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Triangular desire in Sandra Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican"

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TRIANGULAR DESIRE IN SANDRA CISNEROS'S "NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN"

A Thesis

by

LAURA V. BAZALDÚA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Texas-Pan American
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2011

Major Subject: English Literature

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May 2011

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses on desire in Sandra Cisneros's short story "Never Marry a Mexican" in her collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Cisneros alters the typical configuration of triangular desire in Western literature by focusing on two females and one male. This thesis analyzes the protagonist's mimetic desire, applying the Girardian model of triangular desire, for her lover's wife and how it illustrates her internalized racist views. This analysis examines the correlation between mimetic desire and the protagonist's, an individual of color, investment in the illusion of whiteness.

Her desire is fundamentally a drive toward Megan, who represents the white Other. It is a drive toward establishing a meaningful connection with the Other which has the potential to allow her to transcend the racist and classist barriers that exist between her and other women because of patriarchy.

DEDICATION

I would like to thank all of my students who have been with me throughout this journey, and who I hope gained as much from me in the classroom as I did from them. They have been with me during these tough years, and sometimes brutal cycle of learning to teach and teaching to learn. They have been there through my struggle, dreaming part-time while working full-time. Pushing them helped push me.

I couldn't have made it through without my family who not only assisted me in literally getting back on my feet after my car accident but also in conducting my research. Thank you, Mom for wheeling me to the library and lugging my books to the checkout desk and for always reminding me of Abuela's words "a book can take you anywhere." I am grateful for my Dad who has always understood that this, just like my full-time job, is a labor of love. Thank you, Stella, especially for knowing that I would first ask if my library books had been recovered from the car wreck.

I wouldn't have had any spirit at all to do this without my Abuela Mague who lived in the time of great women, Frida & Eleanor, and great ideas (la raza cósmica); she wouldn't have fit anywhere else. When others ask, "Why do you *keep* going to school?" I think of you, Abuela.

Y tampoco me olvido de ti, Abuela Juana. I wouldn't be who I am today without you. You are strong, vibrant, and can make things grow, even when there is little water or sun. My passion to create comes from you.

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I am grateful for my advisor Dr. Mitchell who always pushed me and reminded me of my own efforts to get my students to move forward, and who also helped me come to the realization that the only good thesis is a finished thesis, over and done. Of course, she also let me know that in the author's mind it would never be done, but it could always be expanded upon later.

I thank Dr. McMahon for her enthusiasm and support. I really appreciate the time she took to meet with me one-on-one. I know how hard it is to meet many students' different demands and to address their needs. I regret not having had the opportunity to take one of the courses she offered during the year, but am so glad she is here doing this work where we really do need it and where Chicano/a Literature is not emphasized as much as it could and should be.

I am also very glad to have had Professor Skinner as one of my committee members because he is the teacher who really helped me to appreciate the art of the short story. I truly enjoyed the classes he offered, especially the short story class and Chicano Literature class. I also benefitted from attending his readings of his written works when I had the opportunity and greatly admired his collection of stories in *Flight and Other Stories*.

Finally I would like to express my appreciation for Dr. Buckman and Dr. Carter's steadfast dedication to their students and for introducing me to the Other in Sartre and *in xóchitl in cuícatl* in Miguel León-Portilla.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although the focus in Sandra Cisneros's short stories in her collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* seems to be the romantic relationships between men and women, Cisneros does highlight the importance of the female-female relationships. Instead of simply focusing on the female-male relationships and the sexual desire between men and women in her works, which has dominated the scholarly focus on this collection, my analysis addresses an overlooked aspect of Cisneros's work: the female-female relationships within her collection. It is important to do so because, although there is a typical "boy meets girl" love story in nearly every story in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, Cisneros presents these love stories in order to emphasize the importance and dearth of female-female relationships within the main characters' lives.

In Chapter II, I focus on the relationship between Clemencia and her lover Drew. I argue that the dominant culture, represented by Drew, has a powerful influence on Clemencia's desires and gender and race performance; this dominating force even causes her to define herself as exotic Other or non-white Other. The love story Cisneros presents in "Never Marry a Mexican" is a retelling of the story of La Malinche and Hernán Cortés, a story handed down for generations in Mexican and Mexican American culture. The protagonist, Clemencia who is a Chicana, has a long love affair with her art teacher, a white, upper class, married man named Drew, who eventually breaks off the relationship. I also discuss the roles Clemencia feels necessary to

follow in her relationship with Drew because of his status as an upper class white male, member of the dominant culture. I examine Clemencia's obsession over Drew's wife Megan. She obsesses over Megan's character, physical attributes, and her material possessions, such as her clothes and makeup.

