztec worldview, ritual killing and dismemberment are a necessary transition to rebirth and fertility" (254), and based on the images left of Coatlicue, she was dismembered; according to Klein, "…the god consumed his mother's heart, an act suggesting that she died as a result of heart excision" (231). This is what a good, caring mother would do for her children and this interpretation focuses on the softer side of the deity.

The idea of good mothers, the "Marian devotions" of the Catholic Church, and the conquistadors in Mexico lead to an easy acceptance of the Virgin Mary who quickly became La Virgen de Guadalupe. "Mary's association with nature enabled the indigenous to integrate this 'goddess' into their world vision" (Granziera 250) and allowed the Spaniards to more easily replace the old gods.

Cherrie Moraga, in her text *The Last Generation* (1993), considers the myth of Coyoxauhqui, daughter of Coatlicue. When Coyoxauhqui learns that her mother is pregnant with the god of war (and god of the sun), Huitzilopotchli, "she is incensed" and conspires to kill her mother rather than live in a world "Where War would become God" (73). But, Huitzilopotchli learns of the plot to kill his mother and born, fully armed, immediately kills his sister, "cutting off her head and completely dismembering her body." These body parts were "banished to the darkness and [she] becomes the moon" (73).

Moraga explains that this myth is "enacted every day of our lives, every day that the sun (Huitzilopotchli) rises up from the horizon and the moon (Coyoxauhqui) is obliterated by his light" (74). Moraga says that the Coyoxauhqui's story represents "our attempt to pick up the fragments of our dismembered womanhood and reconstitute ourselves" (74). This is what these Chicanas have been writing for and fighting for. They do not want to be out-shone and obliterated; they want a voice and a part in American society.

Voice and Identity

In Cisneros's first book *The House on Mango Street*, originally published in 1984, the reader can see Cisneros exploring the role of women in the world in which she grew up; these women seem to be seen in a one-dimensional manner. She sees that certain women are treated differently, are regarded with suspicion, and are looked upon as less than worthy. By the end of the end of the novel, the narrator, Esperanza, in the chapter "Beautiful & Cruel," has "decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain" (88). Esperanza sees these women

treated as though they were not as good as other girls, but she also does not agree that they should sacrifice their future happiness just to fit in. She has decided that she will lead her own quiet rebellion against her cultural expectations. By the time Cisneros published *Woman Hollering Creek* in 1991, she is no longer waging a quiet war on her culture's expectations for women; she is hollering it out to the world, she will weep no longer.

The various assignations these women use to refer to themselves and their people – Tejana, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latina, Mestiza, Chicana – all have subtle differences that refer to different identities, all of which are used among themselves, but most Americans choose to ignore these differences and simply called them Mexicans, whether they were born here or not. Gloria Anzaldua, in the essay "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," writes:

> When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly even own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and / or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *Tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas. (*Borderlands* 85)

If a Hispanic is a Spanish-speaking person living in the U.S. (Google.com), that definition could include Mexican Americans, but it could also include Puerto Ricans and people from Columbia or Venezuela, all cultures quite distinct from each other; the same could be said for the designation 'Latino'. These are broad categories and these women

of Mexican descent want to be specific about who they are, just as a person who has light skin and speaks English may not wish to be called a Brit if she is a Canadian.

These women, taking the icons of their culture and wresting them from the masculine interpretations of Chicanos, are forging a different path for themselves and the other Chicanas in the United States. Because there are so many interpretations of the functions and adventures of these goddesses, it makes sense for the Chicana writers to spotlight these women in the most positive light and illustrate their connections to subsequent legends. They are affirming that, as Chicanas, they are worthy. These women are embracing their identity and, at the same time, claiming authority and a degree of autonomy for who and what they are. Cherrie Moraga writes:

> I call myself a Chicana writer. Not a Mexican-American writer, not an Hispanic writer, not a half-breed writer. To be a Chicana is not merely to name one's racial/cultural identity, but also to name a politic, a politic that refuses assimilation into the U.S. mainstream. It acknowledges our mestizaje – Indian, Spanish, and Africano. After a decade of 'hispanicization' … the term Chicano assumes even greater radicalism. (Generation 56)

In her essay "Ghosts and Voices: Writing From Obsession" (1987) Cisneros writes, "in my writing as well as in that of other Chicanas and other women, there is the necessary phase of dealing with those ghosts and voices most urgently haunting us, day by day" (73). For these women writers, their culture, "those ghosts and voices," is a part of them and their lives, but they have learned to retell the stories with the female icons as heroes, not victims. The stories they tell will empower young Chicanas and let the young Chicanos know that the pecking order from the old country will not fly today, in

America. These women write of their culture, but it is an altered culture, a culture that values the past, but takes some of the machismo away from that same culture; it is written for young Chicanas and Chicanos; because these people represent the future, so they need to know the past. Their stories tell America that these women do not want to "melt" into American society, but they want America to accept them as a distinct part of that collective society.

In the following and final chapter, we will examine the impact of African American women on the literary landscape in the latter part of the twentieth century. These women, because so much of their cultural identities had been stripped away when their ancestors had been brought to this country, must look back to the more recent past to find the legends for their refashioning.

Chapter Three – African American Women

"There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how." (Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* 6)

Can the power of stories strip away centuries of neglect and discrimination? African American women writers are trying to make that a reality. They are on a quest to have America hear their voices by telling their own stories in their own way. Through the use of refashioned cultural myths and legends, they weave tales that incorporate the beauty of their culture, while informing the reader of the relevance and importance of their cultural and ethnic sisterhood. In this chapter I will examine how Toni Morrison first told America through the novel *The Bluest Eye*, that a 'White' standard of beauty should not be the only desirable one. Then I will show how in her novel *Song of Solomon,* she alters the legend of the flying Africans by having them fly to the only home they know, America. The final novel in this chapter, *Praisesong for the Widow*, author Paule Marshall has the Africans walking home rather than flying. These books are about belonging, accepting, and remembering.

History

African Americans, unlike the Chinese Americans who immigrated to this country in search of better lives, and the Mexican Americans, who are in the United States from a combination of colonization and immigration, are living a unique existence in the United States. Their ancestors were enslaved and forced to work in a foreign land until, for most of them, only death set them free. When inquiring into American history,

many scholars like to affix the date of 1619 to the first appearance of African slaves on the shores of America – specifically the Jamestown colony. Michael Guasco writes in his article "The Fallacy of 1619: Rethinking the History of Africans in Early America" (2017), that pinning this date on the arrival of slaves in what would become the United States helps "scholars ignore more instructive issues…". These twenty Africans were, apparently, taken by a Dutch Man-o-War from a captured Spanish vessel and brought ashore to be sold or traded to the "labor-hungry English colonists" (Guasco). In fact, Guasco asserts that Africans were present in North America for nearly 100 years prior to this incident at Jamestown. Choosing this date out of all the other possible ones demeans the lives of those prior slaves and suggests that the ancestors of African slaves have been judged by standards other than equality and fairness, which drew so many to these shores, for more than 500 years.

While there were slaves brought to the Americas and sold after the Europeans began to settle the land, there were also thousands of indentured servants imported to assist with labor. David Nicholson, in his article in *American History*, "First Slaves First Hope" (2013), wonders, as so little is known about the 1619 Africans at the time, and so much of the labor consisted of indentured servants, whether these Africans may have been indentured as well, though he doubts the probability that this may be true. Much of this thinking is based on the fact that almost all indentured servants arriving in Jamestown are listed in the "records by first and last name, and those listings include ages, dates of arrival and the names of the various ships on which they arrived" (70). But, for the most part, these servants were all white, and as indentured, had an end-point for their servitude. These colonists saved the life-long enslavement for the Africans.

Overall, we can safely say that slavery was an unpleasant fact in America for well over 250 years. It would take a war to end the practice of slavery.

The End of Slavery

On January 1, 1863, with the United States still enmeshed in the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which "freed all slaves in areas still in rebellion" (Lowery, et al 167). The Union Army would have to win the war outright to free all the enslaved peoples in the country; and so, upon the victory of the Union forces, Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery in the United States. During the ratification process for this Amendment and its subsequent passage (1865 – 1866), many of the Southern states passed "a number of laws designed as substitutes for the old slave codes" (Lowery 50). These were known as Black Codes and they were put into place to "ensure an immobile, dependent black labor force for each state's agricultural interest. They were designed to immobilize penniless, unemployed, and powerless black laborers" (Lowery 50). These laws allowed law enforcement individuals to arrest people as vagrants and then, when they could not post bond, hire them out "for a period not to exceed one year" (Lowery 50), thus allowing Southern landowners to continue farming their vast landholdings with nearly unpaid labor.

