Dancing with the Devil Revisited

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Dancing with the Devil Revisited

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To paraphrase Malea Powell: this is a story about a story—a story about the place I call home. The earth that created me is located in Monte Alto, Texas, eight miles from Hargill, the hometown of Gloria Anzaldúa, and sixteen miles from the Rio Grande and the nearest U.S.-Mexico border crossing of Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas. I was born, grew up on, and currently reside in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands. With this in mind, I begin with a memory: sitting with my mom on her back patio in South Texas one summer day in 2017, I mentioned I had come across a story about a young woman who danced with the devil. "I know that one!" She paused before she added, "Pero, Marlene, es una historia real... en realidad sucedió!" My mom assured me the veracity of the story could be proven and she knew this because she was there. Being newlyweds and fans of disco led her and my father to several nights of dancing at local Rio Grande Valley clubs in the 1970s. The story, as my mother relayed, happened in McAllen, Texas in 1979 when she and my dad were in their early 20s. My parents, Mario and Elva, are shown below.
For those unfamiliar with the story, *Dancing with the Devil* is a well-known Texas Borderlands folktale on par with the story of *La Llorona* (the weeping woman) or *El Cucuy* (a Latinx urban legend comparable to the Bogeyman). *Dancing with the Devil* tells the story of a young woman who defies her parents' warnings, sneaks out on Good Friday, and meets a handsome stranger, presumed to be the devil, on the floor of a nightclub. This nightclub changes by region—sometimes it is not a nightclub at all, but a school dance or prom. In the Rio Grande Valley (also known as "the RGV" or "the Valley"), the story takes place at Club Boccacio 2000 in 1979 in McAllen, Texas. While the story exists in other regions (including other Borderland regions), I examine the story in South Texas because of my own subject positionality and ability to frame my analysis using an autoethnographic frame.

As the story goes, while many club-goers were tempted to engage this handsome stranger, a girl, our nameless protagonist (usually someone's friend or cousin) is the only one brazen enough to accept his offer to dance. In many tellings, the young woman is dead before their dance is over, a cloud of smoke fills the room, and witnesses claim to see a hoof or chicken's claw in place of the stranger's leg and foot. The original story relies heavily on common gendered and religious tropes, conceptions of religious duty, parental compliance (particularly for women), pious femininity ('good' girls don't go out dancing at nightclubs), and perhaps most significantly, fear of the stranger, in this story a half-human, half-animal monster who murders defiant women. Borrowing from Zygmunt Bauman, Shane Phelan describes the image of the stranger as evoking the disruption of seemingly natural boundaries and borders, "neither us nor clearly them, not friend and not enemy, but a figure of ambivalence who troubles the border between us and them... fraught with anxiety" (Bauman qtd in Phelan 5). *Dancing with the Devil* affirms this conception of the stranger as the unfamiliar, the unnatural outsider, enticing women to join him in dance, warning others: this is what happens when you break the seemingly natural boundaries of the community established by traditional religious and cultural institutions. The stranger is a metaphor that becomes real, created to quell the anxiety felt by established norms and institutions during the Chicanx Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. But, the story lives on even today.

**South Texas Borderlands**

In the early 20th century, settlers, strangers on this land, gathered their families and belongings to head to the Borderlands to facilitate the manifestation of white-European destinies. The Rio Grande Valley stood as a unique space in colonized territories. García calls this land "a region six times tilled over by the
political order of colonization; a region ecologically affected by a 500 year old invasive species with deep roots for which grip all resources available (e.g., settler colonialism or coloniality); a region, and a people, today discursively contained, monitored, surveilled, interpreted, and checked by human (agencies) and non-humans (borders, checkpoints) in the name of a modern/(colonial) nation-state" (2). The Rio Grande Valley, these Texas Borderlands, is a culturally and ecologically vibrant space that, through war and violence, has been designated a marker between two countries. This created border drew a line not just between two nation-states, but between peoples, languages, identities, and subjectivities. The internal lines drawn would help ensure the ones drawn on the ground would always be in dispute. It wasn't until the Chicanx Movement that the inhabitants of this region began to theorize and articulate their methodologies and praxis for survival in a settler-colonial landscape. How was this reality reflected in the stories (academic, or otherwise) people told? To answer this, I intend to revisit the folktale, *Dancing with the Devil*.