In Chapter III, I focus on Clemencia's relationship with Megan and the climactic scene in the story where Clemencia finally comes into a more intimate encounter with her rival who represents her repressed desires to take on the roles of wife and mother as well as her denied heritage of white European (colonizer). In bridging the gap between herself and Megan she can move toward understanding her repressed self and thus transcend racist, sexist, and classist barriers put in place by the patriarchal dominant culture. She hasn't yet had an actual physical encounter but still attempts to communicate with Megan in Drew and Megan's home, specifically Megan's bathroom. Clemencia, in an infantile gesture, vandalizes Megan's most intimate possessions with gummy bears, even leaving them in her lipsticks and diaphragm. I argue the importance of her futile attempt toward communication with this woman who represents the white Other with whom she has become fascinated, highlighting the anger she harbors toward her. It reveals her latent desires to connect with Megan. Megan has become for Clemencia the symbol of white femininity. As the symbol of white femininity she comes to represent the pinnacle of beauty and the ideal wife and mother for Clemencia. I also analyze the crisis she encounters in coming closer to her rival, which I claim thrusts her into what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the "Coatlicue state." She could positively come out of this state, but instead she negatively comes out of it failing to understand her true desires and destructively working toward vengeance on Megan's son, sabotaging any real bond with Megan.

In my final chapter, I focus on Clemencia's relationship with her mother, and I argue that her obsession with Megan stems from her mother's own attitude toward Mexican and Mexican American culture. I mainly look at Clemencia's inner struggle due to what she feels to be her mother's rejection of her father, sister, and herself because they are not white. However, instead of transcending racism, she follows in her mother's footsteps and continues to value whiteness over her own culture, taking a destructive rather than creative path from her traumatic experience.

Clemencia's obsession with Megan reflects her desire to be and have her lover's wife. The desire Clemencia feels is mimetic or triangular desire, which René Girard defines in his book *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* as “[t]he impulse toward the object [which] is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator; in internal mediation this impulse is checked by the mediator himself since he desires, or perhaps possesses, the object” (10). Girard explains that “[j]ealousy and envy imply a third presence: object, subject, and a third person toward whom the jealousy or envy is directed. These two ‘vices’ are therefore triangular.” He asks, “What exactly does such a ‘[jealous] temperament’ or ‘nature’ imply if not an irresistible impulse to desire what Others desire... to imitate the desires of others?” (12). Using Girard's construction of triangular desire as a model, I outline the model of triangular desire present in “Never Marry a Mexican” between Drew, Clemencia, and Megan, looking at Clemencia's intense admiration and hatred for Megan inspired by mimetic desire.

I argue that Clemencia desires what Drew, the powerful white male, possesses and values, engendering a desire for Drew's wife Megan; she is presented as a trophy wife and typifies the ideal white beauty. However, her desire to also resemble Megan leads to her attempting to imitate two individuals. I suggest Drew and Megan both serve as model, rival, and object. Thus I

also look closely at gender, race, and class difference. Clemencia's desire is complex because as a woman, Chicana, and member of the lower classes, both Drew and Megan will represent an ideal or model for her. Drew is a model as her former teacher, from whom she wishes to learn not just techniques in art but also a world-view and an eye for aesthetics as an artist. Megan serves as a model because she symbolizes the idealized white beauty as well as the affluent housewife representing the traditional "white middle-class ideologies about women" (Landry 30). She thus represents the ideal mother who Clemencia subconsciously views as a superior partner for Drew because she is white.

It is certainly not implausible that Clemencia as Drew's lover would dwell on her hatred for Megan as well as feel tied to Megan because, as the "other woman" or mistress, they are both intimately involved with Drew. I argue Cisneros's telling of the story from "the other woman's" perspective perfectly captures the connection between mimetic desire and her attempts to define herself and separate herself from the Other (Van Pelt 24-5). It also reveals the identity crisis one goes through when (s)he relies on the "constructed illusion [of whiteness]" to define oneself (Landry 29). Thus I specifically focus on Clemencia's developing sense of self when looking at the triangular desire between the characters Clemencia, Drew, and Megan.

Other writers who have aided me in my research and greatly contributed to the body of scholarly criticism on Cisneros's writings are Jean Wyatt, Maythee G. Rojas, Harryette Mullen, and Sonia Saldívar-Hull. They have identified and analyzed the iconic figures of La Malinche and La Llorona, and/or desire in her works, or provided an in depth analysis of "Never Marry a Mexican." However, I further expand upon desire, specifically mimetic desire, in her short story "Never Marry a Mexican." I also look more closely at whiteness in her work and the protagonist's value of whiteness which I suggest has really determined her desire and affected

her sense of self. I apply Gloria Anzaldua's work on the "Coatlucue state" to the protagonist's identity crisis and argue that Clemencia's confusion in trying to define and determine whiteness in order to define herself thrusts her into the "Coatlucue state" which she doesn't positively come out of. Furthermore mimetic desire has not really been explored in Cisneros's works even though there has been some discussion on lesbian desire which I discuss further in Chapter IV.