The Promise of Civil Rights

In 1866, as a response to the Black Codes passed in the South, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866. This act defined citizenship and guaranteed equal protection under the law. Initially vetoed by President Andrew Johnson, Congress

overturned it and the Civil Rights Act of 1866 became law. It appeared that African Americans were finally being given a chance to gain their Civil rights; sadly, this was not the case. According to Dr. Amanda Bellows in her essay "150 Cheers for the 14th Amendment" (2018), the "law did not go far enough to guarantee rights to freed slaves" so Congress wrote and passed the 14th Amendment to the Constitution that outlined citizenship rights and guaranteed equal protection under the law. This amendment essentially overturned the Dred Scott v Sanford decision as it, the 14th Amendment, declared that African Americans were citizens.

As the final Reconstruction Amendment, in 1870, Congress ratified the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, allowing Black males the vote, by stating, "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (Lowery 186). This lead to "white southern leadership" to institute measures to "disenfranchise black voters," which continued until the "passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965" (Lowery 187). Following the 15th Amendment, in 1875 came the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which outlawed "white only" restrictions on public facilities and permitted all citizens to serve on juries. This toothless law was finally "struck down" by the Supreme Court in 1883 "declaring that Congress did not have the power to regulate the conduct and transactions of individuals" (Lowery 105, 107). The real blow to any hope for Civil Rights came with the Plessy V. Ferguson Supreme Court case in 1896. It was in this landmark case that "Separate but equal" became the law of the land. This ruling "provided the constitutional basis for a plethora of southern Jim Crow laws" (Lowery 429). With this decision, "the separate but equal formula became the new constitutional

orthodoxy that prevailed until 1954" when the Brown V. Board of Education ruling was handed down (Lowery 430). The Brown v Bd. of Education decision, plus the Civil Rights Acts in 1957 and 1960, all chipped away at discrimination in America. But, it was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Congress seriously dealt with the issue of discrimination in all areas of daily life and the desegregation of public facilities (Lowery 108); this finally gave Blacks a more powerful voice in American society.

Civil Rights and the future of Literature

During this 100-year period, despite freedom from enslavement and the subsequent laws ensuring their equal civil rights, African Americans, as a group, continued to face discrimination and a diminished voice in American society; so the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 seemed to be the end of a long nightmare. Toward the end of the Civil Rights Movement, James A. Emanuel and Theodore L. Gross edited a collection of writings called *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (1968). The book contained writings from the "Early Period" of American Negro writing up to what, at that time, was contemporary. One of these contemporary pieces was by Arthur P. Davis, titled "Trends in Negro American Literature" (1967). In Davis' examination of these trends, he spends time contemplating the effects of the 1950s on Negro literature saying that the Brown V. Board of Ed. decision and the Montgomery bus boycott "changed the racial climate of America." He goes on to say, "This change of climate, however, inadvertently dealt the Negro writer of the fifties a crushing blow. Up to that decade, our literature had been predominately a protest literature. Ironical though it may seem, we had capitalized on oppression…" (520). What would these Negro writers write about now?

Writer Julian Mayfield, in the same collection, tried to answer this question in his essay “Into the Mainstream and Oblivion” (1960). His concern with all the Civil Rights talk of integration that was in the air was perhaps “the Negro writer is being gently nudged toward a rather vague thing called ‘the mainstream of American literature’” (559). Mayfield felt that ‘mainstream American writers’ seemed to be apathetic and wrote of little that really mattered.

These thoughts were prompted by Mayfield’s attendance at the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC) writer’s conference. While there, he encountered many Negro writers who were “having trouble squaring [their] art and [their] sense of reality with the American dream.” They were wondering if, in fact, they really were American (557). Mayfield reported that Negroes are generally uncertain about their paths, which he found disappointing because they should be “bound together” by their “tragic and unique experience” in American history (560).

In wrapping up his thoughts, Mayfield talks about the alienation of the American Negro and how it is this alienation, or detachment that “may give him the insight of the stranger in the house, placing him in a better position to illuminate contemporary American life as few writers of the mainstream can” (561). Little did he know, in a short period of time, African American women would be the ones to use this theme of alienation to allow the American public a glimpse into their lives and see the burdens with which they live. It was Toni Morrison, in her first novel, *The Bluest Eye (1970),* who let her readers know exactly how much Black America would not fit into mainstream American culture. She would follow it up with *Song of Solomon* (1977) to

show the American public that African American citizens had a distinct culture, and they were here to stay.

African American Literature and Criticism

Meanwhile, in the following decade, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Chairman of the Afro-American Studies Department and W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University" (cover), published *The Signifying Monkey (1988)*. With this book, Gates puts to bed the worries of Mayfield by stating in his introduction, "Our goal must not be to embed, as it were, Europe within Africa or Africa within Europe" (xx). This book "explores the black vernacular tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition. …[Gates] attempts to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition and that in turn informs the shape of the Afro-American literary tradition (xix). This groundbreaking book would be used to evaluate and critique all African American literature for the ensuing twenty-five plus years.

Sexism in the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement had a great impact on African American women. In the introduction section of *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), author bell hooks writes, "When the civil rights movement began in the 50s, black women and men again joined together to struggle for racial equality, yet black female activists did not receive the public acclaim awarded black male leaders" (4). She goes on to say that by the time the struggle moved into the 60s, "clear boundaries were erected which separated the roles of women and men" (5). In fact, in Nikki Giovanni's essay "Black Poems, Poseurs, and Power" (1976) she, an active part of the Civil Rights Movement in the

1960s, attacks the masculine structure of the movement saying, “They have made Black women the new Jews while they remain the same old niggers. We have got to do better than this” (111).

Hooks believes that this treatment during the Civil Rights Movement is a result of “[c]ontemporary black women’s” inability to see “’womanhood’ as an important aspect of [their] identity” (1). They see themselves as Black first and women after the fact, so they become relegated to the status of second, or more likely third or fourth-class citizens. Zora Neale Hurston, in *Their Eyes were Watching God* (1937) wrote, “De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see” (14), and Ms. hooks contends that in more contemporary times, this oppression is, to a degree, the Black woman’s own fault. During the nineteenth century when women, mostly white, were protesting for their own civil rights and the vote, many Black women joined their cause (hooks 3). This so concerned the white male hierarchy, that they gave the vote to Black men rather than give any woman the right to vote. This action enforced the white patriarchy and opened the door to a renewed era of Black patriarchy (hooks 9). This also put the Black women in a tough spot, if they supported the Black men’s bid to get the vote, they would be denying rights for themselves, while “[o]ther Black women found themselves in limbo, not wanting to ally themselves with sexist Black men or racist white women” (hooks 9).

African American women writers are trying to catch the ear of the American public so as to have their voices heard through their stories, and thus, share their culture. Gates’ examination of African American literature revealed how certain tropes were repeated. According to Rezek (2015), Gates “derives from Yoruba mythology and African American vernacular practices a theory of textual indeterminacy, interpretation,

and signifyin(g) – 'repetition, with a signal difference' (894)". Katy Chiles quotes Gates in her article, "From Writing the Slave Self to Querying the Human: The First Twenty-Five Years of the Signifying Monkey" (2015), "'The black rhetorical tropes, subsumed under Signifyin(g) would include marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on' (57)" (876). Chiles says Gates reports that "writers could imitate – where they could repeat, but repeat with important differences – they could indeed be creative…" (73). The writers take stories from the remnants of their cultural past, most of which had been stripped away from their forebears upon entering the country as slaves, add in the myths and legends created by the slaves upon arrival in the Americas, and then incorporate American pop culture to showcase where they fit into American society. They are using Gates' idea of repetition – repeating a myth or legend - but with important changes, to show America how the dominant culture appears to them and affects them. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter notes, "one must take refuge in how" (*BE* 6); thus, these women, through the power of storytelling, will undertake the task of displaying the beauty of their culture and its importance in the fabric of America. They will prove that they are not just a darker version of the majority population.

The Bluest Eye

In *The Bluest Eye,* author Toni Morrison uses popular culture references to show how the pervasiveness of images from the dominant culture and American beauty standards can distort a young Black girl's idea of who she is, while, at the same time, make other African American people deny their own culture. Thomas H. Fick, in his essay "Toni Morrison's 'Allegory of the Cave': Movies, Consumption, and Platonic

Realism in *The Bluest Eye*" (1989), writes that the characters "operate in a world shaped by a complex and sometimes repressive cultural heritage" (301). Morrison sets *The Bluest Eye* in the 1940s in Ohio. Removed from the extreme repression of the Jim Crow South, the Black community is still kept under the thumb of the white majority. The movies are cast, almost entirely, with whites, advertisements have all white faces, everyone who is in charge of anything is white. If the Black population wants to get along in the white world, they must hide their own culture and try to fit into the white dominated universe around them, else they may face consequences that could result in a loss of the small acceptance accorded them.

