LATIN AMERICAN FEMINIST LITERATURE: A NECESSARILY HETEROGENEOUS CATEGORY

by

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Latina/Chicana literature has been a category of literature homogenized into one ill-fitting heading. The homogenous categorization of Latina/Chicana literature is an incorrect approach to teaching and, in general, approaching Latina/Chicana literature. Specifically analyzing the works of bicultural Latina/Chicana authors illuminates the need for, instead, a heterogeneous category. Using the novels How the García Girls Lost Accents written by Julia Alvarez and The House on Mango Street written by Sandra Cisneros set against the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa, within her book Borderlands: *La Frontera*,

illustrates the diverse quality of Latina/Chicana literature. While Latina/Chicana literature is diversified, there remains distinct cultural themes that the novels and the theory of Anzaldúa utilize, such as food and language, that allow for comparison and dialogue between the works. In conclusion, Latina/Chicana literature is a category constructed at present of an inadequate overarching label and would be much better suited to the freedom of a heterogeneous categorization that allows for a more appropriate literary vehicle with which to explore Latina/Chicana experiences.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "feminist" has been under much debate of late with claims from certain women that the term is dated and fails to validate the multi-faceted women that normally would fall under the label. "Feminist" tells nothing of the class, race, sexual identity, educational background, culture or even gender of the person to whom the label is applied. "Feminist" has come to mean more than the dictionary stated definition of, "one that advocates or demands for women the same rights granted men, as in political or economic status" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd Ed., 496-497). The word has been divided among multiple camps in the struggle for women's rights. From radical feminists to democratic feminists, the women have divided in an effort to conquer. However, the winning battle is far from complete, for now the only agreement remains in the inability to place all women that write women-focused novels or theory within the suffocating confinement of a feminist theory which still privileges white women's experiences over the experiences of minority women. Instead, many women are searching for their own labels to attach to themselves, women like myself.

The word "feminist" is only part of who I am. It is a term inclusive of my constant struggle as a women in a society that admits to its gender inequality through its violence against women and lack of equal pay and equal opportunity

for women. But, despite recent efforts to reappropriate the term "feminist's" usage to be inclusive of minority women, disabled women, women of differing sexualities, and even men, the term remains limited to discussion and description of life as a white female. There are equally important terms with which to describe who I am, such as a "bicultural Latina." The issue and importance of a racial exploration in the context of the feminist movement has been a conflict for many women besides myself. It has been especially difficult for feminist literary theorists.

Racial theory came into the public consciousness during the sixties and seventies and has raised multiple questions as to what theories are appropriate for reviewing works by women of color, and more specifically for my purposes, Latina women. As a minority theorist, Barbara Christian has shown that theories developed by white women tend to deny the point of view of the minority female. Within her essay, "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian touches upon both the reasons behind the lack of minority theory and the need for its development:

> The pervasiveness of this academic hegemony is an issue continually spoken about -- but usually in hidden groups, lest we, who are disturbed by it, appear ignorant to the reigning academic elite. Among the folk who speak in muted tones are people of color,. . . who have struggled for much longer than a decade to make their voices, their various voices, heard and for whom literature is not an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better. (Haciendo Caras, 336)

Despite this lack of a pulpit from which to preach, minority theorizing is very much a possibility and it can occur, but Christian believes it will happen in a

different vein than that of white women. According to Christian, minority theorizing already exists. She goes on to try to define present minority theorizing: "Our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (336). Minority theorizing exists within the present stories of culture, heritage and tradition and it is within the pages of a novel or a narrative that the silence that exists for a minority woman can be overcome. In the form of minority theory, a woman that is usually voiceless can echo her experiences not only for her own personal revelation but the furthering of the entire race from the point of view with which the woman writes. Christian writes of the unique voice of the minority woman, "people of color have always theorized -- but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic" (Haciendo Caras, 336). Clear is her belief that minority women need to make a voice for themselves, not necessarily in defiance of the theory already in existence, but in extension of the present white female voice. However, the question then becomes: where does the racial woman begin her struggle to define a theory without an example, in a world where, "the race for theory has silenced many of us to the extent that some of us feel we can no longer discuss our own literature, while others have developed intense writing blocks and are puzzled by the incomprehensi-bility of the language set adrift in literary circles" (336)? What form should such a theory take? Additionally, should theory take the position that Christian promotes that

the stories of the minority women become the theory or should minority women extend themselves outside of the narrative to create theory in an academic setting such as white women have already done? New questions concerning the further extension of minority literature beyond the arena of Anglo versus minority are then raised necessitating an examination of the varying groups held under the label of "minority".

Should the theory include all minority women or should each minority group develop its own theory? How does one define the minority group, by the government, by sociologists, or by the members of the groups, themselves? These questions and definitions have been the subject of multiple debates and continue to place the minority community within and outside of literary circles at odds. However, before I can discuss the appropriate theory or methodology for understanding the fiction writings of minority women, I need to clarify the definitions of "minority women" that I will use for this thesis.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY

Reload the Label Maker

The term "minority women" is a generally understood term which is inclusive of any under-represented female of any ethnic group other than the dominant group of Euro-Americans. This is a very basic definition which acts as a foundational building block for the more complex terminology of "ethnicity," "race," and "culture." Each minority group has its own feelings concerning the usage of these terms as does the outside world for each minority group; one of the most complicated of these terminology debates rages within the "Hispanic" community[1]. The focus of the debate centers upon whether to label Hispanics a race or a culture or both and, more importantly, on who has this right to define a community of people. This debate is central to my own thesis in that before I can discuss the experiences of the bicultural Latina, I need to define "bicultural."

I have decided to use "bicultural" because the term "biracial" does not seem to address issues of culture. I believe that members of the minority group itself have the sole right to classify themselves with labels or to provide accurate descriptions of their cultures. Under this belief I freely choose the terms of culture and ethnicity rather than race to describe my own outlook onto the theory

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1 As a note, the use of the term "Hispanic" is in itself a debated issue, of which the history is too complicated to do justice with a note; however, the label is loaded for those with indigenous, non-Spanish and mixed Spanish backgrounds for the term is adopted from the *conquistadores* who stole Latin American and Mexican land from the rightful inhabitants during the 16th Century.

and writings of fellow Latina authors and theorists. "Race" implies the science of groups of people which has been developed, not by the minorities themselves, but instead by governments, anthropologists, and human biologists. Races are classified according to one's body type, physical appearance, and land base of origin, whereas a culture is defined by a group's holidays, food, mythology, belief system, religion, politics, art, dance, music, family structures and varying other characteristics unique to the culture. Race acts only as a distinctively visual container for a person; it is devoid of the traditions and experiences which culture provides. Culture fills in the sketched outlines of brown that race provides to develop the group's experiences, alive and unique. Additionally, I see "ethnicity" as a term which defines an intermediary state between the ideas of culture and race, a borderland between two contrasting camps. Ethnicity encompasses the major aspects of culture, such as language and holidays; it also holds the major aspects of race, such as land base and physical features. When the term is used the entirety of the community of people is included, not just the groups defined by culture or race but all that creates uniqueness within the community. In consideration of the term "ethnicity," the defining characteristics of race and culture merge to create a group identity. The group identity or ethnicity of Chicanos and Latinos is still an issue that remains elusive.

The prevalent thinking concerning both Chicanos and Latinos by the government and certain anthropologists is that Latinos should remain grouped into a conglomeration of varying Spanish speaking cultures deemed "Hispanic".

"Hispanic" individuals, deemed so by governmental census and academic admissions, are classified as such according to the culture or environment in which they are born, rather than their personal cultural and racial histories. Thus, a person, for example, that is African-American by birth, can become Hispanic based upon his or her geographical location and neighbors during childhood. The government considers "Hispanic" a culture due to its supposedly easy appropriation by other ethnicities, the supposed inability to be born Latina or Chicana, and the basic fact that one supposedly cannot identify a Hispanic through her or his physical features, as one would an Asian or Native American. Therefore, the use of the term "culture" to describe the Latina community is, additionally, the most easily understood categorization of the Latina peoples by the government and the people of the dominant social structure. While I do not agree with the governmental reasoning, my own appropriation of the dominant terminology will allow members of the dominant structure and minorities raised within its confines to more readily understand my analysis, for the terminology is familiar. However, I am not bowing to the pressures for mainstream acceptance, for I also am choosing to set aside the usage of the term "racial," not in the dominant belief that Latina and Chicana people do not have physical characteristics or a specific land of origin that would make them a race, but in the hopes of centering the focus upon the larger cultural components of the ethnic group versus the limiting view of biologically defined parameters of race.

In addition to the definitions for race and culture, the further defining of

"bicultural" is necessary. I am defining bicultural Latinas as women who come from both a Latino cultural heritage and also another culture distinct from that of the Latino. One should also not limit one's self to a definition of "bicultural" that does not allow for the possibility of duality within the Latino community. A woman can have a Honduran and a Ecuadorean background, making her as bicultural as a woman that was raised Mexican in the white dominant culture of the United States suburbs. It is important to note the subtle difference between a bicultural Latina who is partially white and another bicultural Latina who was raised within a culture that is partially white.

Given the circumstance noted above, I consider a Latina born within a Latin American country, or born to parents who are both of Latino or Chicano descent and raised within a United States neighborhood to be bicultural. I also consider bicultural a Latina who is born to one parent who is Latino or Chicano and the other who is of Anglo descent The existence of two cultures occurs for this type of Latina/Chicana both within the home and within the neighborhood where her parents raise her. These two types of bicultural Latinas/Chicanas are subject to the Anglo and Latino/Chicano cultures within their own lives in variant forms. On one hand, the former type of bicultural Latina/Chicana faces the Anglo culture in the outside world, whereas within in her home she is subject to the Latino/Chicano influences of her culture. On the other hand, the later type of bicultural Latina/Chicana finds the Anglo culture outside and inside her own home. Using my own heritage as an example illustrates this point well. I am an

El Salvadorian/Honduran and Anglo mix by birth. In addition, I was raised within a community that was a majority white, but with distinctive pockets of varying ethnic groups. Therefore, I was born biracial of a mother from Central America and a father from the United States, and then raised within a household that was bicultural and in a community that was multicultural. This note is a necessary distinction to make between the multiple ways that a Latina or Chicana can be bicultural, for it is another one of the various ways in which Latina/Chicana culture varies.

A further clarification to be made concerns a return to the discussion of land base. There needs to be an understanding of the borders concerning the discussion of women's Latin American literature. The discussion, if given full range, can be encompassing of the entire Western Hemisphere, a truly international discussion. However, for the discussion at hand I will focus on three major works by women of Latina and/or Chicana heritage raised in the United States. I will analyze two novels, The House on Mango Street written by Sandra Cisneros, a woman of Mexican descent raised in the United States, and How the García Girls Lost Their Accents written by Julia Alvarez, a woman of Dominican Republican descent who emigrated to the United States. I will examine these works of fiction in relation to the theoretical work of Gloria Anzaldúa, a woman of self-described Indian, Mexican and Spanish descent who was raised in Texas. Their culture follows the bicultural model in that the characters, authors and, in this case, the reader, exist in the midst of two

cultures, that of being Latina or, in the case of Anzaldúa and myself, mixed Latina heritage in a country with a dominant white or Anglo culture. I am limiting the discussion, not only for simplicity, but also for the more personal reason of my own relation to the material. Being bicultural myself helps me to gain a better understanding of Latina literature that is itself bicultural.