According to Girard "the Other and only the Other set[s] desire in motion" (33) which I argue makes Megan's role as the Other, a key factor in explaining the desire Clemencia feels for her because of their racial and class difference. Mimetic desire helps frame the obsession with whiteness that Clemencia is overwhelmed by in "Never Marry a Mexican."

Many Chicana feminists tried to break away from the idealization of white beauty because their main objective was to present a different outlook on the dominant standard of what is beautiful, "*El Movimiento* confronted racism and racial self-hate asserting pride in the Indian-*mestizo* physical features and cultural roots.... The Chicana/os of the 1960s proclaimed 'brown is beautiful'" (Chavez Saucedo 137). They attempted to get away from the ideal white beauty and begin to love themselves, but clearly this was not something that was easy to escape as it was ingrained in their consciousness. Cisneros reveals this with her character Clemencia, as Maythee G. Rojas explains in her article "Cisneros's 'Terrible' Women: Recuperating the Erotic as a Feminist Source in 'Never Marry a Mexican' and 'Eyes of Zapata.'" Rojas writes, "Cisneros creates a female character who has internalized a misogynistic attitude in order to foreground the way patriarchal values spill over and define the way power and agency are expressed *even among the disempowered*" (emphasis in the original 145). This is seen in Clemencia's attempts to rival her former lover Drew and in this way taking on the masculine gender stereotype of the "chingón;" (Wyatt 245) her attempts to possess his wife Megan show just how "patriarchal

values” have affected her and her view on what it means to be “powerful.” However, we see how misguided her views are and that she must free herself from the dominant culture’s values because it causes her to objectify and distance herself further from Megan.

I argue that Clemencia has come to internalize many of the beliefs and views of the dominant white culture even though she is not necessarily aware of it. In analyzing the protagonist’s internalization of the dominant culture’s views as well as the long term negative effects of racism, I take a closer look at Cisneros’s similarities to American writers like Toni Morrison, Nella Larsen, William Faulkner, and Richard Wright and how their works and ideas apply to other works of American literature featuring individuals of color including Chicanas. These works portray similar characters who struggle to assert their identities in a patriarchal culture in which racism and sexism are closely connected; factors that are powerfully influential in determining how these characters see and define themselves as well as how they see and interact with others. I suggest Clemencia, much like Richard Wright’s protagonist in *Black Boy*, is overwhelmed by whiteness and confused by it (Brivic 84). It is important to note that the Other, which is a key concept due to Clemencia’s marginal status as a working class Chicana, and mimetic desire go hand in hand as Girard emphasizes “...the priority of the Other in desire” (46). Clemencia attempts to define herself as the Other, or as the “not-me” constructed by whites, as Toni Morrison explains in her work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*: white Americans used blacks to define themselves essentially in opposition to, she writes “the projection of the not-me” (38). Morrison argues that whites define themselves in opposition to individuals of color. I argue that Clemencia adopts this attitude and defines herself in opposition to whites, or attempts to be “not-Megan.” She also inverts stereotypical gender roles, attempting to take on the stereotype of the male in Mexican and Mexican American culture

which is damaging for her. Using Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of the "counterstance" (100), I argue the character Clemencia is merely taking this attitude and adhering to a binary she psychologically constructed, causing her to go through an identity crisis.

Furthermore, Clemencia believes herself to truly be different from Megan even though she is actually obsessing over, and, in fact, using Megan, to develop her own sense of self. Clemencia is drawn to Megan but continuously insists that she is nothing like her. Clemencia seeks to define race because, as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks claims in her work *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, "We seem to need such a refuge in order to preserve the investment we make in the signifier of Whiteness" (9). Clemencia, Drew, and Megan all have invested in the signifier of whiteness. Seshadri-Crooks also says

Race provides a sense of wholeness but also separateness, difference....

Exploring the structure of race requires a toleration of paradox, and appreciation of the fact that it is an inherently contradictory discourse, and a willingness to see beyond relations of power in order to mine the depth of subjective investment in it. (9)

It is this paradox within race construction that causes her identity crisis; she cannot tolerate it and her investment in binarism of race spawns and drives her mimetic desire for Megan.

It is important to note that Clemencia subconsciously wants to identify with Megan as a woman but refuses to accept "sameness" and insists that she is different because of her investment in binarism, "If she [Megan] was a brown woman like me, I might've had a harder time living with myself" (76). Clemencia has invested in her "otherness" not just in her sexual relationships with white men as we see from the beginning when she takes pride in Drew calling her "my Malinche" and in stating that her men were "borrowed," (69) but also in her career as an

artist, “Any way you look at it, what I do to make a living is a form of prostitution. People say, 'A painter? How nice,' and want to invite me to their parties, have me decorate the lawn like an exotic orchid for hire. But do they buy art?” (71). Unlike Gloria Anzaldúa, who attempted to blur definitions of race, nationality, and gender to show that there are no boundaries other than the ones we construct ourselves, Clemencia and many of Cisneros’s characters cannot break out of these bounds. In fact, they feed off of them and seek them for identity construction. Cleófilas, Clemencia, and even Esperanza’s friend Sally in *The House on Mango Street* seem to shut themselves up in this socially constructed view of race and gender. The boundaries and limitations are self-inflicted and even sadistic in Clemencia’s case.