The Bluest Eye was Toni Morrison's first published novel. Before she is able to revise and reimagine cultural ideas and attitudes, she must take us back to a time and place when African Americans were trying to fit into American society by trying on American culture. This novel focuses on appearance and race and the tragedy that can occur when a young girl cannot negotiate the dangerous paths before her on her way to young adulthood. For Pecola Breedlove, protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, her tragedy is that she wants blue eyes, a virtual impossibility for a black girl in the 1940s. Rejected by nearly everyone, generally because of her appearance and the wretched reputation of her family, this child lives a miserable existence. According to Fick, Pecola believes these blue eyes "will introduce harmony and love into her fragmented and emotionally barren life" (301). The Breedloves are ugly, poor and low-class. Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove fight like cats and dogs, and after they burned down their home, the family must live in a storefront; Cholly (Mr. Breedlove) drinks, and Pecola's brother Sammy, runs away every

chance he gets. Pecola believes that with blue eyes, she will be beautiful, her family will no longer be dysfunctional, and her life will be much better:

> It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different. … If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. (*BE* 46)

She wants blue eyes like Shirley Temple, a cinematic icon, because everyone loves Shirley Temple and thinks she is cute. Pecola's mother, Mrs. Breedlove, is a victim of the same cultural dominance and self-hatred.

The majority culture was pervasive in the 1940s and it affected not just children. Like any other red-blooded American, Pecola's mother, Pauline Breedlove, wants the American Dream. In telling her story, she begins, "The onliest time I be happy seem like was when I was in the picture show" (123). She describes how she would imitate the hairstyles of the white actresses in the movies and that would make her feel beautiful. Pauline admits that it was difficult to come home to her own house and husband after these outings, but life with Cholly was okay. It was only after one of these trips to the movie theater, when she bit into a piece of candy and her front tooth came out, that she "settled down to just being ugly" and "the meanness got worse" (123). She began to physically fight with Cholly again and no longer cared about her appearance. Fick writes, "Pauline cannot be Jean Harlow, and the sense of inadequacy that comes from this failure is part of her tragedy" (304). Her sense of who or what she is disintegrates until she becomes "the ideal servant" (*BE* 100). The only person to whom she shows affection is the little blonde-haired girl of the family who employs her to do their domestic work.

When Pecola was at this family's home one afternoon with Mrs. Breedlove, Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, Pecola's only friends, came looking for her and they overheard the little girl calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly. Claudia observes, "The familiar violence rose in me. Her [the little blonde girl] calling Mrs. Breedlove Polly, when even Pecola called her mother Mr. Breedlove, seemed reason enough to scratch her" (108). That this "little pink-and-yellow girl" (109) would be cooed over and soothed by Mrs. Breedlove, when, even upon seeing her new child after giving birth, she remarked to herself, "A right smart baby she was. … Eyes all soft and wet. A cross between a puppy and a dying man. But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but lord she was ugly" (126). Pecola was marked by her looks from the day she was born.

Another person living in the same town as the Breedloves, and another convert to the American Dream, is a man named Soaphead Church. An immigrant from the Caribbean, he has adopted many of the negatives aspects of success in America. Pecola arrives on Mr. Church's doorstep clutching his business card, which claims that he can help people remove troubles and conditions. "Overcome Spells, Bad Luck, and Evil Influences. … I am … born with power, and I will help you" (173). He is a charlatan and a reprobate, but even he equates blue eyes with beauty. Hence, when Pecola goes to him, pregnant by her father, put out of school and miserable, and asks him to make her eyes blue, he thinks, "Here was an ugly little girl asking for beauty" (174). Church tells Pecola that he cannot grant her request, saying, "I work only through the Lord. He sometimes uses me to help people" (174). At this point, he tricks Pecola into poisoning his landlady's dog, telling her that if the dog acts strangely after eating the poisoned food he has prepared (Pecola does not know it is poisoned), her request "will be granted on the

day following this one" (174). This is what finally pushes Pecola into the realm of insanity. The dog, of course, dies and Pecola believes her blue eyes are on the way. Fick notes, "Movies are the centrally destructive force in the novel not only because of the values they present – perfect white bodies and romantic love – but because of the way they present them: as flawless archetypes above and outside the shadowy world of everyday life" (301). Pecola is affected by the influence of the dominant culture's idea of what constitutes beauty, as is her mother. The major difference is that with Pecola, she believes that the only way she will ever be happy is if she has blue eyes, because then, everyone will love her. Mrs. Breedlove, on the other, when she realizes that she cannot have that life, has decided to accept her ugliness; she is not happy about it, so, she will make sure everyone is as miserable as she.

Mrs. Breedlove is not the only woman of color with a hatred of her own race. Morrison writes about the "thin brown girls" (82) who attend "land-grant colleges, normal schools, and learn how to do the white man's work with refinement" (83). The women who are trying to emulate white society, hoping to one day be accepted. They caution their children to not "play with niggers" (87). This influence of the dominant culture is asserted from the time a child begins to attend school in America. Phyllis R. Klotman, in her essay "Dick-and-Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*" (1979), writes, "The novel opens with three versions of the 'Dick and Jane' reader so prevalent in the public schools at the time (the 1940s) of the novel. Morrison uses this technique to juxtapose the fictions of the white educational process with the realities of life for many black children" (123). Morrison's first version of "Dick and Jane" is the standard version:

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (*BE* 3)

There are capital letters, spacing between words, punctuation – order. It is calm and simple. This shows how life would be for many middle-class white children in America at this time. The second version Morrison offers, "Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty…" (*BE* 4), shows a breakdown in order. There are still spaces between the words and it is understandable, but there is no punctuation to separate the thoughts. This would be "the lifestyle of the two black MacTeer children, Claudia and Frieda, shaped by poor but loving parents trying desperately to survive the poverty, … and … racism they encounter in Ohio" (Klotman 123). The third version runs thus:

"Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisverypretty…" (*BE* 4). It is chaos. There are no spaces to separate the words, no punctuation; it runs together as one incoherent thought. This is the life of Pecola Breedlove. There is no order to her life.

Klotman writes, “Pecola’s actual existence cannot be found in “Dick and Jane,” for in the school primer, society denied her existence” (124).

Essentially, Morrison’s “Dick and Jane” rendering of the primer to begin the story, and comment on life in the USA, mirrors its plot; she emphasizes this point by starting each section with a portion of her chaotic version of “Dick and Jane” to show Pecola’s living conditions and family life. The only difference is that the section headings are in all capital letters – Morrison is yelling to get our attention. The first one begins,

“HEREISTHEHOUSEITISGREENANDWHITEITHASAREDDOORITISVERYPRETTYITISVERYPRETTYPRETTYPRETTYP” (33). This section of the story will inform the reader about the living space of the Breedlove family. The repetition of the word pretty emphasizes the fact that the Breedlove’s home is not pretty, “it foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy” (*BE* 33); it is a store-front and the furnishings inside are worn-out and broken. Morrison continues in this vein for each section of the novel, she will address Mother, Father, Dick, the cat, the dog, and her (Pecola’s) friend, all from the primer. One horror heaped upon the next; the awful fabric of Pecola’s life.

Morrison rejects “Dick and Jane,” and Fick says Morrison’s use of the:

> primer is important not only because it provides a particular set of expectations of modes of behavior … but because it locates these expectations and behaviors in a realm of immutable Archetypes – equivalent to the Platonic ideal of the ‘real’ – in contrast with which this transient world is only an imitation. … [A]nd Pecola’s world is but an *Imitation of Life.* (302)

The italics of *Imitation of Life* is referring to a movie mentioned in the story. The movies, the primer, Shirley Temple, all represent, at this time, ideals that Black Americans have no opportunity to attain. To the ruin of Pecola, they are pervasive. In her paper "Not So Fast, Dick and Jane: Reimagining Childhood and Nation in *The Bluest Eye"* (2005), writer Debra T. Werrlein states, "*The Bluest Eye* explores the contrast between oppressed local culture and innocent national ideal through the friction that erupts between Pecola's life and 1940s models of childhood. Morrison first locates such models in pedagogy by subversively appropriating William Elson and William Gray's nationally recognized Dick and Jane stories." Werrlein goes on to say, "Morrison suggests they posit a *national* masterplot that defines Americanness within the parameters of innocent white middle-class childhood" (56).

Werrlein traces the beginnings of the primer by stating, "the authors characterize safe American childhoods that thrive in families that defy depression-era hardships with economic and social stability" (56). Thus, while Elson and Gray were depicting these happy children and happy families, what they were showing was not even a true norm for the white families of the country. Werrlein cites Elaine May's observation that "nuclear families like Dick and Jane's signaled the triumph of American democracy and capitalism." These readers are essentially propaganda, and Werrlein notes that these Dick and Jane attitudes clearly placed "responsibility for the nation's future prosperity and security squarely on the shoulders of middle-class children" (57).