The personal aspect also lends itself to my own search for a more encompassing category for Latina literature within the United States. As it is, the category of Latina literature is falsely perceived as a label that encompasses all the stories of Latinas. Within courses on college campuses and shelves in bookstores Latina literature is seen in narrow fashion without much room to maneuver the definitions of Latina and Chicana fiction. The main Latina/Chicana works studied when a person takes a women's studies course on this campus are usually Cherríe Moraga's "La Güera" or a piece from Anzaldúa's Borderlands. While both of these are wonderful pieces for study, they are far from the entirety of Latina and Chicana writing available. Latina and Chicana fiction is a large category of writing that reflects a vast number of cultural differences. However, there are multiple issues that need to be addressed before the category of Latina literature can be labeled all-inclusive and this then becomes the aim of the following thesis: to raise and discuss possible answers to the basic question, "What is Latina literature?"

PRESENTATION OF NOVELS AND THEORY

To Build a Theoretical Bonfire

During the 1960s and 1970s, minority writing began to be recognized by the literary community as a viable new form of literature. In response, the literary community led by theorists such as, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and Paula Gunn Allen, began to develop a new theory concerning minority writing to help explain recent writings. However, while the initiation of theory was a welcome contrast to the generations that minority writings had spent in the shadows, there were many problems that did, and still do, exist with development of minority literary theory.

Inherently flawed, the first developments of a racial literary theory were undertaken by members of the white majority that set up the rules by which minority authors of today still find themselves confined. In "The Race for Theory," Christian remarks on the necessity for minority literary theory to be constructed by minority authors and scholars themselves for without their ethnic perspective there would be an unconscious restriction of the complexity of a minority's first hand experience, which, in turn, would suppress the language through which varying ethnic groups tell their stories (Haciendo Caras, 341). Theory similar to Christian's theory has been created by Latina and Chicana theorists.

Author and theorist Debra A. Castillo addresses extensively the need for Latin American women to pen their experiences outside the confines of the white

dominant literary domain. Within her book Talking Back, Castillo address the fact that Latin American women have vastly different experiences from Anglo women and thus should not appropriate Anglo theory for it is an inappropriate model. In order to establish a history to the theory that Latinas need to develop their own literary theories separate from the literary theory of Anglos, Castillo refers to a letter written by Victoria Ocampo to Virginia Woolf:

> Ultimately, then, Ocampo, herself a privileged woman, hints that it would be a grave mistake to appropriate Woolf (and implicitly, we might add, de Beauvoir or Julia Kristeva or Hélène Cixous or Showalter or any other theories) uncritically for a Latin American critical practice, for her theories and her conclusions derive from specific conditions that may not be duplicated in Latin America, where circumstances of race, gender, class, and cultural relationships exist which may not pertain to the Anglo-French sphere. (Castillo, xviii).

The belief that Anglo experience cannot wholly encompass the life occurrences of a Latin American woman is a statement that, while basic in its assertion, has promoted a theoretical overhaul to create a better understanding of Latina experience.

The use of Anglo theory to explain the Latina experience works against Latinas in two very interconnected ways. The first barrier concerning Latina experience, the fact that Anglo women have spoken for their minority peers, while more of a scenario for past theory, still has effect on contemporary theory. The past allowance of the Anglo voice as representative for the Latina experience shadows the present conflict within Latina literary theory in its ability to express itself outside of the realm of the Anglo experience. Castillo believes

in the use of the Anglo experience not as a model but more so as a template for Latinas to form their own theory: "Significantly, the continental names are evoked not necessarily as models to emulate but rather as points of triangulation to mediate their own discussions, to help delimit boundaries, and to provide a common ground for discussion" (Castillo, xv). The use of Anglo and continental theory as a diving board into theory for Latinas is understandable for the foundations of the theories can then act as common ground upon which both Latina and Anglo theory can communicate. The common ground can lend itself to inter-cultural communication through which both groups can gain higher ground in the quest for cross-cultural understanding. However, within this assertion, Castillo endorses a movement towards a collusion of cultural literary theories without addressing the benefits to the Latina community.

The endorsement comes at the cost of the exploration of the underdeveloped Latina literary theory outside the demand to consciously establish a common ground with an already developed Anglo and continental literary theory. This is not to say that a common ground between the Latina and Anglo literary communities should not be a consideration; rather the focus for now within the Latina community needs to be placed on the establishment of a strong Latina literary theory. Once the strength of the community is developed than the exploration of a common ground can be established, but presently Latina literary theory is far from the developmental stages that Anglo theory currently occupies and, therefore, a cross-cultural sharing of literary theory

would be unfair and possibly belittling. A possible answer to the proliferation of the Anglo theory lies in the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa, who calls for immediate literary theory that examines solely the works of Latinas without a spotlight focus upon Anglo theory.

Anzaldúa calls for the creation of theory outside of the presence of Anglo theory, unlike Castillo that asks for the mediation of theory on the common ground of Anglo and Latina theory. The urge for an independent discovery of theory surrounds all of Anzaldúa's theoretical writing; it even appears within the introductions to anthologies that she edits, as seen in the following from Haciendo Caras:

> Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us -- entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is *vital* that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space" (xxv).

The approach of Anzaldúa should be viewed as a form of self-preservation, not only for herself, but for all Latina and Chicana women. The existence of theory is a preserving act when viewed in light of the definition for theory that Anzaldúa establishes for minority women:

> What is considered theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts as theory for women-of-color. Theory produces effects that change people and the way they perceive the world. Thus we [women of color] need *teorías* that will enable us to interpret what happens in the world, that will explain how and why we relate to certain people in specific ways, that will reflect

> what goes on between inner, outer, and peripheral 'I's within a person and between the personal 'I's and the collective 'we' of our ethnic communities. *Necesitamos teorías* that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries — new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. (Haciendo Caras, xxv)

The belief that ethnic literature establishes a link between the real life experience of Latina women and the events and emotions attributed to the main characters of the novels they pen acts as the foundation for Latina literary theory. The theory supports the claim that the previously silenced histories and the presently shadowed world of the Latina can be rewritten and repossessed from the Anglo community. In essence, the history and definitions for what constitutes Latina experience is only presently being recorded and discussed. Each proposed theory then helps to form and create who a Latina is and within what parameters the Latina community consists. If this is the main proposal of Anzaldua, then a challenge needs to be proposed to her construction of the community. The community holds members who are bicultural, who are either products of a Latina upbringing in the United States or who are born from a Latina parent and an Anglo parent. These bicultural individuals are less able to throw down the shackles of white dominant theory and construct their own independent theory, for their very identity resides on the notion that they are partial Anglians and that they are, further, raised within a society where the promoted culture was that of Anglos. While their own cultural identity does not necessarily tie them to the literary theory of Anglo culture, the fact that Anglo theory is the dominant form of thought about literature and that their own upbringing was partially Anglo

influenced, does affect bicultural Latinas' thinking, whether it be consciously or unconsciously. Anzaldúa, however, does address the theoretical challenge of bicultural Latinas and Chicanas within her now famous book on Latina theory, Borderlands: La Frontera.

The full acknowledgment of the bicultural element within the Latina community occurs throughout Anzaldúa's book. The theme is so central to the book that the title itself relates to the idea of mixed race. The symbolism of the borderlands relates directly to the internal turmoil that occurs for all bicultural peoples that are aware of their mixed identities. Anzaldúa refers to the entire bicultural community as mestizo/as; she also extends the definition of bicultural into a multicultural paradigm. The origins of the *mestizaje* occur in the early 16th century with the mixing of the Spanish conquistador and indigenous peoples of Mexico and South and Central America. The ethnic mixing continued with the Spanish move north into early North American territory, and their mixing with the North American indigenous populations. The community that developed from these inter-cultural conceptions is the *mestizaje* or literally a mixture. The *mestizaje* is literally and figuratively caught within the borderlands of the United States. Literally, the southern border of the United States separates the United States from Mexico, and all the countries within Central and South America, creating a unique culture at the border towns on both sides of the line: "*Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the *mulato*, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross

over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Borderlands, 3). It is these inhabitants that become the metaphoric look into the borderlands.

The borderlands are filled with individuals that have no home within either country or culture. Their home remains elusive because a home asks that one conform to a very distinctive and traditional role which borderland residents cannot fill. Different and without a sense of tradition, the bicultural person, as Anzaldúa addresses, exists against all that has been established as "normal." Within a majority of theoretical space these borderlanders are ignored or forgotten, confusedly sucked into one of their respective descriptive categories without thought to creating a new theory which encompasses the multi-parts that create their wholes. Anzaldúa's description of the current situation of the residents of the specific borderland of the United States' Southwest is a particularly grim, albeit, accurate depiction:

> Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens — whether they possess documents or not, whether they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. Tension grips inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger. (Borderlands, 3-4).

The purgatory that borderlanders reside within allows their perspectives to be different from those of the minority that knows only the one world of their culture. The borderland perspective is represented within the eyes of the bicultural or multicultural Latina. Given the belief that bicultural Latinas see the world from the borderlands, the theory that exists for the monocultural Latina, much less the

theory that exists for Anglo women, can not fully apply. The call for a separate yet overlapping theory is heard from Anzaldúa and is echoed by other theorists and by the actual works of bicultural Latinas.

Novel Dreams as Reflected in the Theory Machines

The use of novels as real time examples of literary theory is a well respected form of literary exploration. To delve into the fiction of bicultural Latinas written in the United States gives a greater grasp on the genre of Latina writing than would a study simply into the theory of Latina literature. This is due, in part, to the fact that novels are given to the audience in a more personally relatable form. Theory is usually read by scholars, professors, students and, in general, a more elite group of literary people. Fiction is more readily available and an audience can reflect their own lives within the plot lines of the novels' characters, whereas theory in the continental tradition is abstract and with its only true footing within reality in its criticism of fiction. In an extension of this argument, the definition of a literary text versus a work of theory points out clearly the dichotomy that exists between the two forms of literary exploration. On the one hand, stories or novels reflect a series of actions or a plot undertaken by the main and supporting characters. On the other hand, theory is an unprovable set of ideas that exist to explain a wide range of actions within a limited frame. Novels allow one to delve into a specific situation of particular characters that may or may not be inclusive of other individuals similar in either personality or

background, whereas theory exists to explain a large expanse of situations that may or not be inclusive of individuals with similar backgrounds or personalities. Latina literary theory however takes exception to this limited scope with which it can reach an audience.

Latina literary theory tends to be a convergence of the definitions of theory and literary works of fiction. As Christian believes that minority women theorize in narrative forms by organizing new ways of minority literary theory through creation of new works of minority fiction, Castillo echoes her same sentiments concerning Latina women. Castillo believes that theorizing for Latina women comes in forms opposed to those perceived within the Western concepts of theorization and instead follow a more original plan of formation:

> I make no rigid distinction between fictional and critical writings, although the degree to which a work can be mined for theoretical strategic insights varies greatly. Such a refusal to make rigid discriminations is in keeping with a general tendency in Latin America, where the relationship between the writer and the critic tends to come unstuck, and so many of the best writers are also the best critics and theoreticians. (xxii)

Yet despite the cultural difference that some Latinas use when approaching literary theory there presently are still failings in the areas of theory as its applies to Latina experience, most notably within the realm of bicultural women. Using fiction as a vehicle, one can delve deeper into Latina theory and its applicability to Latina experience.