I assert that the boundaries and limitations stem from deep within Clemencia's psyche and derive from the internalized racism and self-hatred that many people of color experience. This can negatively affect their self-esteem, especially in terms of their views of personal beauty and self-worth. I analyze Clemencia’s psychical conflict of subconsciously linking whiteness with “purity/beauty” (Hall 468) and thus superiority, while consciously attempting to reject “dominant ideals of white beauty” (Cheng 194) just like her conscious rejection of traditional gender roles (Wyatt 248-50). Girard states, “Desire is triangular in the child,” and goes onto explain “[t]he mediators of Proustian childhood are the parents...” (35), which is also the case with Clemencia. Her mother is the first to negatively affect how she perceives herself as a Chicana. I analyze her relationship with her mother and her mother’s own self-hatred (Rojas 139) because it is important in discussing the self-hatred that is tied with her mimetic desire. I suggest this self-hatred has also fomented her envy and worship of Megan such that she even wishes to replace her own mother with Megan. Anne Anlin Cheng elaborates on the impact that women’s mothers have on their perceptions of self: “...what is more difficult for the black daughter to process is

black mothers' *desire*: the self-abandoning, identificatory yearning revealed in their reach for little white girls.... [T]heir profound, affective, psychical investment in the promise-and-denial of whiteness...." She also writes, "only by learning to love little white girls can little black girls be like their mothers" (200). Clemencia, as a woman of color, is also having difficulty coming to terms with her mother's value of whiteness, which has led to her contradictory feelings of resentment and veneration of whites. In fact, she follows in her mother's footsteps in her adherence to the dominant culture's standards. Her mother's hatred of her father's disregard of boundaries and her mother's resentment toward her husband's family's Mexican values shows her mother's inability to break out of these bounds. I argue Clemencia, too, is trapped by these boundaries and doesn't "s[ee]" Mexican men (69) because of her mother's effect on her. I point out Clemencia's own resentment of her mother's rejection of her Mexican heritage. I also look at her sense of abandonment because of her mother's new marriage to a white man and thus her sense of being replaced by her mother's "new" white and all-male family. I suggest Clemencia's ambivalent feelings toward the ideal white mother have incited her desire to have and to be Megan, while preventing her from forming any meaningful connection with Megan.

I also point out Clemencia's self-destructive attempts to sabotage any possible relationship with Megan by becoming romantically involved with Megan and Drew's son. I argue that this not only reflects her self-destructiveness after she has suffered a racial trauma but her failure to "make meaning out of" the "Coatlicue state" (Anzaldúa 68) after Drew's rejection. Her affair with their son shows how this failure will never allow her to have a real relationship with Megan and fails to look at Megan "free from male imperatives" (Landry 43). I discuss Shelly Brivic's work *Tears of Rage: The Racial Interface of Modern American Fiction*, which addresses the long-term negative effects of racism not only on individuals of color but on whites as well, in

order to show such effects on generations as far along as that of Megan and Drew's son. Drew's mistreatment of women of color and of his wife Megan, which leads to Clemencia's unhealthy obsession and determination to remain tied to Megan, leads to her desire to become involved with their son. This pollutes Drew's own white family showing that racism "warps human life" generally (Brivic 33), regardless of whether or not the victims are minorities or members of the dominant culture.

I will also look at the way racist structures affect individuals of color who readily accept the values within those structures. I argue that Clemencia's mother, who values whiteness over her own culture, completely devalues Clemencia and Clemencia's father, and this eventually leads to her children no longer valuing her role as mother. Clemencia begins to seek out a "synthetic famil[y]" (Brivic 27) and thus she begins to desire replacing her non-white mother with the saintly white mother represented by Megan. She also wishes to replace her father with the white father represented by her lover Drew.