While the main function of these primers is to teach students to read:

> …, the primers … never allude to events such as conquest, slavery, immigration, or exclusion. In fact, beyond the occasional appearance of a 'savage' Indian, they

> never feature nonwhite Americans. The Dick and Jane books in particular exist almost entirely outside of history – as if no thing and no time exists beyond the suburban present. They therefore treat American childhood as an abstraction that excludes all but white middle-class children. (58)

If non-white, non-middle-class children are using these books to read, where then do these children see themselves in America? Werrlein says, "… by associating white suburban families with prosperity, morality, and patriotism, Americans painted Black urban working-class families as un-American" (57-58). If the rest of the country sees them as an-American, how do they classify themselves and others like them? According to Werrlein, "Morrison suggests that familial 'pathologies' do not simply spring from individual shortcomings. Just as the Dick and Jane stories equate white privilege with a historyless version of Americanness, the poverty and suffering of Morrison's Breedlove family symbolizes America's brutal history of racial persecution in the United States" (59).

In her article "The Unbearable Whiteness of Literacy Instruction: Realizing the Implications of the Proficient Reader Research" (2008), Jane M. Gangi writes, "Since children must be able to make connections with what they read to become proficient readers, White children whose experiences are depicted in books can make many more text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections than can children of color" (30). Pecola, viewed as ugly by the whites and Blacks, does not see anyone like her in the texts, so she chooses to identify with Shirley Temple, an adored, little white child. Even her friend Claudia said of her, "All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we

cleansed ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness" (*BE* 205).

The late 1960s and the early 1970s brought research about the paucity of diversity in children's literature and its effects on children in the classroom who were learning to read. *The Bluest Eye*, published in 1970, is Morrison offering evidence to back up this research. Morrison, born in 1931, in Ohio, would have experienced the same type of schooling where we find Pecola, Frieda and Claudia. She would have learned to read from the ubiquitous Dick and Jane primers. She probably wondered about books and their absence of children who looked like her. While Pecola is the case to the extreme, Morrison repudiates the white picket fence and the white middle-class of, what would become, the mythic Dick and Jane.

Song of Solomon

Toni Morrison tells the majority of America that she rejects what the majority has defined as the culture of the United States. If, in fact, America is a melting pot, Morrison seems to say, we should be celebrating all cultures, not holding one up as the model for all to emulate. After taking America to task for its cultural prejudice, she will, a few years later, present to the American public a glimpse into the culture and folklore of African Americans; at the same time, she will show African Americans the importance of knowing who they are and where they come from via the novel *Song of Solomon.* While the title of the work has Biblical allusions, "I am black, but comely" (Song of Solomon 1:5-6 KJV), it ultimately takes on a different meaning. Morrison is referring to a slave named Solomon, who like the Africans of the American slave legend, flew away, back to Africa. The wife and twenty-one children he left behind created a children's song about

his flight. This idea of flight is not limited to the flying Africans; she tells of ancestors flying into the air after being shot for their land, flight from responsibility, a flight toward identity and always, flying home – wherever that may be.

The Flying Africans

The flying Africans are an important part of African American history. In *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore* (1976), author Harold Courlander has compiled accounts from "numerous persons and organizations" (xviii) to shine a spotlight on the oral stories, literature and tales from people of African origins in the Americas. The flying Africans is a story that achieved great popularity and Courlander has accounts from three different people about how the slaves, being mistreated by the overseer, flew "right back tuh Africa" (286). The details in the three versions are similar but have subtle differences. In the first version, Wallace Quarterman states that after sticking the hoe into the field they "den say 'quack, quack, quack,' an dey riz up in duh sky an tun hesef intuh buzzards…". Priscilla McCullough's version varies; she says, "All ub a sudden dey git tuhgedduh an staht tuh moob roun in a ring. Roun dey go fastuhnfastuh. Den one by one dey riz up and take wing an fly lak a bud." Shad Hall's version has the fewest details. The overseer is getting ready to beat the slaves so they run down to the river. "Duh obuhseeuh he sho thought he ketch um wen dey get tuh duh ribbuh. But fo he could git tuh um, dey riz up in duh eah an fly way" (Courtlander 286).

Interestingly enough, in 1985, Virginia Hamilton compiled a children's book of "American Black Folktales" called *The People Could Fly.* Her version of the flying Africans takes aspects of the stories in Courtlander's book and adds other touches. Hamilton writes, "Then, many of the people were captured for slavery. The ones that

could fly shed their wings. … the people who could fly kept their power, although they shed their wings" (14). After being abused and toiling in the fields, two of the Africans (Toby and Sarah), who had once had wings, decided that they had had enough of the torture inflicted upon them. While Sarah and her child were being beaten by the overseer, Toby "raised his arms, holding them out to her. *'Kum … yali, kum buba tambe,'* and more magic words, said so quickly, they sounded like whispers and sighs" (16) and Sarah began to rise into the air. The next day Toby repeated the same ritual with the same words when several slaves were being beaten for passing out from the heat, and they all rose into the air and flew away. Finally, the overseers tried to capture Toby for saying "magic words," but Toby was also able to escape. Before he flew off, he called the magic words to the others in the field and "[o]ld and young who were called slaves and could fly joined hands. Say like they would ring-sing. But they didn't shuffle in a circle. They didn't sing. They rose on the air. They flew in a flock that was black against heavenly blue. Black crows or black shadows." Toby took with him the people who could fly, the other slaves were left behind because he "[h]adn't the time to teach them to fly" (17).

In fact, in her article, "Metaphor of Flight in Toni Morrison's Novel *Song of Solomon*" (2016) Aleksandra M. Izgarjan writes, "The stories of the Flying Africans also contain subversive undertones: instead of believing that their fellow sufferers committed suicide during the Middle Passage by leaping overboard or that they submitted to the whips of slave holders, the narrators maintained the Flying Africans actually flew home" (308). This was another type of freedom. To believe that someone escaped was an escape for the listener of the tale, as well. Izgarian states that Morrison "rejects the

previous prejudiced interpretations of [Flying Africans]." Adding that she "uses the same words as symbols of ancestral language and culture" (309). It is in this that the male protagonist, Macon "Milkman" Dead must find the words and symbols to enable him to fly. His Aunt Pilate, the female protagonist, will pilot him to that port.

It is thus interesting to observe the way that Morrison bookends her own novel with Flying Africans. Her story begins with Robert Smith, "The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock" (*Song* 3). Mr. Smith, equipped with "wide blue silk wings [which] curved forward around his chest" (5), climbed to the roof of Mercy Hospital and "leaped on into the air" (9). Sadly, for Robert Smith, he was not one of the Africans who remembered how to fly; did he know the secret words nor the symbols that would keep him from crashing to the earth. Mr. Smith's attempt at flight occurs on the day Milkman Dead was born and "Mr. Smith's blue silk wings must have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered, at four, the same things Mr. Smith had learned earlier – that only birds and airplanes could fly – he lost all interest in himself" (9). This event, though he could not possibly remember it, is what sets Milkman on his quest to discover who he is and where he came from, crucial information he will need before he will be permitted to fly.

Western Mythology

The central story that Morrison draws upon in this novel is the Flying Africans, an African American folktale, but she pulls from many other sources, showing her Western literary background. The idea of men flying also calls to mind Icarus of Greek mythology. Izgarjan states that both Icarus and Milkman "fly in order to find freedom from a burdensome past." But, "Milkman's obsession with flight leads him to spiritual

transformation which is firmly situated not in the Western cultural framework, but in ancestral, African one" (312). Milkman has wanted to fly since he was a small child, but he must solve the riddle of his past before he can ride the air currents. It is this riddle that Morrison feels all African Americans must solve before they can be content with who they are and what their place is in America.

Morrison's riddle-solving trope evokes Sophocles Greek play *Oedipus Rex* where the play's title character solves the riddle of the Sphinx to save the city of Thebes. There are, though, other Oedipal aspects of the story, for instance, how Milkman got his nickname. His mother, "starved for intimacy, breastfeeds her son long into his early boyhood" (Fletcher 409) and only stopped when "Freddie the janitor" spied them through the window of the house, and baptized the child with a new name (*Song* 14). In addition, there is also Macon Dead's (Milkman's father) story that he found his wife, naked, in bed with her father's corpse, sucking on his fingers – Milkman's mother tells a different story.

Finally, an old woman named Circe plays a crucial role in saving the lives of Milkman's father and aunt when they were children. When Milkman goes back to Pennsylvania, initially to seek the gold his father believes is hidden in a cave there; he is surprised to find Circe still alive, probably over a hundred years old, and ready to prepare Milkman for his quest. In *The Odyssey*, Circe is a sorceress "who keeps Odysseus for a year as her lover" (Fletcher 413). When Milkman first saw Circe in the decrepit house, his initial reaction was his memory of the witches from his childhood nightmares, yet he still climbed the stairs toward the old witch-like woman. He also knew, in the midst of those nightmares "that always, always at the very instant of the pounce or the gummy

embrace he would wake with a scream and an erection. Now he had only the erection" (*Song* 239). Even at 100 plus years old, Circe still has some seductive powers, like her counterpart in *The Odyssey*.