To use fiction as an exploration of a literary genre requires that some basic questions be addressed within the exploration. The questions need to

raise attention to the definition of the genre, how the genre is perceived by the literary community. In asking questions surrounding the definition of the Latina literary genre, the specific questions to be raised concern what standards within the Latina novel categorizes it as such. Are the standards held for all Latina literature or are there subsets to the standard? If there are subsets, are these novels still given a Latina literary title, are they seen as an outcropping of Latina literature and given a subheading, or are they simply placed into a completely new category? For instances, how does a theorist categorize Latina writings that are about bicultural issues or bicultural issues and gay issues? If categories are found to exist within Latina literature then how does one's novel or writing find its way into one category over the other? The above questions need to be asked of the genre of Latina literature, for, presently, the category of Latina literature is seen by many scholars and anthologists as a large all-encompassing category which allows only one room for all types of Latina experience to be housed. Just as the literary community refuses to categorize Jack Kerouac, Gore Vidal and William Faulkner within the confining limitations of "Anglo male literature," the same allowance of complexity within Latina literature should be given to women writers of Latina ethnicity.

If an analysis of two prominent works by two separate Latina authors is done one can see the complexity and dimensions to the genre. The comparing and contrasting of The House on Mango Street and How the García Girls Lost Their Accents also allows a view into the defining elements of Latina fiction,

which in turn authorizes use of Anzaldúa's theory found within Borderlands to help analyze the literature. Upon reassessing the theory, questions can be raised concerning the design of the theory. How does one reevaluate the position of Latina literature; are new categories required to fully encompass all the literature or is new teaching and new promotional technique needed to bring the information to the literary community? How does a scholar or professor now use the information to promote an altered view of Latina literature to the public sphere of readers or is it enough to maintain the debate within the literary community without any true conclusions mandated? All in all the comparing and contrasting of the two works will provide a look into the defining qualities for the genre of Latina literature, a genre that has become confused within the modern literary environment as new works are constantly redefining the genre. Before I begin a comparative analysis of literary works, let me explain the reasons behind my decisions concerning the basis for choosing the two novels.

I sought texts that were fictional, for the obvious reason that to analyze Anzaldúa's theory I would need to compare it to the fiction that the theory reflects. The authors would be of the contemporary era for the writing would be more accessible to use comparatively to the theory, which has been a product of contemporary times. Also for me to personally relate to the material it would need to be of a more contemporary era. Additionally, I believe that the works needed to be written by women of a bicultural nature, for it seems that the label of bicultural directly assaults the question of how to place literature that falls

outside the confines of a single type of Latina literature. Using bicultural literature will also give a smaller scope to the analysis, in that the genre of bicultural Latina literature is much smaller in comparison to the larger conglomeration of Latina literature. In conjunction, the bicultural literature is a relatively untapped area of study within the Latina literary genre, thus any resolutions reached will have more of an impact on future study. The impact of bicultural literature within the United States is greater given the fact that most Latinas raised within the United States are bicultural. To find a Latina isolated in a community within the United States that consists solely of individuals of the same ethnic background is very rare, if not impossible. The group "Latinas" within the United States is slowly altering into a more inclusive society of women of varying backgrounds and the theory and literature itself should reflect these changes. Bicultural literature has more of a grasp on the changes within the United States therefore providing a better understanding of what constitutes a Latina literary work within the United States.

There is one fear I want to address before entering into a discussion of why I specifically choose these novels; it is the fear that these works will be seen as the only examples of what defines Latina bicultural literature. This is far from a personal goal in the analysis of the works, for this end would contradict the statements already made concerning the need for a more expansive outlook on minority literature and its theory, not to create a more confining literary world for authors to present their works. The reasons behind my decisions to use these

three specific texts involves more of a personal connection to the pieces than any other theoretical or scholastic influence. The two novels were both written from points of view of younger women such as myself; additionally the characters deal with major issues that my own family has found to be conflicts within our lives. I chose the theory of Anzaldúa for it is based on emotions and thoughts that surround my own existence as a bicultural Latina and furthermore her work is concise, but at the same time speaks in an open manner that lends itself wonderfully to comparison with the more frank fictional works. Also Anzaldúa does not shy from issues that are major components of the lives of bicultural Latinas, such as language, food, and appearance. All three of these issues are found within the novels as main sources of conflict and distinguishing markers of the characters' and authors' biculturality.

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LANGUAGE AS CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN NOVELS

The Forked Tongue of Biculturalism in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

Julia Alvarez's novel, How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, is a wonderful example of bicultural literature and presents itself as a great work for analysis of the pieces that make up the puzzling definition of Latina literature. The novel was published in 1991, which is reflected in the contemporary topic matter. The novel displays its bicultural colors with the title of the story and early within the novel itself. The title suggests the loss of culture or the acculturation of the main characters, the García girls, into the framework of some location in which their accents are unacceptable. The United States is the assumed location in which the loss of their accents occurs, as perceived from the English that graces the cover. The struggle between maintenance of one's culture and acculturation to a new culture that is not welcoming or is even hostile to foreign residents is a distinct complication to the lives of bicultural Latina women within the United States. The theme is one that envelopes the action within the entire novel. It colors all of the events that take place in the lives of all four García women: Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofía.

The novel's setting accentuates the sisters' struggles within the two cultures to which they belong, those of the Dominican Republic and New York City, United States. The novel begins with the present time in the women's lives and moves backwards in chronological order to their childhoods. The interesting

technique illustrates the slow acculturation that the women all experience as they move from the islands during their youth to New York City to spend their pre-teen and teenage years. The setting also sees a telling looping of the life of one of the García women, Yolanda.

The novel opens with her visiting her relatives on the island of the Dominican Republic as a thirty-nine year old woman and ends with a look into her childhood as Yoyo on the island when she is about to leave her relatives for New York. This connection of Yolanda's life to her roots within Dominican culture is a strong one for the novel presents her hasty departure from the island under duress by the Dominican government, but her willing return despite the presence of still hostile forces on the island and a loss of fluency with the Spanish language. The need to maintain a connection with one's culture through the use of language, no matter how small, is a strong influence within the stories that fill How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. Before diving into this subject, however, one more quick note on the use of the novel's story presentation.

The use of anthologizing the events by having each sister tell her own story from three different chronological periods in her life maintains a feeling that the women's lives are dividable into sections. This sectioning provides a divided view of the women's lives, where each has lived almost as three parts of the whole that is her person. The location of their existence is merely a symbol of the three parts, for it is more the culture that exists at the locations that makes up their persons. The location then is further represented by the placement of the

stories within the three sections of the novel that helps to elucidate the position of the women's lives in relation to the telling of their stories. The three sections of the novel begin as the first part opens into present lives of the sisters and continues backward to their college years in the states. This section is marked by the effects of living life as bicultural women. The five stories revolve around how the sisters cope with lives that have become distinctly American given their backgrounds. Yolanda presents the problems of maintaining a connection to her culture, within the story "Antojos," when for many years the necessary survival skill was to cover her difference:

> There is so much she wants, it is hard to single out one wish. There have been too many stops on the road of the last twenty-nine years since her family left this island behind. She and her sisters have led such turbulent lives — so many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them. But look at her cousins, women with households and authority on their voices. Let this turn out to be my home, Yolanda wishes. (Alvarez, 11)

The story "Antojos" is set within the García-de la Torre plantation, which Yolanda returns to after a painful divorce. The visit can be seen as a distraction for Yolanda, considering the circumstances of her emotional state; however as the story unfolds it appears to be more of a search for comfort and security during a time that has left Yolanda vulnerable and without a sense of control. She searches for her lost security on the island where she was born and spent her early childhood and not in the United States. The return signifies a sense of comfort with her native heritage that cannot be provided by her adopted culture within the United States. However there is a duality to this belief in that there is a

discomfort with her return after a five year hiatus from the island. Some of Yolanda's discomfort lies in her difficulty with the Spanish language as seen in the following, "In halting Spanish, Yolanda reports on her sisters. When she reverts to English, she is scolded, 'iEn español!' The more she practices, the sooner she'll be back into her native tongue, the aunts insist" (Alvarez, 7). Language's influence upon whether the women feel comfortable in their environs occurs throughout the novel.

Within the United States, the discomfort lies in their use of the Spanish language and a complete ineptitude with the English language. In the second section, the five stories revolve greatly around the sisters coming into an understanding of the language as a representation of their grasping of the culture. Yolanda, who becomes a writer, finds a particularly ironic comfort in the English language:

> Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language. By high school, the nuns were reading her stories and compositions out loud in English class. But the spectre of delivering a speech brown-nosing the teachers jammed her imagination. . . She still had a slight accent, and she did not like to speak in public, subjecting herself to her classmates' ridicule. (Alvarez, 141)

She finds a solace in her private writings of poetry and diary entries in English, for they provide her with an almost triumphant gain over the obstacles that she has before faced with the language. Yolanda's proficiency as a writer acts as the ultimate revenge against a community that would never accept her Spanish as a

language with which she could justifiably communicate with the literary world. This communication breakdown between cultures plays itself symbolically through Yolanda's marriage to an Anglo man, as they represent the sides to the cultural canyon that stands between their mutual understanding of one another.

The ridicule that Yolanda fell subject to during her preteen years is similar to the lack of understanding that John, Yolanda's husband, has for Yolanda's different ethnic background. The ridicule comes in both situations in relation to Yolanda's English skills. The accent subjects her to ridicule during her school days. In her marriage, there is an ironic alteration to the experience of her school days for it is her proficiency with the English language that eventually ends her relationship.

Within the first section, the story entitled "Joe" centers around the building and disintegration of her relationship with John. The story opens with an explanation of her nicknames, "Yolanda, nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo* — or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, *Joey* — stands at the third-story window. . ." (Alvarez, 68). The explanation illustrates the most personalized gap that exists between the languages of English and Spanish for Yolanda, that of the pronunciation and shortening of her name. To shorten one's name is to make a person appear emotionally close to the individual using the nickname; however if the nickname is an affront to the individual's personhood than the nickname accomplishes the exact opposite of its intended purpose. The

understanding and use of language communicates greatly the comfort one has with herself and her own culture. Yolanda has learned through the disparagement of early schooling that the English language can give her a feeling of reassurance within the United States culture. Her skill with the language gives her a place of respect and a normalized front through which she can maneuver as would a native. She loses this earned key to United States society when she involves herself with John, for he successfully strips her of power to be mobile within a society that expects English from its citizenry.

John begins his undermining of Yolanda's power through the use of her acculturated nickname, *Joe*, and continues through a series of actions that eventually silence Yolanda. The silence of Yolanda is like nails in her coffin, for without a voice that is legitimate in the society in which she is a citizen, she is without authorized personhood in enemy territory. In the beginning of their relationship, John demands verbal agreement to his questions, settling for nothing but words:

> 'I love you' John said, rejoicing, tricked by the barks and the howls. But Yolanda was afraid. Once they got started on words, there was no telling what they could say. 'I love you' John repeated, so she would follow suit. Yolanda kissed each eye closed, hoping that would do. 'Do you love me, Joe? Do you?' he pleaded. He wanted words back; nothing else would do. (Alvarez, 70)

Mirroring her school life, in which she was not legitimate until she could verbalize herself in English to her fellow students and teachers, she is without authenticity in the eyes of her lover without words. There is a troubling turn that occurs for Yolanda; once she gains her ability to verbalize she is turned against by her lover

for she is seen as overly efficient with the language that she was forced to learn to gain a voice. The following depicts well the conflict that arises over this subject as Yolanda asks John to construct an impromptu ode to her, "'My dear Joe,' John began, but put on the spot, he was blocked for a rhyme. He hemmed, he hawed, he guffawed. Finally, he blahhed: 'My dear, sweet little squirrel, you mean more to me than all the gold in the world.' He grinned at his inadvertent rhyme" (Alvarez, 71). Yolanda responds to his effort with the following admonishment, "Yo sat up again. 'C minus!' She rolled away from him onto the grass. 'Where'd you learn to talk Hallmark?'" (Alvarez, 71). Yolanda's anger at the lowly attempt at poetry by her husband connects with the fact that the obtaining of her ability to speak the language was tasking and the expectations of her were great. John was a product of the language and he is able to speak poorly without ridicule because it is his native tongue without ridicule, a luxury that Yolanda is not granted. John's response to Yolanda's critique is defensive, "Hurt, John stood and brushed off his pants as if the grass spears were little annoying bits of Yo. 'Not everyone can be as goddamn poetic as you!'" (Alvarez, 72). The conflict ends in a telling sign of their communication problems, a sign that foreshadows the eventual event that dissolves their relationship completely.