I felt it necessary to focus on the characters that do not necessarily fit the feminist ideal, in that they are ultimately unable to free themselves from oppressive situations. "Never Marry a Mexican" presents a protagonist or antihero desperately seeking to break away from traditionalist views on gender, race, and class but is not able to do so. Clemencia experiences an identity crisis and fails to undergo a significant transformation; she remains a lonely figure at the conclusion of the narrative. I argue that her desire to build positive relationships with others, more specifically the Other, is never realized, and her inability to look beyond "whiteness," as shown in her obsession with Megan, remains an obstacle to the development of her identity. In establishing a connection with Megan, Clemencia would empower herself because she would overcome the dominant culture's means of keeping women divided. I suggest Megan is also symbolic of the

Virgin Mary because the Virgin Mary is a figure who has represented transcendence among Chicanas (Arrizón 37-42) and so she represents the transcendence of race and gender for Clemencia. Had Clemencia been able to establish a connection with Megan she would have been able to transcend race and gender. Thus Megan becomes an iconic figure because she is the key to Clemencia's salvation in accepting herself and repairing the “break” between herself and her mother (Rojas 140). However, although Clemencia did not establish a meaningful relationship with Megan, the reader is still able to see in Cisneros's story a potential for changing the patriarchal social systems that work to keep women from making real connections that could lead to a breakdown of those patriarchal systems.

CHAPTER II

CLEMENCIA AND DREW; THE GREAT WHITE PATRIARCH'S POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON DESIRE, RACE PERFORMANCE, AND GENDER PERFORMANCE

Sandra Cisneros's works often focus on Chicanas who are struggling to assert their identities as they inhabit a region near the U.S.-Mexico border and thus are greatly affected by and even embody the borderland culture. They are driven and restricted by variable, and sometimes contradictory, sets of cultural expectations. Her short story "Never Marry a Mexican" is no different, as the protagonist Clemencia undergoes an identity crisis because of her struggle to accept and understand the contradictory and paradoxical structures of race along the U.S.-Mexico border. Her failure to understand this is what also engenders her desire for her lover, and especially for his wife Megan, which will be the focus of Chapter III. This mimetic or triangular desire stems from her wish to emulate Drew and Megan because they are both white. She has learned this from her mother; it is also due to the power and influence Anglo culture has within borderland culture. Her wish to desire what they desire will eventually lead to her obsession with Megan. The drive behind this obsession, even though Clemencia is not fully aware of it, is essentially to make Drew the object rather than the subject in the configuration of triangular desire that Girard describes; in this way she would be able to assert and recognize herself and Megan as subjects—a feminist approach that counters patriarchy. Girard describes the configuration of triangular desire as a "third presence" influencing an individual's desire. The

individual feels desire for the object but “[t]he impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator,” and the mediator is really a model whom the individual wishes to be like (10). This has much to do with the self and other as the title of Girard’s book illuminates, and in fact causes Clemencia to undergo her identity crisis, and even stultifies her development of self. I argue that Drew represents the dominant white culture in Cisneros’s story and in this way shows the great influence patriarchy has on the protagonist Clemencia and her desires, as well as on her willingness to perform the gender and racial roles she believes Drew wants her to embody; this in turn leads her to take on the role of the exotic Other and non-white Other.

It is important to first look at Gloria Anzaldúa, who is one of the most influential Chicana writers, and was able to capture the “fluidity” of the borderlands in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. She examines the “fluidity” between Anglo and Mexican culture to show that although there is a geopolitical boundary that serves to divide peoples it is mainly a constructed boundary. Clemencia and many of Cisneros's characters, however, have not transcended the structures that serve to divide them from others and just cannot break out of these bounds (Wyatt 243-7). In fact, they feed off them and seek them for identity construction. Cleófilas, the protagonist in “Woman Hollering Creek,” Clemencia, even Esperanza’s friend Sally in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, each seem to shut themselves up in this socially constructed view of race and gender. Cleófilas is accepting of the abuse from her husband until she finally starts to read and think about the many newspaper articles about women getting killed by their partners, (52) and Sally is accepting of her husband keeping her shut up in their house (“The House on Mango” 101-2). This is not to say that the works are not feminist because as Sonia Saldívar-Hull points out in her book *Feminism on the Border* “[i]n different ways and to different degrees, the women and men Sandra Cisneros portrays in her texts struggle to resist

incorporation by the dominant class and culture,” even if they sometimes thoughtlessly comply with patriarchal demands (104). The boundaries and limitations are accepted by the women whether incipiently or throughout the stories, and thus self-imposed, even uncompromisingly in Clemencia’s case. In the sexual role-play between Clemencia and Drew of Indian woman/conquistador we see the sado-masochistic power structure as Clemencia describes their sexual encounters, “My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan, you said, and yanked my head back by the braid.... Before daybreak, you’d be gone, same as always, before I even knew it. And it was as if I’d imagined you, only the teeth marks on my belly and nipples proving me wrong” (74). Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks explains in her work *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*,

Race provides a sense of wholeness but also separateness, difference....