Elaborating upon Morrison's reworking of Greek texts, Judith Fletcher writes in "Signifying Circe in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" (2006), Circe "is a liminal figure who mediates between death and life, but she also sits at the portal between two stories, not only the two sections of the novel, but also the novel and the epic tradition" (414). It is Circe who sends Milkman to the cave where his father and aunt hid after their father was killed, and it is she who gave Milkman the real names of his grandparents and the name of the town in Virginia from whence they came. Upon learning all this, Milkman is no longer interested in the gold that was supposed to be hidden in the cave. He wants to find out who he is, so he sets off on his quest.

The Import of the Flying Africans

The legend of the flying Africans is in fact a popular theme in African American literature. Grace Ann Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry, in their article "Flying as Symbol and Legend in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye, Sula,* and *Song of Solomon*" (1983) report that "Flying has been associated with freedom" and "implies raising oneself" meaning it can "suggest physical, moral, or spiritual height or superiority" (119). Katherine Thorsteinson, in her essay "From Escape to Ascension: the Effects of Aviation Technology on the Flying African Myth" (2015), agrees with Hovet and Lounsberry, adding, "This myth was created under the painful conditions of the New World, reflecting the desires for freedom, cross-Atlantic return, and even death shared by enslaved Africans and their descendants" (259).

It is Lorna McDaniel who does a thorough examination of this myth in her text "The Flying Africans: Extent and Strength of the Myth in the Americas" (1990). She reiterates its function as a "projection of systems of flight escape and homeland return" (28), but she ties it also to witchcraft and symbolism. In the various ways the motif has been used in African American storytelling, the method of flight often needs a type of charm to enable the person to fly. Using, perhaps, a ring or a feather, a hollowed out gourd or even "corn cobs tucked under their armpits," sometimes, they would have to intone magic words or spin around, float "in a sea shell or on a leaf, [soar] on a wing, on the back of bird or simply walked upon the water, they had to overcome the sea" (29).

McDaniel goes on to say that since the Europeans in the New World preserved so much of their food by salting it and in some West African cultures they believed that salt was used to keep a witch from getting back into her skin when she went out flying, the Africans had to forgo salt to be able to fly. McDaniels writes:

> One can easily perceive the New World extension of the salt metaphor in African legends and in history where the distasteful, salty and death-laden Atlantic Passage could have logically reinforced the association of salt with death and the spirit world. The sea is the physical barrier and salt, in its association with the sea, also inhibits return, but in an alternative way. (31)

This aversion to salt is still seen in the Caribbean today. "In modern ceremonies throughout the Caribbean that are staged in honor of ancestral memory, salt is withheld from the food cooked in honor of the *old parents*" (31).

The universality of the theme, according to McDaniel, is that of "homeland longing" as in the myth of Icarus. But this is not just seen in the New World nor is it "exclusive to Black mythology and thought; we find identical themes and imageries in biblical references, in hymn language and in European folklore" where, for example, "Children are advised to 'put salt on his [a bird's] tail and you can capture him'" (36). All people use the idea of flying as an escape, but it was the African slaves, taken from their homeland, transported across the Middle Passage and subjected to unspeakable terrors, who made the concept their own.

Flying Home / Finding Home

We have heard since childhood: "Home is where the heart is." When, in the nineteenth century there was a movement afoot to send the Africans back to Africa, some African Americans balked at this solution. As far as they were concerned, they were already home. Thorsteinson writes that American writers in the twentieth century "express a *rejection* of the cross-Atlantic return… But what unites all of these transformations is the redirection of desire from the collective memories of an African homeland to resolving the internal struggles of the United States" (her italics 259). It is in this light that Morrison places Milkman, amid flight, at the conclusion of *Song of Solomon*. She is taking the myth of the Africans who could fly home, Milkman is a direct descendant of one of them, but does not have Milkman fly to Africa. Because Morrison leaves it up to the reader to decide if his flight fails, we can imagine that he knows he is finally home; he went on a quest to find out who he was and where his people came from; the book ends with the culmination of that quest and the closing of the circle.

During his quest, Milkman has matured and come of age. Hovet and Lounsberry write, "he realizes his newly developed sense of self and community. … He also begins to gain insights into others, realizing now how he abused Hagar (his cousin and lover), and neglected his mother and sisters. Finally, he accepts the fact that he cannot just get up and fly away anymore" (*Song* 138). It is the idea of men flying away that is the center of Paula C. Barnes' article "Pearl Cleage's Flyin' West and the African American Motif of Flight (2009). Barnes contends that Morrison's use of the flight motif exemplifies the failure of men to fly, saying that Morrison is really looking at flying African women and it is Milkman's Aunt Pilate who really flies at the end of the story.

Perspectives on home and departures from home

What is the "Song of Solomon?" and why is it so hard to get a handle on? It is a song of loss and heartbreak. The children's song that repeats throughout *Song of Solomon* is about Milkman's grandfather's flight from the cotton fields and back to Africa.

O Sugarman don't leave me here

Cotton balls to choke me

O Sugarman don't leave me here

Buckra's arms to yoke me

Sugarman done fly away

Sugarman done gone

Sugarman cut across the sky\

Sugarman gone home (49)

The song utilizes the name Sugarman rather than Solomon, but Milkman realizes the song is about his great-grandfather when he arrives in the small Virginia town of Shalimar ("which Mr. Solomon and everybody else [in town] pronounced *Shalleemone"*) (302). Looking carefully at the song, one can see that it is not about an African flying gloriously back to Africa, instead it is the story of those left behind. Milkman's distant cousin Susan Byrd tells him that after Solomon flew away, "It like to killed the woman, the wife" (323). Apparently, Ryna, Solomon's wife "screamed and screamed, lost her mind completely" (323). She was left behind with twenty-one children. The first line of the song "Sugarman don't leave me here" reveals the anguish of Solomon's wife and children as being left behind.

Later on in the story, when Milkman is joyously telling Sweet, a woman with whom he is involved while in Shalimar, about the fact that his "great-granddaddy could fly" she asks, "Who'd he leave behind?" (328). Pilate is often visited by the ghost of her father who tells her, "'You can't just fly on off and leave a body'" (147). While Milkman is thinking about the excitement and adventure that seem to go with the story, it is the women, who are left behind, who see the legend from the other point of view; the men keep leaving the women. The first Macon Dead was shot (and flew "five feet up into the air") (40) and killed by his neighbors on his Pennsylvania farm. He left behind his two children Macon and Pilate. Macon Dead, Milkman's father, has left his wife emotionally. He despises her and tries to have as little to do with her as possible. Milkman uses Hagar, his cousin, and leaves her behind with no regrets; this leads to her death. Guitar, emotionally disconnected from his friend Milkman and what remains of his family, has

only vengeance left in his life. The central men in the story are dead, not because of their names, but because they have no cultural or spiritual connection to their past.

Toni Morrison is therefore using the legend of the Flying Africans to show that having a connection to one's past, having a cultural home, can keep people grounded and keeps families together. This is all rooted in the slave culture of the South, where slaves, yearning for freedom, were willing to leave family behind and do whatever was necessary, to get away. In addition, slave owners often separated families, selling men and women off and leaving families broken. Morrison may be commenting on the continuing prevalence of female-only heads-of-households in modern day America. bell hooks, on the other hand, believes that "[s]exist historians and sociologists have provided the American public with a perspective on slavery in which the most cruel and de-humanizing impact of slavery on the lives of black people was that black men were stripped of their masculinity, which they argue resulted in the dissolution and overall disruption of any black familial structure" (20). Leaving feminist criticism aside, Morrison is making a point about the importance of knowing and understanding the past before a person can understand him/herself.

In her article "Pass It On!: Legacy and the Freedom Struggle in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*" (2015), Laura Dubek writes, that Milkman, through his quest, initially to find gold, has discovered his past. She says, "Milkman cannot see the ancestors, but he can hear and feel them. …all the Africans lost during the Middle Passage and all the slaves who worked the land and suffered the lash. What will keep their dream from dying is the knowledge that everything they worked for is being passed on" (99-100). To keep these enslaved people from dying without name or acknowledgement, Lorna

McDaniel (1990) conjectures that the "Flying African" myth "alludes not only to the imagination of supernatural power and the soul's return from exile, but also to the ideological choice of suicide that was often made by enslaved Africans" (33). Thorsteinson (2015) adds to this by pointing out that "For many uprooted Africans… suicide was considered forbidden and shameful" (260). It was better to create a myth, a legend, to explain their disappearance than to have them shamed. It is this willingness to accept death, like the slaves jumping off the slave ships during the Middle Passage that Morrison explores in *Beloved* (1987), in which Sethe cut her baby's throat so that Schoolteacher, sent by the master of the plantation Sweet Home, from which Sethe escaped, could not take her new-born baby to Sweet Home to be enslaved. Milkman, through his quest, is finally able to connect with his past. This connection, because of Pilate's guidance, allowed him to surrender to the air (*Song* 337). He can fly because "Milkman belongs to the country of his birth, even as the laws of his country deny him civil rights based on the color of his skin" (Dubek 99), and he finally knows who he is and who his people are.