In an effort to resolve the issue Yolanda playfully becomes physical with John and he responds with an effort at forgiveness by entering into a mirthful attitude and continuing their earlier rhyming game. He asks Yolanda to come up with a rhyme for her name, "'I' -- she pointed at herself -- rhymes with the *sky*!'"

John disallows the rhyme, "'But not with *Joe*!' John wagged his finger at her. His eyes softened with desire. He placed his mouth over her mouth and ohhed her lips open" (Alvarez, 72). Yolanda tries to compensate for the mistake, however the rhyme is never legitimatized: "'*Yo* rhymes with *cielo* in Spanish.' Yo's words fell into the dark, mute cavern of John's mouth. *Cielo, cielo*, the word echoed. And Yo was running, like mad, into the safety of her first tongue, where the proudly monolingual John could not catch her, even if he tried" (Alvarez, 72). In a flashback to her previous experience as a grade school student, Yolanda's first language is silenced by a native speaker of English. Her ideas expressed in her native tongue are non-legitimate to the culture that rules within the United States and they remain unrecognized by her husband, an individual who is supposed to understand her and allow her a legitimate existence. Instead John silences Yolanda, in a symbolic fashion, with his own tongue. By blocking the Spanish from exiting her mouth he succeeds in silencing her culture and the language which gives Yolanda a sense of security. This same type of conflict resolution occurs near the end of "Joe" and becomes the last event experienced between the two before their divorce.

The conflict that fuels their relationship dissolution occurs when Yolanda uncovers a list that John has created concerning the pros and cons of his love for Yolanda: "But this time it was because he made for-and-against lists before doing anything, and she had discovered the *for-against-slash-Joe-slash-wife* list. Number one *for* was *intelligent*; number one *against* was *too much for her own*

good. Number two *for* was *exciting*; number two *against* was *crazy*, question mark" (Alvarez, 74). Upon the confrontation of John with the list he points to his need for lists to help decide large issues for him and relates this to Yolanda's use of words as her crutch. Yolanda responds with wounded anger: "'Words?' She swatted him with his paper. 'Words? Wasn't I the one always saying, *Don't say it. Don't say it?* I was the one who tried to keep words out of it'" (Alvarez, 74). Once again, John uses Yolanda's proficiency against her. Her ability to use the English language at a level higher than her native husband becomes a weapon with which John wounds Yolanda again and again. John needed to use lists to decide his emotional state for he felt left out of the process of Yolanda's emotional decision making due to her higher level of verbal processing. It acts almost at his own attempt at poetry. The lists are an unconventional medium in which he can process his emotions. However, their existence in the non-literary and academically accepted form of lists only adds to the inefficiency with which John tries to emulate Yolanda's fluency.

The solution phase of their conflict, again, follows an earlier pattern established by John. As Yolanda struggles to understand the issues John tries to silence her:

> He drew her towards him, in play, and pressed his lips on her lips. Her lips tightened. She set her teeth, top on bottom row, a calcium fortress. He pulled her forward. She opened her mouth to yell, *No, no!* He pried his tongue between her lips, pushing her words back into her throat. She swallowed them: *No, no.* They beat against her stomach: *No, no.* They pecked at her ribs: *No, no.* 'No!' she cried. . .'Noooooooo!' she screamed, pushing off everything she knew. He let her go. (Alvarez, 75)

The tongue of John appears to push the words of Yolanda back inside, to silence her words. However the situational outcome is different, for Yolanda refuses to be silenced and speaks from both of her languages with an urgent, "Noooooooo!" The word No is not only understandable in both English and Spanish but the utterance is guttural and primitive giving the feeling that the cry was from the most original of all human languages, the language of survival.

The necessity of language expression as a means or survival is a topic that Latina literary theory covers extensively. In the theory of Gloria Anzaldúa, she refers not only to the need for Latinas to express themselves in their native tongue, but also of the need for bicultural Latinas to not turn away from the English language. As Latinas exist within a culture that values English over any other language the voices of Latinas becomes systematically silenced:

> We cross or fall or are shoved into abysses whether we speak or remain silent. And when we do speak from the cracked spaces, it is *con voz del fondo del abismo*, a voice drowned out by the white noise, distance and the distancing by others who don't want to hear. We are besieged by a "the silence that hollows us." As "present" beings, though ones who have been "blanked out" and whose voices are heard as static, women-of-color have difficulty speaking within a discourse and within a group of speakers who (be they white or colored) exclude her. (Haciendo Caras, xxii-xxiii)

The silence is a place of negative space, where the Latina that cannot master the language of the majority resides and thus resides in nothingness, unrecognized by the greater society. Anzaldúa directly connects the silence of a person's words with a metaphoric death of the person. As Yolanda battles against her silence, she mirrors the struggle of all Latina women in an effort to be justifiably

understood. For according to Anzaldúa, once a Latina breaks through her language barrier she has gained legitimacy, "When she transforms silence into language, a woman transgresses" (Haciendo Caras, xxii). To accomplish the bridging of the communication canyon, Anzaldúa encourages Latinas and other minorities to use their native tongues to express themselves. The act of using one's own culture as a road map into the depths of the silences allows for powerful and honest writing:

> I sit here before my computer, *Amiguita*, my alter on top of the monitor with the *Virgen de Coatlalopeuh* candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body. The Writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. This vampire which is my talent does not suffer other suitors. Daily I court it, offer my neck to its teeth. This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories, to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body — flesh and bone — and from the Earth's body — stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztecan blood sacrifices. (Borderlands, 75)

The writing appears to be almost alive, a luxury that English cannot give the Latina. English does not allow Yolanda, in the story "Joe," to reach into the depths of her own self; this can only be accomplished through her use of Spanish, her own secret language.

Anzaldúa, while endorsing the use of native tongue to fully express oneself, warns against the defiance that some Latinas have for using English. There is a definitive importance connected with the maintenance of one's cultural

language and dialects; however, Anzaldúa believes that the voice of the native will not always be heard; rather in the United States English will always be the language to which individuals listen. Thus to communicate at a level that will be heard by the majority in the United States, Latinas need to embrace their English skills as a tool to the world of the Anglo. English acts as another tool, in a war of identities, with which Latinas can fight the oppressive Anglo perspectives and opinions:

> When we come into possession of a voice, we sometimes have to choose with which voice (the voice of the dyke, the Chicana, the professor, the master), in which voice (first person, third, vernacular, formal) or in which language (Black, English, Tex-Mex, Spanish, academese) to speak and write in. When we, the objects, become the subjects, and look at and analyze our own experiences, a danger arises that we may look through the master's gaze, speak through his tongue, use his methodology — in Audre Lorde's words, use the 'master's tools.' . . . I feel that there is a place for us to use specialized language addressed to a select, professional, vocational or scholarly group. . .We should not give up these 'languages' just because they are not accessible to the general public. (Haciendo Caras, xxiii-xxiv)

Anzaldúa uses the analogy of *máscaras* or masks to describe how Latinas survive in the Anglo world. We all have varying faces that depict a different side to ourselves, as stated above we need to choose the voice with which we want to communicate. As an Anglo writer would need to decide the point of view from which her story needs to be told to give the story its greatest impact, a Latina writer needs to reassess her voice every time she writes and speaks. Which voice to be used becomes an extremely important question to a Latina for the wrong choice of voice can mean silence which leads to professional suicide as a

writer and a metaphorical personal death. Returning to the example of Yolanda, she herself has many *máscaras*. Her voice can be found in multiple forms that are deviants of formal English and Spanish that has been taught in school. Anzaldúa refers to the many voices with which she has leaned to speak all as an effect of her biculturalism, deviations of the formal voice she has been taught. She speaks in the dialectical forms of Northern Mexican Spanish, Chicano Spanish, Tex-Mex, *Pachuco*; each language represents a side to the multicultural background of Anzaldua (Borderlands, 55-56). The sides all symbolize *máscaras* with which Anzaldua can reach varying audiences, but they also act to split a person's wholeness.

The personhood of an individual is an important part of maintaining a self-identity. As the *máscaras* collect in a Latina's closet, her own identity becomes more and more split and eventually comes to breaking point where life-altering decisions concerning identity need to be made. An example of this can be seen in the fall that Yolanda incurs after her leaving of John. She leaves John with the knowledge that he has helped accentuate the divisions that exist within herself, "When she left her husband, Yo wrote a note, *I'm going to my folks till my head-slash-heart clear.* She revised the note: *I'm needing some space, some time, until my head-slash-heart-slash-soul* — No, no, no, she didn't want to divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo" (Alvarez, 78). Her quest for wholeness becomes the deciding factor for leaving her husband and becomes the event focus for the resolution of the story.

During Yolanda's recovering stay with her parents it becomes clear that Yolanda has lost any sense of wholeness or self-identity. She spends her time reciting the poems and words of others without breaks for her own words. She is unable to tap into words of her own and instead quotes and misquotes English writers without any breaks to display her own thoughts. Her parents, worried, check her into a small, private facility where she can recover. Yolanda's goal in the facility is finding a wholeness to herself, "Yo fantasized about Doc. He would save her body-slash-mind-slash-soul by taking the slashes out, making her one whole Yolanda" (Alvarez, 80). However it is interesting to note that the Anglo's demand for an acculturated Latina is not the only force that can create a sense of divisions to the whole.

Yolanda's parents have been just as instrumental in the breaking of her into pieces as has her Anglo ex-husband. This division creation can be seen in her parents' visit to the facility: "'Ay Yolanda.' Her mother pronounced her name in Spanish, her pure, mouth-filling full blooded name, Yolanda. But then it was inevitable, like gravity, like night and day, little apple-bites when God's back is turned, her name fell, bastardized, breaking into half dozen nicknames — '*pobrecita* Yosita' — another nickname" (Alvarez, 81). In their desire to become acculturated and accepted into the culture that has barred them from full acceptance since their arrival in New York City due to their language differences, they unconsciously choose to make their daughters' acculturation easier by using the language of the majority culture that they have become a part. The accents

and Mrs. García's malapropisms have been the source of immediate difference between the Garcías and their native United States counterparts. Additionally the accents that the girls brought into the country and into their United States neighborhoods and school playgrounds were a source of painful difference. But the acceptance of the language of the oppressor turns against them as they grow older, as in the example of Yolanda who becomes so many parts to her whole that self-identity is lost. Yolanda's search for wholeness does not end in the facility with Dr. Payne; it only acts as the spark into a search for self-discovery that continues with Yolanda returning to the Dominican Republic and to her native tongue.