Exploring the structure of race requires a toleration of paradox, and appreciation of the fact that it is an inherently contradictory discourse, and a willingness to see beyond relations of power in order to mine the depth of subjective investment in it. Visible difference in race has a contradictory function. If it protects against a lethal sameness, it also facilitates the possibility of that sameness through the fantasy of wholeness. (9)

The power structure evident in her relationship with Drew, and even her fixation on their “visible difference,” is exactly why Clemencia has an identity crisis. Early on in the narrative, Clemencia describes her sexual encounters with her lover Drew, an older white man who was her art professor. She describes her lover, pointing out her dark skin in comparison to his own white skin, “My skin dark against yours. Beautiful you said. You said I was beautiful, and when you said it, Drew, I was” (74). This is a statement from the protagonist that clearly reflects Drew’s

large influence on her worldview. She is unable to see beyond the two contrasts of light and dark as Drew is telling her the contrast, or extremes, is beautiful and this inability is in fact what causes her to have an inner struggle, because she cannot look beyond a binary construct of white-dark.

The unbalanced power structure between herself and Drew is evident in their role-play of Indian woman/conquistador or essentially the colonized/colonizer. In order to better understand this unbalanced structure it is important to look at the iconic figures of Mexican folklore and history like Malinalli, or as she is best known, La Malinche, and other legendary figures who have also shaped Cisneros's story. "Never Marry a Mexican" is a reinterpretation and an amalgam of the two centuries-old stories: La Malinche and La Llorona; elements of the story of La Virgen are also present. La Malinche was a young Indian woman, "daughter of an Aztec *cacique*, or chief... a member of a privileged, educated class." She was given away "to itinerant traders" by her mother and then "sold to the ruling *cacique* of Tabasco." She was finally given as a gift to Hernán Cortés and soon began to serve as his translator and advisor. She bore him his first son (Candelaria 2-3). The legend of La Llorona is presented in Catrióna Rueda Esquibel's book *With Her Machete in Her Hand: Reading Chicana Lesbians*:

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful woman, virtuous and poor. She was discovered by a wealthy young man. They fell in love and were very happy together. They were blessed with beautiful children (two, more or less). One day the woman's lover abandoned her (or announced his marriage to a highborn woman, or announced he was taking the children away from her). In rage and despair she drowned him (or the children) in the nearby river. Forever after she

has been doomed to haunt the riverbanks, looking for her lost lover (or her lost children). (29)

The short story “Never Marry a Mexican” is a reinterpretation of the story of La Malinche because the heroine Clemencia is a young woman of color, of lower economic status, who has a love affair with an older white man of a higher economic status. “Never Marry a Mexican” is an amalgam of the two stories because the heroine Clemencia not only resembles La Malinche in racial, cultural, class, and gender difference between herself and her lover but one of the major scenes in the story, shortly after Clemencia attempts to have some kind of contact with Megan, represents the event that takes place in the legend of La Llorona. In this scene Clemencia steals a tiny baby doll from her lover’s wife and throws it over a bridge into a dirty river. She “symbolically drowns” the doll/child (Mullen 8) which is a cathartic act for the protagonist. It is her weak attempt to break away from her sense of obligation to her lover Drew and everything he represents: white privilege, power, wealth, and patriarchy. It reflects the tale of La Llorona because the legend tells that she drowned her children to take revenge on her lover or husband (depending on the source) after he left her for a woman of a higher socio-economic class (Esquibel 29). Thus it was her attempt to take vengeance against male privilege and white privilege.

However, Sandra Cisneros has contemporized the two myths and made them woman-centered rather than male-centered, patriarchal narratives. The narratives are significant aspects of Mexican culture because they have often been used as cautionary tales for Mexican women. Esquibel states

The many variations of La Llorona stories, like the variations of Delgadina..., allow for the storyteller, the performer, to choose the version that best fits her

purposes. Thus, like Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the tale can be told as an indictment of a system of slavery that makes some women and their children the literal property of their male owners. It can also be told as a warning to poor women to choose partners of their own social status. It can be a lament for the generations of indigenous Mexicans killed during the conquest, of the constant danger to single mothers, as a condemnation of female sexuality, as an anti-abortion warning. (29)

However, the telling of it as an "indictment of a system of slavery that makes some women and their children the literal property of their male owners," as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, was not a prevalent interpretation in the past but rather a popular contemporary reading resulting from the Chicano movement. Esquibel goes on to say, "...Gloria Anzaldúa... argues, Chicana writers and artists consistently 'reread' them [tales of La Malinche, La Llorona] through their work" (23). Chicana writers and artists have only just begun to "reread" these texts like Sandra Cisneros has done with her own collection of stories. The reason these stories have been "reread" by Chicana writers and artists is due to the fact that they have largely been used as "a warning to poor women to choose partners of their own social status" thus further imposing and sustaining the racist, sexist, and classist structures already in place.