In Toni Morrison's essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" from Mari Evens' book *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation* (1984), Morrison notes that for a time, music was used as a way of healing for the African American community, but "That music is no longer *exclusively* ours" (340). Thus, Black Americans needed a new or another way to heal and gain strength. Morrison writes, "parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological archetypal stories that we heard years ago. But new information has got to get out, and there are several ways to do it. One is the novel" (340). An important element in the novel by African Americans is

the ancestor. Morrison says that in Black literature, "the presence or absence of that figure determined the success or the happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself" (343). She goes on to say that "In *Song of Solomon* Pilate is the ancestor" (344); therefore, it is her presence in the novel that assures the reader that Milkman will find success in his flight – whatever the reader takes that success to be.

In the same chapter as Morrison's "Rootedness" essay, Dorothy H. Lee has an essay entitled "The Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison." Lee notes that each of Morrison's first four novels "reveal a consistency in Morrison's vision of the human condition, particularly in her preoccupation with the effect of the community on the individual's achievement and retention of an integrated, acceptable self" (346). This is to say the protagonist must know herself / himself and the community whence s/he came before being able to move forward to complete his/her quest. Milkman was able to do this, with Pilate as a mentor / guide, but in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola has no one to assist her except the charlatan, Soaphead Church, and thus, fails in her quest and descends into insanity (346).

Pecola and Mrs. Breedlove, her mother, do not know their community or their culture, nor do they have an ancestor on whom to call for counsel. Thus, Mrs. Breedlove accepted "Power, praise, and luxury [that] were hers in this [the Fisher] household" (*BE* 128), as she was unable to get any of those things elsewhere, including her own home. She took what she could as a household servant for a white family. Pecola, with no one to turn to, including her mother, believes the words of Soaphead Church, the closest person

she can find to an elder, and is sure that he has delivered to her the blue eyes that she believes will make her beautiful in the eyes of the American public.

One legacy of slavery is broken families and a fragmented culture; an entire group of people had their culture torn out at the roots, and Morrison suggests that running away is not the answer, running home is.

"Her body she always usta say might be in Tatem, but her mind, her mind was long gone with the Ibos…" (Marshall 139)

Praisesong for the Widow

Another example of this theme, the importance of keeping one's cultural identity, is found in Paule Marshall's novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). Widow Avey Johnson is on a cruise in the Caribbean with two friends, when her mind suddenly keeps jumping back to the past, her stomach will no longer tolerate any food, and her dreams are haunted with visitations from an aunt she spent summers with when she was a child. With her mind and body seemingly in rebellion, and not knowing what else to do, she makes the rash decision to disembark at the island of Grenada and take the next flight home to the United States. She takes a launch from the ship and arrives amid a "crowd of perhaps two hundred men, women and children, who from their appearance – their clothes and the way they carried themselves – were clearly from the more respectable element on the island" (65).

Finally able to find a taxi amid the throng of people, she learns from the cabby that they are "Out-islanders" (75) and every year at that particular time, they travel back to their home island of Carriacou, to honor their ancestors and reconnect with their cultural past. Avey Johnson thinks nothing of it and goes on to her hotel to wait for the next morning's flight. That night, her dreams are visited by her dead husband, Jerome. Avey is beset with regret for who or what she forced her husband to become, and she "mourned – not his death so much, but his life" (134). He was a man who always gave of himself and only "took his anger out on himself" (134). Near dawn, when she finally fell to sleep, she is again visited by her aunt who implores her, "'*Come/Won't you come…?'*" (143). Upon waking, she showered, dressed and went for a long walk down the beach, to settle her mind.

Losing her Culture

Avey thought of her husband, Jerome, "'Jerome Johnson' she had taken to calling him in the privacy of her thoughts, no longer able to think of him as 'Jay.' But hadn't she, in the same formal way, also started referring to herself as Avey Johnson? Hadn't she found it increasingly difficult as the years passed to think of herself 'Avey' or even 'Avatara'?" (141). Jay was the man who enjoyed the blues and jazz music, who would quote Langston Hughes or Paul Laurence Dunbar poetry to her, but, she knows, "Jay's death had taken place long before Jerome Johnson's" (135); Jerome was the man who learned to deny his race and sought acceptance in the white world of New York. They had both become, as Susan Rogers writes in her essay, "Embodying Cultural Memory in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow"* (2000), "…lost in their persistent yearning for wealth and stability" (82). Rogers also writes that Avey and Jerome "became

subsumed within an attempt to prove themselves on equal terms with white folks, by accruing material possessions" (81). In addition, the reader is given hints about Avey's social preferences when we learn the cruise ship she is sailing on is called *Bianca Pride*, essentially white pride, and she also resides in White Plains, NY. She wants to believe "that she has gained social parity in the eyes of white society" (Rogers 81). It is with these memories and thoughts in her mind that she wanders down the beach.

Meeting the mentor – Lebert Joseph

After walking blindly in the hot sun, she ventured too far and had to take shelter in a "rum shop" (158) on the beach. The shop, run by a cranky and ancient man, is closed and she is told to leave, but she begs to sit in the cool shade for a few minutes and the man relents. He is one of the Out-islanders and is getting ready to leave on the excursion, following those who left the day before. This man, Lebert Joseph, referred to as "A positive trickster" (Lavender 109) and "an embodiment of the West African/ Caribbean trickster figure Legba" (McNeil 187) is another one of Morrison's ancestor figures. Avey had her Great Aunt Cuny as her ancestor figure when she was a child and she now has Joseph to guide her on the rest of her journey. As Toni Morrison noted previously, when an ancestor figure is present, the final result will be positive, since Avey has met her mentor and ancestor figure, we know she will her finish her quest and find her lost cultural identity.

Permitted to sit in the rum shop for a few minutes, almost against her will, Avey begins to tell this old man, Lebert Joseph, all of the difficulties she has been experiencing, the ill feeling in her stomach, the inability to sleep because of the dreams she keeps incurring and ends by saying, "…I was like someone hallucinating" (171). It

does not take Joseph long to realize that Avey is spiritually and culturally bereft and his attitude toward her quickly changes. He immediately takes an interest in her and her plight.

As a child, Avey, short for Avatara, was sent to "Tatem Island, just across from Beaufort, on the South Carolina tidewater" (32) on the orders of her paternal great aunt Cuney. While visiting Tatem, her great aunt would teach her about the culture of the area, including how to do the "Ring Shout" (33) an old dance left over from the slave days. Another important cultural and historical fact imparted by Great Aunt Cuney, was her recollection of how her own grandmother witnessed the miracle of the walking Ibos. The Ibos were unloaded from the big ships into small boats and rowed ashore to what would become known as Ibo Landing. When taken out of the boats, the Ibos, chained arm and leg, looked around at their surroundings. Cuney tells Avey, "'Cause those pure-born Africans was peoples my gran' said could see in more ways than one. The kind can tell you 'bout thing happened long before they was born and things to come long after they's dead" (37-38). These Africans saw what was going to happen to them and the land and the country and simply turned around, looked at the white men who brought them ashore, and began to walk back to the river. But when they reached the river, they did not jump into the boats, they simply walked out onto the water and began to walk back home to Africa. According to Cuney's grandmother, "they was singing by then" (39).

This story, told over and again by Aunt Cuney, is part of her cultural legacy. Avey recalls, "Back home after only her first summer in Tatem she had recounted the whole thing almost word for word to her three brothers, complete with the old woman's inflections and gestures" (38). Cuney is the person who named Avey – Avatara – after

Cuney's own grandmother "who had come to her in a dream with the news" that the child would be a girl (42). As soon as Avey turned seven, her father was required to take the child to the South Carolina tidelands every August so she could spend the month with Cuney. Being consigned the story of the Ibos, Avey believed "the old woman had entrusted her with a mission she couldn't even name yet had felt duty-bound to fulfill" (42). Jonathan Howard asserts in his essay "'Gone with the Ibos': The Blueness of Blackness in Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow"* (2016), "As if realizing, even from the grave, that a much older Avey had finally succeeded in ridding herself of the vague notion of having been entrusted with a mission, Aunt Cuney reasserts her stubborn calling in the dream by taking the form of a preacher and imploring Avey to return to the place" (901-902). Avey is trying to ignore the past and Great-aunt Cuney will not allow her to do that; her mental and physical discomforts are nudging her toward her destiny.