The immediate sense of home occurs when Yolanda finally reaches the Island, a feeling that was devoid in the United States, an indication that she is closer to discovering her own center of comfort. She wonders at the unspoken security she finds as a part of the Island, "This is what she has been missing all these years without really knowing that she had been missing it. Standing here in the quiet, she believes she has never felt at home in the States, never" (Alvarez, 12). Yolanda's return follows like a self-discovery and a recovery from the divisions she suffered at the hands of the United States, her parents' need to acculturate, and her own need to do so. The language which has played such a large part within the life of Yolanda is also a large part of her self-discovery. Yolanda returns to the inevitable question of which language that has been taught to her; which of the dialects and words fit the moments when she reaches

into herself for answers:

> The radio is all static — like the sound of the crunching metal of a car; the faint, blurry voice on the airwaves her own, trapped inside a wreck, calling for help. In English or Spanish she wonders. That poet she met at Lucinda's party the night before argued that no matter how much of it one lost, in the midst of some profound emotion, one would revert to one's mother tongue. He put Yolanda through a series of situations. What language, he asked, looking pointedly into her eyes, did she love in? (Alvarez, 13)

The searching for a voice that will not only be heard by others, but by oneself is a journey that Yolanda is on throughout her life. The search is convoluted and complicated as the voice is constantly changing to suit the audience, her formal English for her college classes, her familial Spanish for her conversations with her family. To speak to herself, though, the situation requires a voice that speaks to her own sense of self-love, as the poet's question, "which language do you love in?" alters to "which language does she love herself in?"

The issue of language is an enormous part of one's existence as a bicultural woman. Anzaldúa comments on its importance in the following:

> Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity — I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Borderlands, 59)

Bicultural women remain in the shadows of the literary world because their language is seen as a dialect inappropriate for literature and scholarly pursuits.

In the form of verbal expression the mixture of languages can be seen as also inappropriate and uneducated. The need for an understood and approved voice is imperative for the cultural survival of Latinas. Without it, there is certain cultural eradication that follows the pattern that Ray Gwyn Smith's quote establishes: "'Who says that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?'" (Borderlands, 53). Examining another novel in comparison with How the García Girls Lost Their Accents provides another view on the importance of language within bicultural Latina literature as a means for identification of Latina works of fiction.

The Forked Tongue of Biculturalism in *The House on Mango Street*

The form of how the stories are told within The House on Mango Street is different in its basic structure than that of How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. The House on Mango Street cannot be correctly described by the term "novel"; instead it is an anthology of varying short stories, similar to How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, but variant in the changing point of view. The book alters between first, second, and third person to tell the tales of the happenings on and around Mango Street. The main point of view held is that of Esperanza Cordero, a young pre-teen girl, who tells her tales from her own first person point of view. One of the first vignettes that opens the book is entitled "My Name" and illustrates the effect language has upon young Esperanza. The spilt between languages occurs over her own name, the label of who she is as a

person: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing" (Cisneros, 10). In the two languages that Esperanza utilizes she is two different people, as Yolanda was within Spanish and English. The dichotomy Esperanza feels occurs within the classroom, as it did for Yolanda, "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver. . ." (Cisneros, 11). Acceptance of the language of her native tongue does not occur for Esperanza in the classroom and because her name fails the acculturation test, her culture not only becomes unacceptable but so does her personhood.

There is complication though to the feeling that Esperanza holds for her name; it is a complication concerning the confining elements of her Chicana culture. In the Spanish language, Esperanza is held back by her name as it takes on a melancholy association with hope. Throughout the novel, Esperanza connects her hope to leaving Mango Street and its poverty and harshness to the confinements of her culture and this hope is first glimpsed in a connection to language within "My Name." She speaks of the confinements of Chicana culture in connection to her name by the history and tradition that it carries with it:

> It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She 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 a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like

> their women strong. . .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. . .And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on their elbow. . .Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but don't want to inherit her place by the window. (Cisneros, 10-11)

In addition to the burden that Esperanza carries with her name into the United States and with only English speakers, she carries an equally heavy burden in her native culture. Her burden within her culture is of one repression, one that prevents her from speaking from her heart, that places sacks over the heads of the aware women to prevent them from being recognized for their strength. So Esperanza walks a thin line between a Chicana culture which will not give power to her voice and a United States culture that will not acknowledge her voice. Throughout the novel there are places where both cultures battle together to maintain a hold over the voice of Esperanza, as they did to Yolanda in the story "Joe."

Esperanza and Yolanda share the burdens of their names which act as blatant cultural markers indicating their Chicana/Latina heritages, but that also act against them within their own culture. During introductions with native United States citizens, Esperanza is consistently betrayed by her own name to the source of her heritage, "Who are you? And I wish my name was Cassandra or Alexis or Maritza — anything but Esperanza" (Cisneros, 15). But in ironic fashion, upon introductions to her new neighbors she is not laughed at for her name but instead is accepted. Additionally, however, Esperanza finds herself

being more fluent in a language than the native speakers: "We come from Texas, Lucy says and grins. Her was born here, but me I'm Texas. You mean *she*, I say. No, I'm from Texas, and doesn't get it" (Cisneros, 15). The fluency is not noted by the natives and instead the difference of Esperanza sets her apart more so than her fluency brings her closer. Akin to Yolanda, the development of the language of the Anglos is still not enough of a step to overcome her supposedly foreign heritage, which for Esperanza Cordero, is uncovered by her name. Within writing, like the author Yolanda, Esperanza finds not only escape but a ladder into the world of the accepted citizenry; she is given a legitimate voice.

The use of words is a very important part of Esperanza's life as she uses the vignettes within the novel as a diary to reveal the feelings concerning her situation on Mango Street. She is even encouraged to maintain her writing by her Aunt Guadalupe, a woman who is racked with disease and eventually dies in her house on Mango Street. Aunt Guadalupe knows that through writing Esperanza can leave the confining oppression of Mango Street, "That's nice. That's very good, she said in her tired voice. You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at the same time I didn't know what she meant" (Cisneros, 61). The ability to leave Mango Street requires that Esperanza overcome the barriers of her heritage, in addition to her poverty and gender. As illustrated in the theory of Anzaldúa this is accomplished through the expression of voice, which Aunt Guadalupe encourages, although Esperanza does not become fully aware of the power of

her pen until later in the novel. In the denouement of the novel, within the last vignette, "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Esperanza becomes fully aware of her future and the power of her voice as a bicultural Chicana writer:

> I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (Cisneros, 110)

The history of her heritage or the ghosts of lost relatives and those that cannot leave Mango Street become the reason for her writing. These persons left behind without a legitimate voice in the dominant culture are the reasons that Esperanza needs to create a new voice for herself as an example of all those who cannot be given acceptable voice. She understands that she is carrying a legacy, a historical recording in her heart and head. She is not only responsible for her own feelings and thoughts but for all of the women left on Mango Street and for all her relatives left behind in Mexico. The words of her mother are an indication of Esperanza's cultural responsibility:

> Today while cooking oatmeal she is Madame Butterfly until she sighs and points the wooden spoon at me. I could've been somebody, you know? Esperanza, you go to school. Study hard. That Madame Butterfly was a fool. She stirs the oatmeal. Look at my *comadres*. She means Izaura whose husband left and Yolanda whose husband is dead. Got to take care all of your own, she says shaking her head. Then out of nowhere: Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains.

> Yup, she says disgusted, stirring again. I was a smart cookie then. (Cisneros, 91)

Esperanza's words are necessary to record the history and therefore ensure the survival of her ambiguous culture. Within her literary theory Anzaldúa echoes these same sentiments of a need to preserve culture and maintain cultural survival:

> [T]he future will belong to the mestiza. Because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos -- that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave -- *la mestiza* creates new consciousness. The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. (Borderlands, 80).

Esperanza uses her words to create a new consciousness for those that like her are *mestiza*, a new community that encompasses both the United States and Chicana/Latina cultures. As seen in the examples of both Esperanza and Yolanda in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, the need for a legitimate voice is the ultimate in the creation of a cultural place within the United States. This theme of voice takes precedence over any other form of legitimacy within these two works and within the theory of Anzaldúa. And while language is not the only marker of culture it is the most important for it allows personhood and grants the tools for the breaking of silence. People are taught through words and without their usage cross-cultural communication would be improbable. Additionally, however, there are issues of cultural representation that exist besides the voice, such as food. While food may not be as much in the forefront

as language, it is an important piece to constructing fictional literature representative of the Latina/Chicana bicultural experience for food reflects on the attitudes of appearance and identity for women within the culture.

FOOD AS CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN NOVELS

The Food Factor in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

Food is an insight into the culture and in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents the attitudes of the sisters toward food reveals a definitively bicultural differential. Food that is reminiscent of the Dominican Republic provides a point of security and comfort to the sisters. A point in case is the first story of the novel, "Antojos," which centers around Yolanda's return to the Island. Within the story Yolanda discusses the items that she has missed from her leave from the Island and one the item she mentions is the fruit, guavas. Yolanda's desire for guavas is connected to the culture through the term *antojos*, which is defined in the novel as, "'[W]e say a person has an *antojo* when they are taken over by *un santo* who wants something'" (Alvarez, 8). To have an *antojo* therefore is to be driven by the powers of the spirits in the heavens towards a desire or a notion. The use of spirits to lead a person towards a fancy is a cultural issue unto itself, for the culture of the Latina is laced with religious imagery and icons. Additionally the labeling of Yolanda's fanciful desires upon the Island in her native tongue adds to the cultural nature of her cravings. As an answer the question of what she desires culturally from the Island, Yolanda responds with an equally culturally laden longing for guavas, "'I'll tell you what my *santo* wants after five years,' Yolanda says. 'I can't wait to eat some guavas" (Alvarez, 9). Guavas are a wonderful example of the fruits that only grow within humid and tropical areas such as the Island and areas of Latin American and Mexico. In fact

the root of the word is Spanish, "Sp. *guayaba* <a native word in the Caribbean islands]" (American Heritage, 581). So, not only is the fruit a food native to the Dominican but the actual word used to describe the food is derived from the Island, itself.

Yolanda spends the rest of the story in search of the special fruit; however, it seems prudent to mention the circumstances of her search which entail a confrontation with the distinctive classism which exists on the Island and in the United States, as well. Yolanda needs to travel outside of the walls of her family's compound to find the guavas she longs for. This act is seen as dangerous by her relatives who connect the outside community of the Island with a lower class system and therefore a more primitive and harsher lifestyle. Yolanda does not heed the warnings and ventures into the "interior" of the Island in a borrowed Datsun. Yolanda does come face to face with the harsh lifestyle that the *campesinos* live within at the center of the Island; however the danger that is supposed to be an essential part of their lives never becomes a part of Yolanda's trip. In fact, ironically Yolanda remains safe and protected because the *campesinos* extend themselves to her in over friendly fashion. When she receives a flat tire, two *campesino* men replace her tire and ask for nothing in return and without the help of a group of little boys she would have never been able to find the guavas that she so desires. With dramatic irony, the issue of class reverses itself to illustrate the kindness the *campesinos* show to Yolanda who is seen as higher class, whereas in the United States Yolanda is seen as a

lower class individual in the eyes of the upper class with whom she attends school. Class, while a force within the lives of multiple cultures, maintains a special connection for the Latina/Chicana with the issue of food.

Class affects the type of food that a Latina or Chicana is able to provide for herself and her family, and this offering provides the woman with a sense of cultural and familial pride, as illustrated within the interaction between Yolanda and the owner of the fruit stand that Yolanda stops a: "'Can I serve the doña in any way?' the old woman asks. *'¿Un refresco? ¿Una Coca Cola?'* By the pride in her voice, Yolanda understands the old woman wants to treat her to the best on her menu" (Alvarez, 15). The woman can overcome the shame she feels concerning her poverty in the company of the economically comfortable Yolanda through her offering of food. The necessity of eating and cooking for oneself are needs that all people within the culture share despite their economic status; therefore the old woman's offering acts to equalize her with Yolanda. The old woman can fill Yolanda's class independent need for refreshment and this empowers her beyond the stage of class. In addition to the connection food has to class, food acts as a host to a multitude of issues within the Latina and Chicana culture which affect a Latina/Chicana's comfort within the culture.