María Inés Palleiro in her article "Cuento folklórico y narrativa oral: versiones, variantes y estudios de génesis," articulates the potential of the cuento folklórico: "el relato folklórico puede ser considerado como conjunto de bloques textuales constituido por unidades mínimas independientes y fragmentarias, conectadas mediante nexos flexibles" (3). Community narratives, disseminated through methods like "storytelling, family histories, biographies, cuentos, testimonios, and counterstory" (Martinez 214) function as building blocks for dominant narratives. These blocks, however, aren't clean, sturdy, or even. They're fragmentary and flexible, living documents, floating histories that tell the stories of entire communities over long stretches of time. Each retelling adds something to the dominant narrative expanding its potential for "transformaciones de una matriz pretextual que activa un mecanismo generador de correcciones y variantes" (3). As I listened to my mom talk about a nightclub she frequented in the Texas Borderlands in the 1970s, I considered how stories construct reality, how these transformations Palleiro describes as implicit potentials existing within folktales have the power to reveal and change communities.

**In Search of Fragments**

Soon after that conversation with my mother, I found myself in the archives of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) Library asking one of the librarians for help. He pointed me to the research of a professor from UTRGV's legacy institution, the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), Mark Glazer. I asked one of the archivists, an older Latinx woman probably around my mom’s age, if she
could help me locate the original research. We chatted as she pulled out texts. "Hay otro libro escrito por Limón si lo quieres," she says as she hands me binders and books. "Sí, lo quiero. Gracias." Eventually, she asks about the focus of my project. I tell her I'm interested in the *Dancing with the Devil* story: where it originated, why it stayed with so many people, and what effects it had on our community. I didn't have any specific research questions; I just wanted to know more. When I left the library that day, the archivist warned against devil-related research and advised me to explore a different topic. I felt as if I had entered stranger territory. The depth with which my mother and other women from that particular period in South Texas believed the devil appeared at a nightclub had piqued my curiosity. How do you keep women whose culture is steeped in religious imagery family-focused and at home? How do you keep them from crossing borders into the unknown? Tell them a story about the devil.

*Dancing with the Devil* has now both orally and textually circulated amongst multiple generations of people living in South Texas. An interesting and recurring aspect of the *Dancing with the Devil* narrative is that it usually begins with 'someone who was there.' Quickly it changes to 'knows someone who was there.' And, finally, the community's heavy influence on the transfer of the story reveals itself and the story is told through the lens of 'bueno, es lo que dice la gente.' Attribution of the story to "well, that's what people say" can be understood to mean that's what elders in the community have always said. The story is then cemented and becomes a communal reality. As a story, it has had staying power, and part of my inquiry into the story is an inquiry into stories themselves.

Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong writes, "Through my language I understand that I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths... I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns" (Armstrong qtd in King 2). Because stories are relational, historical, cultural, and embedded in the lived experiences of communities, I view this project as an opportunity to listen to the stories being told when stories are being told. This epistemological view of storytelling is so deeply embedded in cultural rhetorics that I hope to contribute to the conversations cultural rhetorics scholars have already begun. Andrea Riley Mukavetz defines culture as the "spaces/places people share, how people organize themselves, and how they practice shared beliefs." She continues, "To do cultural rhetorics scholarship under this idea of 'culture' allows scholars to [focus] on how a specific community makes meaning and negotiates systems of communication to disseminate knowledge. So, what cultural rhetorics
scholars do is investigate meaning making as it is situated within a specific cultural community...[t]o do cultural rhetorics work is to value the efforts and practices used to make and sustain something and use that understanding to build a theoretical and methodological framework that reflects the cultural community a researcher works with" (Mukavetz 109-110).

With the work of cultural rhetoricians in mind, my goal for this project is to look at how dominant narratives are constructed from and maintained through smaller, networked folktale story fragments within a specific community—the Texas Borderlands. More specifically, I ask: what do these folktale fragments reflect or reveal about settler colonial logics with implicit and embedded intersecting gendered oppressions? And perhaps, most importantly, how can a storyteller use cultural rhetorics methodologies to influence, or even change, the dominant narrative?
I encountered the three narrative fragments for this analysis almost serendipitously. I've struggled with a rationale that connects these three fragments and elevates them as worthy of analysis. But the truth is I could have chosen any narrative fragments of the *Dancing with the Devil* story because each fragment shares a similar potential. In her article, "The Responsibility of Privilege: A Critical Race Counterstory Conversation" Aja Martinez contends, "The keepers and tellers of either majoritarian (stock) stories or counterstories reveal the social location of the storyteller as dominant or non-dominant, and these locations are always racialized, classed, and gendered" (213). My positionality as a Chicana from South Texas and its intersection with my profession as an early career academic trying to balance my interests in research and poetry drew me to the work of researchers and poets, all residents (or former residents) of the Texas Borderlands. This paper looks closely at the following *Dancing with the Devil* fragments:

1. two interviews from Mark Glazer's (1994) *Flour from Another Sack & Other Proverbs, Folk Beliefs, Tales, Riddles & Recipes*;
2. an autoethnographic account from José Eduardo Limón's (1994) *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*; and

Stories exist within what David Boje calls story networks, where stories are exchanged organically and performed (perhaps during an interview or in a creative performance) and function as nodes or fragments within the larger network. He likens these fragments to a story disassemblage soup because, like in a soup, "there never is a 'whole story' or an 'originary story' since even 'eye witnesses' disagree, as do 'historians'" (65). I am looking for the potential these three fragments have to reveal rhetorical insight about how stories work within a community. "It is in this... story disassemblage soup that network analysis commences, as analysts add further assemblages to the concoction. They are never witness to or able to reassemble a 'whole story' (Boje 65), but fragments can explain the dominant stories, the parts of a story that remain consistent, on purpose, and with contextual motivations. The dominant narrative of the *Dancing with the Devil* story is a seemingly simple one: a girl disobeys her family's rules (or worse, forgets or ignores her family's teachings), allows romantic passion to overcome her better judgment, and dances with a stranger... the devil. For both the breaking of the rules and the forgetting of her family's teachings, she is punished by death. But in what ways is the dominant narrative revealed or potentially changed by the storyteller and their storytelling methodologies?
I begin with fragments by researchers and professors Mark Glazer and Jose Eduardo Limón. While employing different research methodologies, Glazer and Limón attribute the popularity of the *Dancing with the Devil* story to changing social, political, and economic conditions in Chicanx communities in the 1960s and 1970s. Similar changes were experienced again by these communities in the 1990s. What interested me more than their findings, however, was how both Glazer and Limón represented the dominant narrative through their research methodologies. Their research methods evoked in their research participants feelings of distance, ambivalence, and anxiety. In short, they reflected feelings of discomfort in interaction with outsiders. In other words, these researchers evoked the stranger, an image their research attempted to study in the first place. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* questions the power of those who have researched indigenous communities calling "the word itself 'research'... probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (1). Marginalized communities, such as the Texas Borderlands, are also vulnerable to traditional models of Western research practices. Whether intentional or not, Glazer and Limón's published research has contributed to the story through its representation and affirmation of Western research methodologies. There are colonial politics (including affirmed gendered oppressions) at play in their research and retellings of the *Dancing with the Devil* story.

**Fragment 1**

Glazer's *Flour from Another Sack & Other Proverbs, Folk Beliefs, Tales, Riddles, & Recipes* sits in the Border Studies Archives on the first floor of the UTRGV library. A retired professor from UTRGV's legacy institution, UTPA, Glazer begins, "This anthology is the outcome of work done collectively by myself, my student collectors, work studies, and other personnel" ("Acknowledgements"). While he credits Professor Juanita Garza as "one of the few experts of the Texano cuisine and its cultural settings," he emphasizes that he is "fully responsible for the final form in which all of these genres, as well as the tales, appear in this collection." I am not privy to Glazer's background or positionality beyond images and interviews available online and via UTRGV's archives; however, his acknowledgments section (while briefly acknowledging the contributions of others), does appear to reinforce a settler-colonial model of Western research. More specifically, he appears particularly interested in the systemic analysis of the Rio Grande Valley, an area he calls "rich in folklore" that up until that point had not been documented in any "readable fashion" ("Preface"). Glazer continues, "We hope that this systematic approach to a folklore anthology will enhance the value of this collection for
folklorists since it is unique in its use of these methods which are representative of folklore scholarship today" ("Preface"). What follows his preface are minutely detailed, taxonomic descriptions of Glazer's research, including charts that track the number of instances of major themes and motifs from his field research with his participants, or as he refers to them, his "informants."