The myth of La Malinche implies that she is a traitor because she helped Cortés, but combined with the tale of La Llorona, the female figure is now truly made to be a foolish and embittered woman entertaining unrealistic notions because of the tragic ending of the tale serving as a warning to all women. In fact, both figures, who are often presented as wishing to move beyond their social status, pay the price, as do their children (descendants), for believing they could move beyond their own social status, i.e., marry a white man and someone who is a

member of the upper-class.¹ The tragic overtones associated with the two figures is replete with patriarchal values, in which an Indian/mestiza woman could not, or *should* not, entertain the idea that she could be more than a sex object for a man of a higher status or a white man. Indian and mestiza women could be lovers but not an acceptable marriage partner for a member of the ruling class. It is not only “a warning to poor women to choose partners of their own social status,” but the implication is that women of color who were of a lower status could not hope to be more than a sex object for white men of the ruling class. If a woman became involved with a white man or a man of a higher status, then it was at her own risk with all the consequences falling upon her shoulders and not upon the privileged white male class.

In “Never Marry a Mexican,” as mentioned above, a young woman of color has an affair with her art professor, an older white man. The point of view is first-person and from the perspective of the “other woman.” Thus Cisneros is not only contemporizing the two legends but also telling them from the perspective of the colonized Indian/mestiza woman in relation to the Spanish noblewoman (white-European). However, the setting is not Mexico but the U.S., yet the stigma of interracial relationships between whites and those of Mexican descent in the United States is still a factor. Mary Louise Pratt says in her article “‘Yo Soy La Malinche...’”:

The 16th century relation between indigenous woman and Spanish man is “read” onto the 20th century relation between Anglo-American man and Mexican-American woman. By extension it applied to relations between the latter and Anglo institutions in general. Just as the indigenous Mexicans were there before the Spanish arrived, so the Mexican Americans in the southwest were there before

1. Mary Louise Pratt states, “In Mexican popular mythology, La Malinche, as she is called, is remembered as a traitor, the indigenous woman who sold out to the Spanish conquistadores.... She is often associated with a fourth legendary figure, La Llorona, the weeping woman who walks at night looking for her lost children” (860).

the Anglos arrived. The analogy rests on deep historical continuity: until 1848 the U.S. Southwest was Mexico, and the Mexican Americans were Mexicans. The contemporary Malinche myth is historically transposed, but not transplanted.

(862)

Cisneros does an excellent job of showing how interracial relationships are still a complicated issue in both Mexico and across the border in the United States, and thus how the “Malinche myth” still significantly affects Chicanas. Cisneros shows this in the relationship between Clemencia and Drew as well as with Clemencia’s father who is from Mexico, and her mother who is of Mexican descent but born in the U.S., which I explain further in the following chapters. Cisneros uses the tales of the “mythic mothers of Mexico” who form the “maternal trinity” of Mexico because the iconic figures are “closely tied to the Spanish conquest of Mexico, to colonialism and mestizaje” (Esquibel 23). These myths are not only reinterpretations but provide perspective on her characters’ struggles with gender, race, and class; Clemencia’s inner struggle is deeply rooted in historical traditions and her culture.

Clemencia, much like La Malinche, is “abandoned” by her older white male lover Drew. She soon becomes the “jilted lover,” similar to La Llorona, as she does not forgive and forget but vengefully sleeps with Drew’s son years later. She feels that Drew’s son is *her* son because she was with Drew when he was born, and in fact she “convinced” Drew to “let him be born” (74). She is unaware of the patriarchal implications that such a belief holds because the choice to have the child was not entirely Drew’s but also Megan’s; she also advises Drew to “let him be born” because the child is an extension of Megan and she really hopes to maintain a connection with Megan any way possible. Historical accounts state that La Malinche’s son with Cortés was reportedly taken from her and raised in the Old World; Malinche was never able to raise him

according to her own traditions (Pratt 866). Clemencia tries to make Drew's son see her through the eyes she once saw his father, with adoration; however, unbeknownst to Clemencia, her desire for Drew is not original but mimetic, rooted in her own mother's influence. La Malinche is “today ... commonly figured as the sexual mother” (Esquibel 23) and Clemencia is quick to accept this role of the sexually desirable woman of color or the exotic/Other. The first description of her intimate moments with Drew is a sort of role-play with her taking on the role of La Malinche and Drew acting as Hernán Cortés:

Drew, remember when you used to call me your Malinalli? It was a joke, a private game between us, because you looked like a Cortez with that beard of yours. My skin dark against yours. Beautiful you said. You said I was beautiful, and when you said it, Drew, I was. My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan, you said, and yanked my head back by the braid. Calling me that name in between little gulps of breath and the raw kisses you gave, laughing from that black beard of yours. (74)

Clearly, Clemencia as an educated Chicana would know the story of La Malinche² and the negative implications the story holds as an Indian woman acting as translator for the conquistador. Clemencia notes it “was a joke, a private game” between her and Drew (74). Clemencia and Drew are both educated enough to understand what La Malinche represents, thus they call it a “game” and a “joke,” but Clemencia physically and psychologically places herself within the submissive role in their playful lovemaking and affair. She is placing herself in the

2. Catrióna Rueda Esquibel notes, “The stigma of *malinchismo/vendidismo* has been repeatedly used to keep Chicanas ‘in their place.’ This Mexican nationalist strategy was appropriated by Chicano nationalists in the 1960s. Chicana feminists in particular were identified with La Malinche” (24).

stereotypical position of the exotic Other. Rachel von Duyvenbode argues in her article “Darkness Made Visible: Miscegenation, Masquerade and the Signified Racial Other...”