On Yolanda's jaunt to discover guavas, she uncovers other foods which represent the culture of the Island, "Piled high on wooden stands are fruits Yolanda hasn't seen in years: pinkish-yellow mangoes, and tamarind pods oozing their rich sap, and small cashew fruits strung on a rope to keep them from

bruising each other" (Alvarez, 13). The abundance of food that Yolanda is a guest to on the Island is a sign of the attitude toward food within the Latina/Chicana culture. There is a feeling of comfort within the food of our mothers as it is prepared in the kitchen and as it is served to us at the small round tables in the kitchen corners. The security of food within the Chicana/Latina culture is a theme found within the theory of Anzaldúa:

> Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo, chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbequing *fajitas* in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home. (Borderlands, 61)

The connection of home with food is a strong one within Latina/Chicana literature and culture. There is a security found in home that is connected with food. One is never full enough or fed well enough when she is in the presence of her relatives. When Yolanda makes her entrance at the party thrown for her return, the comments given are immediately concerning her low weight and the welcoming gifts are cake and *cafecito*s. The link between Latina/Chicana culture and food is so strong that Debra A. Castillo writes of how Latina literary theory can be based upon the analogy of a recipe:

> The 'Recetario' to this book suggests the common language, but also demonstrates that recipe sharing has a sinister as well as a celebratory side. The recipe serves as an index of female creative power; it also describes a giving of the self to appease another's hunger, leaving the cook weakened, starving. To have access to speech, to recipe sharing, she must feed others, often from her most intimate self. . . (Castillo, xiv)

The self sacrificing cook within the kitchen can be seen easily as the writer who with her legitimate voice gives vicarious sustenance to other Latinas and Chicanas without a voice. Within a bicultural framework, however, the use of food becomes altered, perverted in a way by the culture of the United States which promotes an antithetical attitude to food than does Latina/Chicana culture.

The attitude toward food on the Island is in direct contrast with that of the United States. The damaging effects of the complications of the colliding cultural attitudes can be clearly seen in the story of the second oldest sister, Sandra, within the story, "The Four Girls." Sandra is the one sister which has received the hidden Swedish genetics and therefore has Anglo features such as her blue eyes and peach toned skin. According to Mrs. Garcia she is the best looking of the sisters, "'The others aren't bad looking, don't get me wrong. But Sandi, Sandi got the fine looks, blue eyes, peaches and ice cream skin, everything going for her!'" (Alvarez, 52). Sandra's beauty occurs according to a different standard then the one her sisters are judged upon. She is pronounced beautiful according to the standard of attractiveness within the United States and is, in a sense, separated from her culture. Different rules now apply to Sandra concerning beauty and the maintenance of her looks falls under the United States formula, which at the time period is the late 1970's. During this period, the United States promoted the incredibly thin style in models such as Twiggy and this became the example under which Sandra, by default of her Anglo appearance, falls.

Sandra appears cognizant of her placement under a different standard

than her sisters as seen in her desire to alter the foundations of her appearance, "'But imagine in the spirit of contradiction, she wanted to be darker complected like her sisters'" (Alvarez, 52). However, her behavior acts in defiance of her control or understanding of the situation that she is placed because of her biculturality. Sandra battles the beauty standard placed upon her in a way very familiar to women in the United States, as ironically Mrs. García explains how Sandra becomes anorexic:

> 'Anyhow, this diet took over. When her sister got married, Sandi wouldn't even taste the wedding cake, taste! . . .So Sandi kept losing weight. At first, she looked good. She had let herself get a little plump, and with her fine bones Sandi can't carry extra weight. So losing a few pounds was okay. Then, she went away to a graduate program, so we didn't see her for awhile. Every time we talked her voice seemed further and further away. And it wasn't because it was long distance either. I can't explain it. . .So one day we get this call. The dean. She says she doesn't want to alarm us, but could we come down immediately. Our daughter is in the hospital, too weak to do anything.' (Alvarez, 52-53)

The irony in the statement of Mrs. García lies in her acceptance of the fact that Sandra originally loses weight, despite the exclamatory statement she makes concerning Sandra abstention from wedding cake at her sister's wedding. The situation that leads to the weight loss is a direct connection to the confusing beliefs concerning beauty and food that Sandra has been fed.

She is from an culture that encourages their women to eat and cook as a celebration of their heritage. In fact, many women within Chicana/Latina culture find that their only domain in which they exercise absolute power is within the kitchen. As Anzaldúa finds a secure comfort in the food of her culture, Sandra

was raised to do to the same. However, raised within a society that puts an angle of guilt upon a woman's consumption of food, Sandra battles a inner war of ideals. In a Latina culture with an emphasis on food and its connections to the home, women are seen in a different physical standard than are women of the United States. If one takes a moment to scan the images of women promoted as beautiful within each culture, which I did by glancing over popular magazines, two very different pictures form. In the United States one sees a thin, blonde and blue eyed Michelle Pfeiffer whereas the Latina community is promoted by a rounder and bustier Salma Hayek[2]. Sandra is seen by outsiders' eyes as fitting into the confines of the United States model of beauty due to her Anglo appearance; however, she has been raised with the attitudes of beauty promoted within the Latina culture. The confusion of biculturality sets in and brings an inner chaos to Sandra. While the other sisters are plagued by the thoughts of not fitting the United States ideal for beauty, they also are aware of the genetic impossibility by which they are judged. Without Anglo features one cannot compete on an Anglo appearance level; the level that Salma Hayek is judged upon is the scale on which they will also be judged. However, Sandra acts as the exception and is judged according to Anglo rules. The culture clash that creates chaos within the confines of Sandra's life is reflected within the lives of Latina

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2 The photos that I use as my basis were from 1997 and 1998 copies of the following magazines: Entertainment Weekly, Cosmopolitan and People Weekly. The actual small sampling of photos from which I garnered my opinion appear within the appendices of the thesis.

women that enter into a community that holds varying ideals on the aspects to female beauty.

A real life example to the challenging ideas on food occurs with Venezuelan Miss Universe, Alicia Machado. Alicia was crowned Miss Universe in 1996 and upon her acceptance of the title she describes herself: "'I was anorexic just before I was crowned skeletal'" ("Sequels", 160). The five foot seven inch Alicia weighed 118 pounds, very low for a woman of such a height. The year that occurred after her win became a whirlwind as the United States press reported Alicia had incurred a weight gain perceived as immense, despite the fact that Alicia herself felt the weight gain was "'normal and necessary'." ("Sequels, 160). In fact United States citizen, Donald Trump, part owner of the pageant, enlisted the skills of fitness instructor, Edward Jackowski, to place Alicia on a rigorous schedule to lose weight, "[A] low-carbohydrate, higher-protein eating plan and twice-daily workouts, that slimmed-down Machado" ("Sequels, 160). While the United States press and public were concerned about the twenty-year old Miss Universe's weight, Venezuela's press and public remained quiet concerning the weight gain. Meanwhile, Alicia was given a lead role in a soap opera in Venezuela, and is seen as a household name, despite the fact that she weighs almost fifteen pounds more than she did when crowned. However, by United States standards Alicia is better when slimmer, hence the subheading of the article, "After a rocky reign, the scales tip in favor of a trimmer Miss Universe" ("Sequels, 160). Alicia experienced the same culture clash concerning

food and appearance as did Sandra. Just as the situation is dramatic concerning the language barriers within the United States, women from Latina and Chicana cultures that step into the United States are presented with vastly different attitudes concerning food and beauty. Outside the realm of cultural clashes, Latinas and Chicanas use food within the United States as reminders of their culture and sometimes of the country of origin itself. This was seen in the words of Anzaldúa, in the antojos of Yolanda, and is a part of The House on Mango Street.

The Food Factor in *The House on Mango Street*

The issues of appearance, identity and class that surround food within How the García Girls Lost Their Accents do appear within The House on Mango Street; although the issues are the same, there is a variance to their construction. Class is approached within the novel through the vehicle of food in the story "A Rice Sandwich." The story begins with Esperanza's innocent childish desire to eat lunch in a location different from her home, where she normally eats. Some children at the Catholic school have permission to eat in the canteen instead of returning home to lunch, due to the fact that their homes are too far or their mothers are not able to be home for lunch. This entire process is new and exciting to Esperanza and after a dedicated three days of pressuring her mother, she is given parental permission to eat in the canteen: "Dear Sister Superior, Please let Esperanza eat in the lunchroom because she lives too far away and

she gets tired . As you can see she is very skinny. I hope to God she does not faint. Thanking you, Mrs. E. Cordero" (Cisneros, 45). The ensuing events illustrate the connection between Esperanza's lunchtime wish and her class, which up to this point in the novel has remained a non-issue.

Sister Superior upon presentation of Esperanza's note proceeds to question, in a disbelieving manner, the true location of the child's home:

> You don't live that far, she says. You live across the boulevard. That's only four blocks. Not even. Three maybe. Three long blocks away from here. I bet I can see your house from my window. Which one? Come here. Which one is your house? And then she made me stand up on a box of books and point. That one? she said, pointing to a row of ugly three-flats, the ones even the raggedy men are ashamed to go into. Yes I nodded even though I knew that wasn't my house and started to cry. . .Then she was sorry and said I could stay — just for today, not tomorrow or the day after — you go home. (Cisneros, 45)

Due to the innocent desire for Esperanza to eat in a setting that was not her home, she is subject to a racist admonishment by the Sister. The assumption that Esperanza lives in the most rundown and impoverished area of the city is due completely to Esperanza's name and appearance. The Sister limits Esperanza's freedom based upon her culture and additionally destroys her dreams, that of eating within the lunchroom, which is done without proof but rather on the assumption that the Chicana girl must be from across the boulevard. Not only is Esperanza's desire undone but so is the authority of Mrs. Cordero, as she is the authority figure that has granted permission to Esperanza to stay at school during the lunch hour, which the Sister does not accept. The entirety of the scene takes place under two very important aspects of

Chicana/Latina culture, religion and food. Both of these areas normally provide Latinas and Chicanas with a sense of comfort and security, but within"A Rice Sandwich" they do the opposite and instead provide a sense of humility and hurt.

The resolution to the story provides more unease to Esperanza and acts to illustrate what Sister Superior already made apparent, that Esperanza is from a distinctly different and non-empowered culture: "In the canteen, which was nothing special, lots of boys and girls watched while I cried and ate my rice sandwich, the bread already greasy and the rice cold" (Cisneros, 45). Esperanza's rice sandwich stands out as a symbol of her culture, one that only adds to her feelings of cultural isolation. Also the rice sandwich provides no comfort that a cultural food reminder, such as rice, normally would for Esperanza; instead it only adds to her humility which has been based solely on her cultural difference. So food again plays both sides of the comfort coin, by in one sense, allowing for security through cultural familiarity and, in another sense, by displaying the individual as different from the dominant culture through her food therefore creating a feeling of discomfort. Food is a comforting and discomforting presence for Esperanza concerning her class status, as it is for Sandra in relation to her appearance.

The connection between food and appearance is not as prominent within The House on Mango Street as it is with the character of Sandra within How the García Girls Lost Their Accents. There are stories on appearance but they appear separately from the tales of food. The tales of appearance do not center

themselves around the issue of food; however, the stories do indicate a definitive emphasis within bicultural Latina/Chicana literature upon appearance and its affects upon self-identity. The stories discuss the affects of appearing physically different in a society that gives priority to Anglo features; one of these stories is a particularly short vignette, "Those Who Don't."