Discussing Western research of this type, Smith brings Stuart Hall into the conversation. She writes, "Stuart Hall makes the point that the West is an idea or concept, a language for imagining a set of complex stories, ideas, historical events and social relationships" (44). Smith emphasizes Hall's suggestion that Western research allows 'us' to classify and categorize, condense images, and create standards and criteria for evaluation or rank (45). She writes, "Systems of classification and representation enable different traditions or fragments of tradition to be retrieved and reformulated in different contexts as discourses, and then to be played out in systems of power and domination, with real material consequences for colonized peoples" (46). Glazer seeks to taxonomize Rio Grande Valley cultural practices, and his audience is ultimately an academic one. Furthermore, the language he uses to acknowledge and introduce his research participants reflects this academic audience and their Western research methodological expectations of objectivity. Smith reminds readers that "research has not been neutral in its objectification" because "objectification is a process of dehumanization," problematic because it degrades a minoritized community's agency, self-determination, and control over knowledge making and sharing processes—such as the documentation of community cultural traditions and folklore (41). Even a small detail such as Glazer's choice to refer to his research participants as "informants" implies they are there to provide information in the construction of his body of work, his dominant narrative about the Rio Grande Valley. Agboka encourages the interrogation of such dehumanizing terms (2). Why "informants"? Why not volunteers? Participants? Partners or collaborators? Community members? The use of "informants" reinforces the goal of the project: an "objective" account of Rio Grande Valley culture, including folktales.

Glazer collected two brief, oral accounts of the Dancing with the Devil story, the first from a 12-year-old "informant" he identifies as "female, student, Mexican-American, speaks Spanish and English" (Glazer 136). She describes a young girl getting into a fight with her strict mother after she requested permission to go dancing. "Her mother told her that if she went, the devil would appear to her. She insisted and went, not obeying what her mother had said" (Glazer 136). While this participant's retelling emphasizes disobedience, her retelling includes details such as the
protagonist of the story sitting with her friends at the dance before a handsome stranger asked her to dance. She adds that the couple danced all night.

Glazer’s second “informant,” a 62-year-old man from the Rio Grande Valley, offered further details about the stranger: "Everyone saw him and wanted to dance with him. The girl who had disobeyed her grandmother danced with the handsome man" (Glazer 138). He describes the crowd watching as the handsome stranger disappeared in a "puff of smoke"; they are witness to the girl being taken away and dying a few days later. There are a few discrepancies in the two stories, but the main themes remain constant: a young woman defies her family and goes out dancing; then she defies social conventions by pursuing a handsome man in a nightclub; and finally, she is punished for her transgression by death.

Because of Glazer’s emphasis on objectivity and systemic documentation, his analysis of the event is not framed as such, but rather as the result of disciplinary research methodologies. Through this lens, he attributes the popularity of the
constellations
a cultural rhetorics publishing space

folktale to the changing social and political dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley, particularly that of population growth. Glazer creates a temporal divide, a border, between the "old Valley" and the "new Valley" stating, "The Valley was about to change drastically. So you have all these major changes which took place and one could say that this was the very last period of the old traditional Valley" (Glazer qtd in Gaffney). This liminal space created by changing socio-economic conditions pushed a folktale that demanded stricter compliance to existing rules and boundaries from women, particularly their compliance in staying away from strangers. Changes exacerbated by fear of the unknown resulted in the retelling of a story, orally passed from person to person, where a young woman breaks the rules of the collective community, falls victim to the temptation of an evil stranger who turns out to be the devil, and dies as a result of this transgression. Glazer successfully reaffirms the original story in his retelling. Both participants emphasize the young girl's disobedience; however, the second participant includes details such as the stranger's expensive car and clothes. Additionally, in this second account, at the climax of the story, when the stranger finally reveals his hoofed foot and chicken leg, this participant adds "every place he would touch her, his handprint would burn on the skin" (138), choosing to focus on the young girl's body, a profound implication about the consequences of a women's sexual desire. Glazer's organization of the retellings is revelatory; it shows what exactly is most important about the story culturally—what aspects of the story have been cemented while others can be flexible because they are secondary to the young girl's defiance. While I'm hesitant to refer to Glazer's collection as a settler archive, it is what García might call a "premier site of production for colonial difference and coloniality of knowledge" (3), and colonial logics represented in Western research methodologies are inextricably linked to gender as well.