Lebert Joseph knows how to cure Avey and he quickly begins to pressure her to come along with him on the excursion. He understands that she has lost her cultural identity and needs to relocate her origins. Though she puts up some halfhearted resistance, Avey agrees to accompany him to Carriacou and see what is there. Before the afternoon is over, Avey is on a boat with other "Outlanders" going to honor their ancestors.

The Middle Passage of Avey

Travel by boat for African Americans should evoke a cultural memory. Marshall gives Avey a Middle Passage type journey on the boat to get her to the island. No sooner have they set off on the water then Avey comes down with a terrible case of seasickness. It began with vomiting, "Finally there was nothing either solid or liquid left for her to

bring up and the vomiting gave way to empty retching …" (206). This ordeal was followed by diarrhea, "to her utter disbelief, there it was: the familiar irresistible pressure, followed by the clenched muscles easing, relinquishing their hold under the pressure; and then, quickly, the helpless, almost pleasurable giving way" (207). Crowded onto a small place in a boat, she is soon covered in human filth. This mini imitation of the Middle Passage starts Avey on her journey to reclaim her heritage, while at the same time it cleanses her in preparation for that journey. All the bloat and heaviness of her comfortable, middle class life must be jettisoned. Her final preparation for her reclamation occurs at the home of Lebert Joseph's daughter. Avey is carried to Rosalie Parvay's house and once there, cleansed, massaged and put to bed. When she is finally able to rise, she is ready to go to the "Big Drum" ceremony for its final night.

The Big Drum Ceremony

Avey sat for three hours watching the various dances and thinking she should be disappointed at the "what little was there" (240), but she realized that she was not. Instead, "The restraint and understatement in the dancing, which was not even really dancing, the deflected emotion in the voices were somehow right" (240). As she continued to watch and more and more dancers were leaving the clearing to go home, Avey picked up her chair to move it to a place out of the way of the revelry, but once there, she did not sit down. She watched the dancers and was soon in their midst. "Her feet of their own accord began to glide forward, but in such a way they scarcely left the ground. … by the time … she reached the tree again, she was doing the flatfooted glide and stamp with aplomb" (248). What these Outlanders were calling the "'Carriacou Tramp'" (248) was, in fact, the Ring Shout, taught to her all those years ago by Great-

aunt Cuney. When she finally feels the connections, “the threads streaming out from the old people around her” (249), she began to dance in earnest. Avatara has reclaimed her heritage and can now move forward.

Avey is ready to fly back to the United States and asserts that she will become like the Ancient Mariner, and “like the obsessed old sailor” (255), she would stop everyone who would listen to tell them of the excursion to Carriacou and push them to remember who they are. In addition, she would fix up Cuney’s house in Tatem, which she inherited, and demand that her grandsons be sent to her every summer so that she may pass on the cultural inheritance from Great-aunt Cuney. Like the Ibos, Avey needed to walk. In her case, she walked down the beach to find her mentor; it was only then that she could move across the water to search for her cultural home.

Conclusions

Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall write extensively about the idea of honoring and preserving their culture. The three novels mentioned here are but a small sample of the body of work produced by these African American women writers, but overall, they provide links to the cultural past to lead a new generation into the future. As Morrison mentioned previously, she believes that these links will be strengthened through storytelling and novels. Americans love to say that we live in a melting pot, but our society is, and should be, more like a stew, with chunks of distinct, individual flavor. Many people say that everyone should blend in and become “American,” yet we look at each other and see differences and behave accordingly. Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall are trying to show their readers that we are all different and we need to embrace our diversity and our culture. This is what makes us interesting and provides us with our

identities. When the critics worried in the 1960s that African American literature would begin to resemble white mainstream literature, it was with good reason; America has been trying to whitewash African Americans since they were enslaved and shipped to this country, and with poor results. These writers are informing their readers that spiritually and culturally, America is their home and they need not return to Africa to recognize that.

Not really an Ending – more like the Beginning

"Those who tell the stories rule the world." --Hopi American Indian proverb (storytellingquotes.com)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story," says that the way to "create a single story [is to] show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become." Over the course of many years, the media – television, radio, magazines, newspapers, novels, poetry, all media – have been telling a single story about groups of people. It does not matter if the people are of African descent, Asian descent, male, female, we have a stereotype to attach to that group, to any group. We can all agree that stereotyping is wrong, but it continues, nonetheless. Adichie goes on to say these stories are about power. She says, "How they are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." When we believe we know what to expect from a person because we are familiar with a stereotype about that person's culture or ethnicity, we, as Adichie so eloquently states, "rob them of dignity." One aspect of the single story in America is the power and voice of the white male. We have been listening to their stories for so long, they have deafened American ears to the voices of anyone who is not white and male. This is why we need to allow people to tell their own stories. This is why these women need to tell their stories. We must give them the voice and the

power to tell America who they are and how their presence is an important part of the country.

Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her recent book *Leadership in Turbulent Times* (2018), suggests that the leaders, on whom she focused: Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson, could credit a portion of their success to their ability to tell a story. Goodwin posits that each of these men were able to gain followers because they could tell a good story – fiction or non-fiction, whatever they were speaking about, people listened. As Adichie said above, stories contain power: who tells them, how they are told, about whom they are told, all these factors involve power. That is why, as mentioned in the introduction, Columbus, and ultimately the Spanish throne, held initial power in the Americas, they controlled the story of the Native Americans. These were a people with no voice in the narrative.

While this dissertation is not about feminist literature, it cannot help but be, in some respects, about feminist literature. Because feminist literature tries to lend voice and power to women, regardless of ethnicity, and that is precisely what the books these women have written are doing, they, therefore, may be thought of as feminist. Women of all colors must join together to tell their own stories, to be heard, to demand a place at the table. It is the women of color, though, who have a much more difficult time achieving that place. While all women writers must overcome stereotyping, minority American women, because of their ethnicities, must overcome additional categorization. For Chinese American and Mexican American women, it is proving their value as females within their ethnic groups, while also showing their worth to the American public who have pigeonholed them into exhibiting specific behaviors. African American women

have to overcome the American public's idea that all women of their ethnicity are "strong Black women," and are capable of handling anything, in addition to sexism within their own race. By assuming power over their own narratives, these women are assuming power over their own lives.

Chinese American writers Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan consider themselves "American writers" (Kingston, CulMis 57) (Tan, *TOOF* 316). Because of their ethnic origins, they are often looked upon by people of similar backgrounds as traitors to the ancestors and the old country if they write things that shows old China in a poor light or depicts Chinese men as less than positive role models. While, according to a small but vocal group of minority writers, they should not be writing for the mainstream public (*TOOF* 316). Tan says, as Kingston did in a similar fashion in chapter one:

> I would have to say I am an American writer. I am Chinese by racial heritage. I am Chinese-American by family and social upbringing. But I believe that what I write is American fiction by virtue of the fact that I live in this country and my emotional sensibilities, assumptions, and obsessions are largely American. My characters may be largely Chinese-American, but I think Chinese-Americans are part of America. (310)

Tan has taken control of her story. She is not allowing college professors, Chinese literary critics, public school districts, other minority writers, or the general public to tell her story. She, like Kingston, will not be pigeonholed into telling the story that everyone expects.

In the African American chapter, I noted that according to Zora Neale Hurston, the Black woman is the mule of the world. Alice Walker, in response to criticism about the treatment of men in her novel *The Color Purple* says she cannot understand their (Black Men's) "inability to empathize with black women's suffering under sexism, their refusal to acknowledge our struggles; …[or recognize] that women are oppressed in virtually all cultures" (1988 79). The idea of black men treating the black women of the Civil Rights Movement as lower in status was noted earlier in comments by bell hooks and Nikki Giovanni. Walker does acknowledge the important contributions made by various black men in American history, but feels that many black men did not like to be depicted as the oppressor because, "they were, in fact, the ones *being* oppressed" (79). Unfortunately, this is a sad fact of oppression. The oppressed lash out and try to oppress others over whom they may have some power.