The story explores the fact that appearance, like food, can bring a cultural comfort or discomfort. Within Esperanza's neighborhood, the dichotomy is readily seen whenever a non-Latino or Chicano enters: "Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake" (Cisneros, 28). The discomfort radiated by the strangers to Mango Street is an effect of the strangers' cultural difference. The assumptions concerning the Chicano and Latino residents by outsiders is that they are dangerous and criminal, such as Sister Superior's assumption that Chicana Esperanza is impoverished and too lazy to walk the "long three blocks" home for lunch. Esperanza, though, finds comfort within the appearance of her neighbors for they are of the same skin tone as her own, "All brown all around, we are safe" (Cisneros, 28). The comfort of living amongst individuals of the same cultural appearance is a result of the bicultural society in which Mango Street is located. For if one is a citizen of a Latin American country or of Mexico, the difference in cultural appearance does not occur; everyone has relatively the same basic cultural appearance. Instead, differences between cultural groups

occur on a different level, like that of economic status, as seen in Yolanda's trip to pick guavas. The situation in the United States is different, for the appearance of varying cultures is more dramatic, such as with Anglos and Chicanos/Latinos. The effect of this bicultural existence for Chicanas and Latinas is to develop comfort within the company of others that display a similar cultural appearance. While the role of appearance within The House on Mango Street does not center around food as in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents there is a central theme around the dual nature of food and appearance as they bring both cultural comfort and discomfort. And, as in How the García Girls Lost Their Accents, food provides a comfort and security that is representative of one's culture and home within The House on Mango Street

Association of one's home country, can be easily induced by the meal placed before a Latina or Chicana. As Anzaldúa will remember her culture through the panza floating within her hominy, Chicana/Latina women can be reminded of the comfort of home through food. The character of Rafaela within The House on Mango Street, like Yolanda, finds a distinctive comfort within the tropical fruits that remind her of her Island origins. She is a woman that has married too young and on Tuesdays stays locked within her apartment waiting for her husband to return from playing dominoes. She remains locked away because her husband, "is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at" (Cisneros, 79). Rafaela is without much comfort in her apartment on Mango Street, as she is married to a jealous husband and spends her time

fantasizing like a fairy tale princess: "Rafaela leans out the window and leans on her elbow and dreams her hair is like Rapunzel's. On the corner there is music from the bar, and Rafaela wishes she could go there and dance before she gets old" (Cisneros, 79). For comfort, Rafaela does not turn to the arms of a secret lover or spend the time with a friend on the phone; instead she has the neighborhood children buy her juice that is either coconut or papaya. The juice is a comforting reminder of the island that Rafaela has left to reach the United States and provides her with a comfort she can receive no where else: "Rafaela who drinks and drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesdays and wishes there were sweeter drinks, not bitter like an empty room, but sweet sweet like the island, like the dance hall down the street where women much older than her throw dice and open homes with keys" (Cisneros, 80). Freedom, that she associates with her home, also comes to her fantasies when she drinks the juice, a freedom that does not exist for her in the United States.

The freedom that belonged to Rafaela on the island came from her ability to be a whole person, one that is familiar with the landscape, language and its culture, inclusive of its food and social standards. The inability for Rafaela to have her literal freedom because her husband's jealously keeps her locked away, prevents her from gaining freedom in other circles, such as the freedom of knowledge of the social standards of the United States that the women in the dance hall use or the knowledge of another source of security besides the island juice. It is uncertain from the story but assumptions to the ability of Rafaela to

speak English are slanted towards her inability for her husband most likely would want her devoid of any ability to be free and language is an immense part of a person's freedom. Rafaela remains a foreigner within the country that she, as a citizen, watches from her apartment window. She has yet to find a comfort within the United States and therefore straddles the borderlands that Anzaldúa has promoted as the location of bicultural Latinas/Chicanas. Anzaldúa does not believe that bicultural Latinas and Chicanas, such as Rafaela, should remain in the lonely desperation of the borderlands; she instead promotes a reworking of the borderlands to provide a safe and creative home for bicultural women.

CONCLUSION

Tolerance of Ambiguity

As survival for the residents of the borderlands, Anzaldúa promotes flexibility and the idea of creation of a new home that combines the two worlds between which the bicultural Latina/Chicana is caught. Anzaldúa recognizes the middle ground that Sandra confronts concerning the attitude differences between her own Latina culture and that of the United States over the area of food and appearance. Additionally she develops a theory that encompasses the need for security within these competing cultures, just as Rafaela searches for the same middle ground that Sandra seeks, despite their contrasting approaches to self-identity and comfort in the borderlands. Anzaldúa's theory consists of reassessing the wasteland that bicultural or mestizas appear to be held within and instead creating a new approach to these borderlands:

> [N]umerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. (Borderlands, 79)

"Floundering within uncharted seas" is the most accurate description of both Sandra and Rafaela, as both characters search for their own identities in a world they know little about or more exactly of what they know conflicts with all they have been taught. Therefore, as Anzaldúa prompts, these bicultural women

cannot hold onto their past ideas concerning security for it will lead them to "death." The finality of Anzaldúa's statement can be seen in the near death experience of Sandra with her anorexia and with Rafaela's metaphoric death entombed within the confines of her apartment. For the survival of these female characters it is necessary for them to build new ideas and to promote a sense of security variant from the type of security with which they were raised. Without a desire to change they will get crushed under the cogs of time; Rafaela will spend her days staring out her window drinking her memories and Sandra will, instead, starve her memories in hopes they leave her. Anzaldúa recommends the melding of the two worlds to find harmony within their overlaps and the recommendation is well taken for without acceptance of both worlds, the memories and habits of the other world will swallow one whole.

In the gaps between cultures lie the victims of biculturalism that struggle everyday with the antithetical attitudes that exist within themselves. The attitudes range farther than food, appearance and language for bicultural Latinas and Chicanas; however, these are the three main areas in which we are caught. Appearance and language are both ways that those not familiar with our culture finger us and food is a way in which we finger the difference in culture. The chance that we will be forced to choose between following the Anglo ways and oppressing our own minority culture is a great possibility. Many see it as a survival technique, a way in which to decrease the difference and the alienation. Others will see the only answer to be the creation of a separate place within the

United States for bicultural Latinas and Chicanas to exist without the excessive burden of answering to Anglo ideals. However among the possibilities lies the answer given by Anzaldúa which is a combination of the two. She believes in the flexibility of the bicultural Latina/Chicana is a necessity for survival. As stated before, "rigidity" will cause death to the woman; a bicultural woman needs to confront the dueling ideals within herself and mold her own borderland where there is room for both cultures:

> "*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. (Borderlands, 79)

A tolerance for a bicultural woman's duality needs to be developed not only by the woman herself but also by the outside cultures. To create a safe borderland for bicultural Latinas and Chicanas there needs to be room within the creative space of the Latina/Chicana culture and the Anglo culture to allow for the new territory.

The new territory for bicultural writers is being created with novels like the two discussed here. Both novels are written by women that are indeed themselves bicultural and are creating, with their stories, space for their fellow bicultural Latinas and Chicanas. The genre of bicultural Latina and Chicana fiction does undoubtedly have aspects which highlight similarities or trends within the novels that allow for their placement within the same category of literature.

The aspect of a borderland consciousness, akin to the mestiza consciousness that Anzaldúa presents, is one of the major similarities between the two novels. As both books present their characters as existing in two worlds, they illustrate the chaos and confusion that Anzaldúa so vividly describes as the wasteland where mestizas are residents: "Alienated from her mother culture, "alien" in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits" (Borderlands, 20). To exist outside of the *intersticios*, there needs to be a greater recognition of the place of bicultural Latinas and Chicanas within the United States literary community. Language is a powerful tool to renegotiate the placement and alienation that bicultural Latinas and Chicanas feel due to their lack of representation within the dominant and minority cultures that they belong.

A mutually understood language bridges the cultural canyons that exist between the Anglo and Chicana/Latina culture. This mutually understood language can create a foundation for discussion of other issues. Among these, the issues of appearance and food and their connections with self and cultural identity can be presented for discussion by theorists and authors alike. Theorists and authors can engage within a cultural discussion that expands the category of Latina and Chicana fiction into a category that becomes more understanding of the great variance within the culture. Not only can the category become inclusive of biculturality, but also of variance in sexuality, physicality and class. With

Latina/Chicana literature recognized as a viable category of literature, we now have the ability and the need to expand its definition. The definition needs to protect the heterogeneous nature of the Latina/Chicana experience, otherwise Latina/Chicana literature and theorists will do as Anglo theorists have done to us, which is to exclude because there is no applicable definition within their language for us as Latinas and Chicanas. Latina and Chicana experience can be recognized as heterogenous for, as in biology, the experience is constructed of parts or genes that have a recognizable identity on their own but come together to create a new type of chromosome. For example, Latinas and Chicanas recognize the genes for language and food but each Latina and Chicana contains a variant pairing of these genes to construct variant attitudes and experiences. Therefore to view Latina/Chicana literature, a heterogenous lens is the most appropriate with which to view all the variance that lies within the cultural experiences of Latinas and Chicanas. In addition we need to create a new language or new theory like that begun within the two novels presented here to encompass the Latinas and Chicanas that have fallen into the borderlands. We need to create space for all of us to have a home, not only in the foreign landscape of literary theory, but also within the landscape of the United States. Once this space is fully created, the dialogue underway, then a reassessment of the progress of Latina/Chicana literature can be made, but for now the need for a necessarily heterogeneous category is imperative. For if the robbing of one's language is more violent than war, then an act of equal force is required to gain

back and reassert all that we have lost as a culture and as a people.

Appendix A

Magazine Photos

Photo of Michelle Pfeiffer


50 years of
Hollywood
fashion
SPECIAL ISSUE
On sale October 6
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Photo of Heather Graham