As I sat with my mom in her garden back in 2017, I couldn't help but wonder how the intersecting socioeconomic changes occurring in the Rio Grande Valley had impacted her desire to go out dancing and maintain her respect for my grandmother's rules. For Glazer, the biological sex of his research participants was included as an additional piece of data, but for Smith, "Gender refers not just to the roles of women and how those roles are constituted but to the roles of men and the relations between men and women. Ideas about gender difference and what that means for a society can similarly be traced back to the fragmented artefacts [sic] and representations of Western culture, and to different and differentiated traditions of knowledge" (47).

Fragment 2
The research for Jose Eduardo Limón's book, *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*, led him to a Mexican restaurant in San Antonio, Texas, and to a young woman named Sulema who claimed to have been at a nightclub with her girlfriends the night the devil appeared. He spoke with Sulema and her friends Ester, Blanca, and Dolores. Limón first introduces himself to Sulema at her place of employment, a small Mexican restaurant in San Antonio. During her break, he sat with her under the watchful eye of the restaurant's owner. Because of her paternalistic chaperone, she couldn't answer his questions fully, so he asked to see her again. Limón writes, "She didn't have to say it; her long hesitation said it all: Familia? (family?) Quien eres tu? Y que quieres de deveras? (Who are you? And what do you really want?) and, the ultimate deep normative structure of greater Mexico, 'Que va a decir la gente?' (What will people say?)" (169).

Eventually, Sulema invites Limón to the nightclub where the events allegedly occurred where he could talk to her and her friends away from parental figures about the *Dancing with the Devil* story, writing "No sooner was I resettling into south Texas, and there I was again, on my way to a dance" (170). A few nights later he found himself at the nightclub chatting with four girls in between dances.

While different in its approach, once again, the researcher's rhetorical agency is centered. Limón's use of autoethnographic narrative provides a starkly different performance than Glazer. Limón is a young, Latino, academic, conducting research where he grew up, the Texas Borderlands. Sulema introduces him to her friends by saying, "This is the professor I told you about, es anthropologist y quiere saber del diablo" (170).

Like Glazer, Limón is positioned as a stranger in the community (because of his academic pedigree) and thus also elicits a performance from his research participants. The women Limón interviews are playful and flirtatious (at least according to his accounts) and willing to discuss the story of the devil at the nightclub but are wary of Limón as a scholar and researcher. Limón is distinct from Glazer in that he is the familiar stranger, both part of the collective and yet, as a researcher, separate from it. Outside looking in. The women in his research almost function as an aside from his rhetorical agency as a storyteller. His agency works in service to researching and understanding the community he grew up in, left, and returned to. At one point in his research, he, himself, dances with the young women. He writes, "Throughout the evening I danced with each of the women in turn...[a]midst moments of intense concentration, nervous laughter, and occasional
glances toward the dance floor, this is how I came to know the devil. I offer it as a general dialogue of voices, including my own" (172-173).