For African American women writers, the men are not truly the problem. As noted in the introduction, August Wilson's character Stool Pigeon spends the play letting everyone who will listen that they need to know their story, their history. That is the message of Morrison and Marshall. The people of African descent should not allow themselves to be subsumed by the dominant culture. Morrison writes in "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" that "there are a lot of people who talk about the position that men hold as of primary importance, but actually it is if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor that we are, in fact, lost" (344). The importance of knowing one's identity is the main theme of *Song of Solomon*. In the essay "Quest for Self: Triumph and Failure in the Works of Toni Morrison" (1984), author Dorothy H. Lee notes that when "Milkman has learned the secret" (354), the secret is his identity: who he is, who his ancestors were,

and where they came from, once he has learned this, he can fly. The tragedy in *The Bluest Eye* is that most of the people in the story have lost the ancestor and do not know who they are. Paule Marshall is delivering the same message in *Praisesong for the Widow*. Avey must go on a quest to find her roots, her ancestors, before she can be comfortable. She can no longer go back to her life of comfort in the white suburbs because, she realizes, it is a denial of her roots. Morrison and Marshall are telling their readers that before they can find a voice, they must know who they are. They are flying and walking back to the past to find their way home; but a home, not in Africa, a home in America. Without their culture, they are lost, and they have no voice, no story to tell.

Cherrie Moraga, in her book *The Last Generation,* reflects on her family in America, after seeing her aging aunts and uncles at a dinner party. She writes:

> Watching them, I know lo mexicano will die with their passing. My tios' children have not taught their own children to be Mexicans. They have become 'Americans.' And we're supposed to quietly accept this passing, this slow and painless death of a cultura, this invisible disappearance of a people. But I do not accept it. I write. I write as I always have, but now I write for a much larger familia. (2)

Moraga is writing to preserve some aspect of her culture. She says, "My father is Anglo; my mother, Mexican. I am the result of the dissolution of blood lines and the theft of language; and yet, I am a testimony to the failure of the United States to wholly anglicize its mestizo citizens" (54). Both Moraga and Anzaldua write with the intention to show their Mexican side first. While they are feminist writers, they are Chicano writers before all else. Cisneros is not militantly feminist; instead, she has softened her stance writing

stories that incorporate her Mexican side, but they also include the American part of her existence. For Cisneros, in America, the woman does not weep, the creek HOLLERS. Girls can go to school and get a degree, not a husband. She can write about the Virgin of Guadalupe, but she also lets her readers know that she is Mexican *American*.

All these women are writing about how their culture is a very important part of who they are – their culture has an ethnic / racial past, but it is also American. They do not want to deny important parts of their identity, but they do want to be accepted for who they are; they do not want to be invisible because Americans find parts of their background unfamiliar. They are inviting America into their lives to make it familiar to the general public.

For reasons of efficacy, I limited my racial / ethnic groups to three, though I certainly could have included many more, especially the voices of Native American women. While I have used Leslie Marmon Silko in the chapter on Mexican American women, specifically in relation to La Llorona, she writes a great deal about the lore and mythology of the Laguna Pueblo and other Native people the Southwest, of whom she is related. Another prominent female voice from Native American literature is Louis Erdrich, of German and Ojibwa heritage. Erdrich has written many books about Ojibwa life and one that ties in many world myths is *The Antelope Wife*. In this novel, the title character, the Antelope Wife is of the antelope. She does not appear to be a skin changer or shape shifter, but like the Celtic Selkies, who could come out of their skins to become "beautiful maiden[s]" (Froud and Lee), she has "join[ed] these dreamlike creatures [the antelopes] and bec[a]me part of their liminal existence. …As an antelope person, [she] crosses the line between human and nonhuman" (Little 504). The Antelope women, like

the Selkie women, bewitch men who, upon seeing them, cannot resist them, this causes the men to plot their capture and take them to wife, usually resulting in sorrow for all. Variations of Erdrich's antelope woman can be found in many Native American stories; normally she is a deer woman and, but like the antelope wife, she is so beautiful men cannot take their eyes off her. Elaine Kleiner and Angela Vlaicu (2001) write of Erdrich that she "uses her own racial and ethnic mythology in order to draw out images of powerful women and so construct empowering identities and cultural images for Native American womanhood." They go on to say that she engages in "revisionist mythmaking … as a socio-political act" (56). Erdrich is using her background to inform the public about her people, about women and her culture. As noted in the introduction by Dr. Terry Tafoya, with all the backstory that must go into telling a Native American story, perhaps Erdrich, to be better understood by the general public, needs to revise her myths.

Lighting a Match

Why are the writings of these women so important? With the winding down of the Civil Rights and Women's Rights movements in the 1970s, many of the women highlighted in this dissertation emerged on the literary scene as a concrete reminder that these movements were not a fluke. Their voices empowered other minority women to take up the pen and begin to write their own narratives. Into the 1980s and through the early 2000s, the American public was introduced to Octavia Butler, who showed the world that white males were not the only inhabitants of the science fiction universe. We also met Gloria Naylor who presented the world of African American women as an often-magical sisterhood, full of heartbreak and love. Terry McMillan took readers into another

realm of African American life, young professional women looking for happiness, and American women were following along.

In the 1990s and into the new century, Hispanic women, mainly from the Caribbean Islands, began to publish their stories in the United States. Esmeralda Santiago from Puerto Rico, Julia Alvarez from the Dominican Republic and Cristina Garcia from Cuba, all wrote about life in America, assimilation and its effects on identity; in addition, they all, at least, touch upon cultural expectations for women in the U.S. and their home countries.

Asian American women writers such as Bharati Mukerjee and Jhumpa Lihiri, both born in India, but writing about the immigrant experience in America and negotiating an identity that fits their culture and their new American life. A similar voice, would be Gish Jen. She is Chinese American and her works are about fitting in in America when you do not look like all the other Americans around you.

Starting a Fire

The number of minority women voices bloomed in the United States following the Civil Rights and Women's Right Movements, with the numbers increasing with each passing decade. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the voices have increased exponentially and have increased in variety, as well.

Some of the most exciting writing is being published in the Young Adult literature (YA) category, with fresh voices like: Angie Thomas with her breakout hit *The Hate U Give*. This novel examines Black lives and women's lives and trying to negotiate two different cultural worlds. It was quickly turned into a motion picture. Another talent

in YA literature is Nic Stone, a young woman who wrote the novel *Dear Martin.* She says on her book cover biography that this novel is "an attempt to examine current affairs through the lens of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s teachings." These young women are engaging young people with their writing, trying to keep the flame of the Civil Rights Movement alive until true equality is here, and we no longer need to keep talking about it.

Another new voice in YA fiction, children's books and poetry is Isabel Quintero. She is Mexican American from Southern California and her work depicts issues that young minority women must face, including racism and sexism. Erika Sanchez is another up-and-coming Chicana writer, author of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and, published the same year, a collection of poetry. A portion of Sanchez's writing deals with growing up poor and having undocumented immigrant parents. In the non-YA realm, Reyna Grande writes of her life as a minority in America, but she was born in Mexico and illegally immigrated to the United States when she was nine years old. These experiences run through her works as they shaped her into the person she is today.

As Asia is a huge continent, there are many countries from which to draw and add to our American literary tapestry. Sri Lankan American author S.J. Sindu explores the cultural expectations of arranged marriages and homosexuality in her debut novel *Marriage of a Thousand Lies*. Sindu told NBC News prior to the novel's release that it "is more than just the story of young, LGBTQ Americans of Sri Lankan descent. …, it is also the story of immigration, community, and surviving the trauma that comes with war" (Gandhi). The experiences of their lives provide these women with extensive material to inform the America public of who they are and why their presence and differences make

them an important part of life in these United States. On a more unusual note, Yale Law professor Amy Chua decided to use the stereotype of the Asian parent to raise her daughters to be successful in America. Chua, a first generation Chinese American, married a Jewish American man; upon that union they decided to raise their children in the Jewish religion, but she would raise them as a Chinese mother. The ensuing struggles and lunacy are chronicled in Chua's memoir *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Only in America would we choose the stereotype and then write about that experience.

Immigrant women, professional women, undocumented women, gay women, straight women, all these women, and more, have a story; and by telling their stories, by allowing Americans to hear their voices and build empathy, we heal each other and ourselves. To go back to Neil Gaiman, he writes, "Empathy is a tool for building people into groups, for allowing us to function as more than self-obsessed individuals" (Cheap Seats 8). These stories make us realize we are not alone in a confusing world with no one feeling the same thing we are. Stories help build out communities.

When Arthur P. Davis was pondering the future of "Negro American Literature" in 1967, he concluded that once the American Negro no longer needed to protest through literature to gain Civil Rights, "The Negro American writer will do then what he has always done after each crisis in the past – continue on his trek to the mainstream of American literature" (*Dark Symphony* 526). To this we can say, yes, she will. The voices of these women – Kingston, Tan, Cisneros, Anzaldua, Morrison, Marshall – have given permission to other minorities, female and male, over the ensuing decades, to let their fellow citizens know of their experiences and invite others into their lives for a brief time to share those experiences. This flowering of literature has not only allowed racial and

ethnic minorities to be heard, it has helped to give voice to Queer / Gay / LGBT literature, as well. All of these voices, these stories, are becoming our mainstream American literature and are filling in the bare spots in the American tapestry; thus, we are finally able to have a better idea of the big picture of the populous of the United States.

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