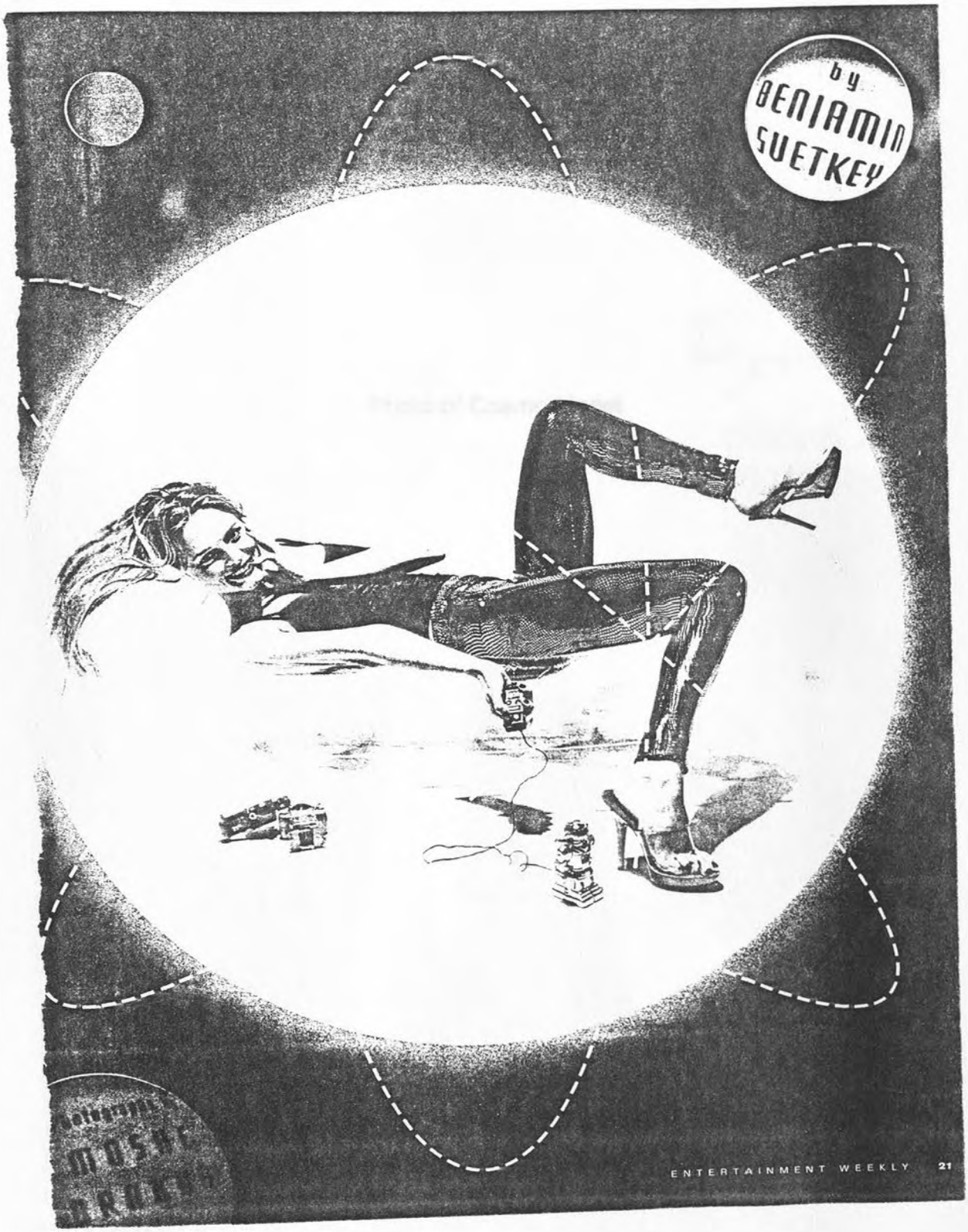

by
BENJAMIN
SUETKEY

Photo of Cosmo Model

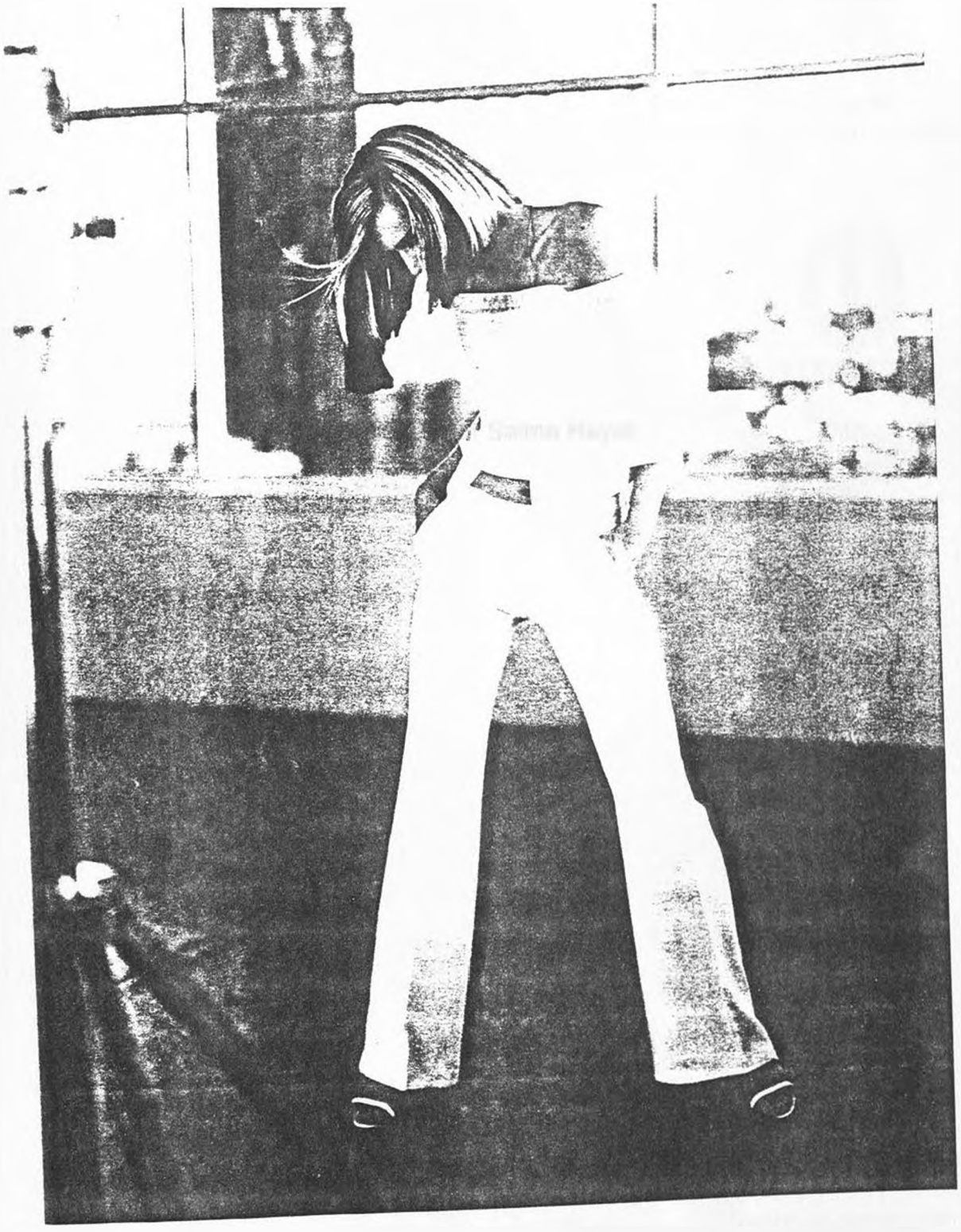
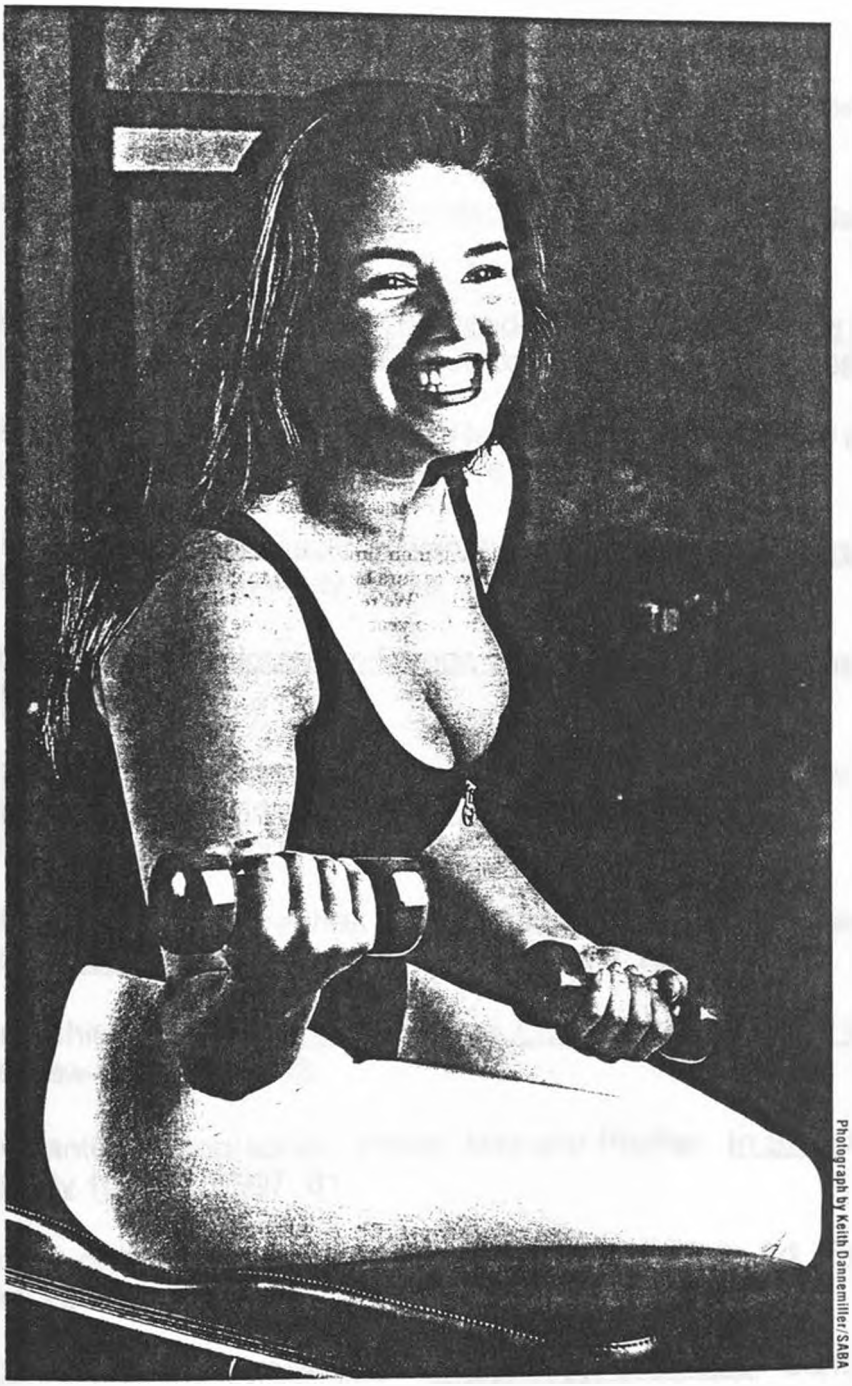


Photo of Salma Hayek


What's Hot Now
FEATURING SALMA HAYEK
InStyle
STYLE FORECAST: 10 MUST-HAVES FOR SPRING
InStyle
Salma Hayek
At Home With:
Muriel Hemingway in Sun Valley
Randy Quaid in Beverly Hills
Madonna
Brad Pitt
Courtney Love
& George Clooney
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ON SALE DECEMBER 22
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PHOTO: GEORGE HOLZ

Photo of Alicia Machado



Photograph by Keith Dannemiller/SABA

"When you are crowned Miss Universe, you think they all love you," says Alicia Machado, pumping up in her Caracas gym. "But you are just a thing, a commercial product."

A BEAUTY QUEEN LIGHTENS UP

After a rocky reign, the scales tip in favor of a trimmer Miss Universe

Alicia Machado, Miss Universe 1996, spent her time under the tiara burdened by a weighty issue: Did she get too fat to fit into her title? "I was anorexic just before I was crowned—skeletal," says the 5'7" former Miss Venezuela, 20, who won in May 1996 weighing 118 lbs. "It was normal and necessary to gain some weight."

Maybe so. But within months the press was saying she had gone overboard. While Machado later claimed pageant officials had exaggerated her weight gain, both sides deny reports she was threatened with losing her crown. Last January, to help Machado shed the just desserts of a life she describes as "constant travel, different foods and not exercising regularly," mogul Donald Trump, part owner of the pageant, enlisted Manhattan fitness guru Edward Jackowski, who checked her in at 155. What she didn't expect was the slew of photographers on hand to watch her sweat. "Focusing media attention on my weight was all done as a publicity stunt," she says now. "A controversy like this was perfect."

For both sides. The flab gab "made me cry at the time," she concedes, "but it was good for my career." Last May, thanks to a low-carbohydrate, higher-protein eating plan and twice-daily workouts, a slimmed-down Machado—in a gown that showed off her newly pierced navel—crowned successor Brook Mahealani Lee, Miss USA. She has since feasted on a steady diet of movie and TV offers (including a May turn on CBS's *The Nanny*). Opting to polish her acting in Venezuela, she returned as "a household name" and landed the lead in a new soap, *Samantha*. Machado, whose beau of six months is restaurant owner Juan Rodriguez, 24, still works out with a personal trainer to hone her present 130 lbs. Yet, she says, "I don't care what people say about my weight now. I am just healthy. I think I look really good."

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