Unlike Glazer, Limón conducts participatory observations and in-depth interviews with Latinas, the demographic that is both the object and subject of the Dancing with the Devil narrative. Similar to Glazer, Limón returns to Western methodological traditions. He concludes his chapter by placing a highly theoretical lens against the Dancing with the Devil story. Limón situates the folktale within socio-economic circumstances in South Texas; however, he attributes this to larger global and political circumstances. Limón poses the questions: "why did the devil dance with such intensity in Southern Texas? Why does he seem to come more readily to the lips of women, although others note his presence as well?" Limón finds his answer in South Texas's "shocking encounter with the cultural logic of late capitalism" (179). He asserts that the changing agricultural economy of South Texas created a push among elder residents to seek more stable identity constructions within the local moral economy. This is met with resistance by younger residents, specifically women, who began to, in the 1970s—because of the Chicanx Movement—make greater contributions to the economy than previous generations. According to Limón, "The devil—who is such a moral threat to the elders...appears to be a sexually charged site of admiration, delight, and playfulness for these women" (185). Because this retelling is told through Limón's heightened subjectivity, informal allowances not seen in Glazer's research appear in the text. Limón writes, "But amidst drink, dance, and talk, I was after the devil, and he indeed appeared, not in any visible dramatic form, but as the principal figure in a collective narrative produced by the women that night when I asked about him" (172). Limón's methodology provides greater allowance than Glazer's methods for a reader to understand his subject positionality in relation to his research participants. His narrative, however, tinged with a colonial research paradigm and its accompanying gendered implications is still centered. Given the information Limón provides to his readers, did he bring the devil's voice into the narrative by enacting a colonial academic paradigm fraught with patriarchal tensions? Did Limón deliberately take on the role of a metaphorical devil in his retelling? If so, what then are the consequences for the young Latinas who danced with him? Limón presents a shift in the Dancing with the Devil narrative. While his methods allowed for more participant interaction, whether intentional or not, his narrative is centered and aspects of the gendered oppressions present with the Chicanx community are reflected in his research.
Perhaps settler colonial logics are too embedded in Western research methodologies for certain scholars, namely men. Perhaps a Chicana feminist lens can provide further insight into the *Dancing with the Devil* story. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquin* was published and la Raza Unida party was formed in Texas...[n]ow that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become" (85). Saldivar-Hull acknowledges this same accomplishment but articulates the intersectional problem of the Chicanx movement as only possessing "passing reference to the roles of women in that history" (27). She notes that if Chicanas "had to rely on the historical record written by men and male-identified women, Chicanas' roles in history would remain obscured" (27). One of many places Chicana feminists have found methodological agency is in storytelling through art and poetry. Saldivar-Hull continues, "In my present role as a Chicana cultural worker, I trace the coming to consciousness of my identity to the cultural artifacts, the first Chicana/o poetry I read in the mid-1970s...[t]he act of reading poetry written by a Chicana complicated and enriched by burgeoning self-consciousness as a feminist Chicana" (12). Poetry itself elicits a distinct rhetorical performance; it invites readers to interact with words and images on the page in unfamiliar, even strange ways. As a genre, poetry allows readers to view a story through the use of what Royster, Kirsch, & Bizzell call critical imagination or "conscious awareness of what we have come to know by more-traditional means...to look back from a distance...in order to broaden our own viewpoints in anticipation of what might become more visible from a longer or broader view, where the scene may not be in fine detail but in broader strokes and deep impressions" (72).

**Fragment 3**

Amalia Ortiz is a Chicana spoken-word artist from South Texas whose collection of poetry *Rant. Chant. Chisme.* was published in 2015. She is a National Slam finalist and her work has been featured on HBO's *Def Poetry Jam. Rant. Chant. Chisme.*, her debut collection, won both the 2015 Writers' League of Texas Book Awards and Poetry Discovery Prize.

Her poetry tells stories of the border. In particular, her poem, “Devil at the Dance” retells the border folktale. She writes:

Her papá taught her to never look down.
A good dancer engages her partner's gaze
or trustfully rests an ear on a strong shoulder.

So, by the time she finally noticed the hoof  the claw
the claw
tearing up the floor where shiny boots should be,
it was too late.

She was already in love.
Ortiz's poetic retelling of the Dancing with the Devil story begins in media res—the young woman already dancing with the handsome stranger. The first line of the poem begins with a reminder of her parental teachings, as if her family's values are always at the forefront of her thoughts and actions. She is concentrated on the internal dialogue of her father's voice: never look down, engage your partner's gaze, trustfully rest an ear on a strong shoulder. Some of this paternal dialogue reinforces cultural gender norms; however, it also seems to respond to accusations of disobedience from previous retellings of the story. She may have defied her parents to get to the dance, but she kept their teachings in mind when engaging with a dance partner. Through the process of dancing with the devil, a connection is established. When discussing the image of the stranger and coalitional possibilities for political transformation, Karma Chávez builds on the work of Aimee Carrillo Rowe and writes, "The result is a coalitional subjectivity that provides the agency to resist in ways not bound by fixed identities or subjectivities as one learns to politicize her/his belongings and adopt impure stances that allow for connection between people and groups who are very different" (144). Ortiz's word choice indicates an intrinsic trust our protagonist has quickly established with the stranger—they make eye contact, she engages him 'trustfully' and rests her head because of her perception of his strength. The young woman allies herself with the stranger, the devil. Ortiz's retelling offers a shift in subjectivity, reminiscent of the differential consciousness Chela Sandoval describes in her essay "US third world feminism: The theory and method of differential oppositional consciousness" and later in her book with Angela Davis, *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Sandoval asserts, "Self-conscious agents of differential consciousness [can] recognize one another as allies...[permitting] the practitioner to choose tactical positions, that is, to self-consciously break and reform ties to ideology...practices that permit the achievement of coalition across differences" (Sandoval 196-197). In Ortiz's retelling, by the time our nameless protagonist has noticed their differences (the hoof, the claw), she remarks "it was too late," a connection, a trust, a coalitional subjectivity had already been established...a differential consciousness that allowed for a potential not present in previous fragments, the potential for love.

Ortiz implicitly asks, what if our protagonist didn't die? What if her first rhetorical act wasn't stunted nor punished, but allowed to take place, be uttered, and listened to? What if she danced with the devil and lived to tell the tale? Chávez continues, "Differential belonging is a strategy where variegated groups choose to belong across seemingly strong lines of difference at the same time that groups demonstrate the fiction of divisions upheld within normative constructions of
belonging" (144). In this instance, the rhetorical agency lies in the young woman herself, the dancer, the subject, and the object of the original folktale. The final lines of the poem are the most poignant and also the most revelatory about agency and methodology: "[s]o, by the time she finally noticed the hoof / the claw tearing up the floor where shiny boots should be / It was too late. She was already in love" (Ortiz 101). Ortiz imagines the critical possibility that the young woman is still alive because her dance with the devil wasn't an act of transgression met with punishment, but rather an act of love constructed from an embrace with what was so feared. In her discussion of a "Revolutionary Love" that occurs outside ideology, Sandoval writes, "This form of love is not the narrative of love as encoded in the West: it is another kind of love, a synchronic process that punctures through traditional, older narratives of love, that ruptures everyday being" (140-141). In this way, Ortiz helps to reconstruct the narrative reality of the collective, which allows for agency and alliance to exist among different groups of people. Her poem encourages the crossing of perceived, seemingly natural borders or boundaries in the name of this revolutionary love.

By breaking the established narrative norm, Ortiz opens the story up to larger narrative transformations as well. Through her poem, Ortiz transforms the agentive potential of both the young woman and the devil—a shift from a single subjectivity to a coalitional one, affirming as well that methodology has agency to break away from dominant narratives and potential to enact stories outside of traditional Western paradigms.

One Concluding Fragment

_Dancing with the Devil_ is a border story in multiple ways. It's a story about borders taking place in a bordered space. These fragments reaffirm that the subject in charge of the methodology, documentation, and circulation of a retelling possesses control and agency over the narrative as a whole. Perhaps unconsciously, Glazer and Limón contributed to the story through its representation and simultaneous affirmation of Western research methodologies and reinforcement of traditional, oppressive gender paradigms. Ortiz, however, used her poetic performance to offer the story's protagonist agency, the ability to speak and inject meaning into the rhetorical interaction of the story's retelling. The fragment's contribution to the larger narrative shifted and transformed the dominant story, however slightly. This change is also reflected in the coalitional spirit imbued in Ortiz's poem. The fragmentary and flexible nature of stories, those imperfect building blocks of
dominant narratives, allowed for a shift toward crossing borders into the unknown with love.

At the time of this draft, it has been four years since my first conversation with my mom on her garden’s patio. I can't help but think about how much this story has been a part of our lives since that initial conversation. As I worked on this manuscript, I lived with the characters (the young woman, her parents, her family, and the devil) and inquired how I might also contribute to the narrative, guide it toward coalitional, loving potentials. In 2019, my poem, "Nine Months After the Burning of Club Boccaccio / McAllen, Texas (1979)" was published in *North Dakota Quarterly* by the University of Nebraska Press. The poem, written as a letter to the young woman’s parents, introduces Joaquin, the child born from the love that began the night she danced with the devil. I include an excerpt here:

Dad, I want you to love Joaquín and teach him how to fish
teach him to plant flowers and trees in the yard
I want him to help you mow the lawn
give your aching back a break
I want you to put one of your paint-covered cachuchas on Joaquín's head
take pictures in the mirror
making silly faces together
Mom, I want you to teach Joaquin how to dance
like you taught me
yo se que todos son enojados conmigo, pero
Joaquín no tiene la culpa
He is a blessing, and
this disobedient daughter wants to come home
The poem posits the coalitional possibilities Joaquin possesses, and the love the young woman deeply wants to share with her parents, Joaquin's grandparents. In this retelling, death and punishment are no longer at the forefront of the narrative, the poem leads with love and possibility... a new direction for an old story.

WORKS CITED:


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Marlene Galván was born and currently resides in the Texas Borderlands. She is the granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, daughter of Mexican American parents, and mother to one beautiful boy. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at Texas Tech University and Writing Center Director at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

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