[the] use of masquerade supports the notion of “race as a performance,” as evident in minstrelsy, whereby the mask of blackness provided the white actor with an opportunity to indulge his own sublimated desire for the “lusty life of black folk” under the protection of otherness. The creation of textual masks not only subverts “racial privilege and disrupt[s] binary oppositions” but also importantly deconstructs Williams’ work.... Seeing race as performative also valorizes the visual realm, championing a subjective and plural reading of the text. (205)

She is critiquing Tennessee Williams’ works, but it also applies to Cisneros’s work as Drew is obviously “the white actor,” in his role of the Spanish Conquistador--typically a brutal historical figure--but only a “joke” between the two lovers. They both seem to feel transcendent of the two historicized roles; however, as the story closes the conclusion of Clemencia as “conqueror” in regards to her sexual relationship with her student, Drew’s son, brings real perspective in the damage caused by the unbalanced power structure and her inverted role as the dominant, worldly, experienced, and “playful” female teacher. Yet Cisneros is still providing us with a feminist view because as Saldívar-Hull suggests she has in a way “transform[ed] Clemencia into a source of female power” and moved her “from the *object* of dominant discourse to the *agent* of an alternative vision” (122) by making her the “powerful” figure (106) in her relationship with Drew’s son. However, Saldívar-Hull also adds that Clemencia is a “feminista falsa who wreak[s] havoc on lovers’ lives as well as [her] own” (103), and we do see that she has been psychologically affected and even corrupted by the established racist and sexist systems put in place by men like her lover Drew. It is significant to note that in switching the roles from older

white male authority figure and father-figure to an older female of color in a position of authority (mother-figure), Cisneros makes the reader uncomfortable. In fact, the author has revealed the manipulative act for what it is. Drew has taken advantage of the father-figure role and Clemencia has also done the same, acting as a mother-figure for Drew's son and later seducing him. For many this is an unthinkable act, revealing the reader's own inclination to adhere to the binary of the virgin/whore, linking a mother-figure to a non-sexual or virginal figure and a woman who is seductive and confident in her sexuality like Clemencia with a whore who cannot or rather *should* not be associated with a mother-figure. Thus the reader may become aware of his/her similarities with Clemencia's own constricting views.

Clemencia, as a Chicana, is definitely not in the position to subvert racial privilege, so the "masquerade" only serves to entrap her. She cannot "act" as a person of color and release her own inhibitions through wearing the mask of color because she is a person of color and not a member of the dominant culture. It is clear through the way she presents whites in her monologue that she feels the expectation from them to be this uninhibited being. She is what is stereotypically presented in the masquerade; *acting* as the woman of color only serves to further "problematize ethnic authenticity" and "complicate[s] the signification of identity" (Mullen 15). But worse still, it only reinforces racial constructs and otherization, "Historically, this sense of female sexual desire was largely expressed through coloured women (note the sexual licentiousness of black women as depicted through the minstrelsy genre and Hottentot Venus)..." (von Duyvenbode 212). She is essentially allowing Drew and other married men she mentions to think they are acting on their real inner desires away from their wives and "normal" (white) lives while she is living in the shadows, not for herself, but for them. She refuses to marry, have

children, and even live in the “middle class” (72) neighborhood where she and her sister were actually raised, even if, in fact, it is what she truly desires.

Clemencia feels that she is “subverting racial privilege” and subverting her own socio-economic status by living in a barrio and “performing” the role of La Malinche. Harryette Mullen claims

For middle-class characters, such as the narrators of “*Bien Pretty*” and “Never Marry a Mexican,” the ironic humor with which they adorn themselves and decorate their homes with folk and kitsch artifacts signifies their middle class acculturation and privilege as much as it indicates their attempt to escape or transcend class through self-fashioning...; living in or near the barrio figuring the artist as female, desiring subject, and the community as male, desired object also complicates the signification of identity. (14-15)

However, she is in fact unwittingly strengthening, “The stigma of *malinchismo/vendidismo*,” which “has been repeatedly used to keep Chicanas ‘in their place...’” (Esquibel 24). Clemencia’s action would not be considered wrong in a patriarchal society but is questionable for a “woman-identified woman” (Saldívar-Hull 123), because she participates in the masquerade and really denies any association with her Indian heritage through this farcical act with her lover Drew. It is a denial of the iconic mother La Malinche, represented as the mother of the first mestizo. It is ironic that she should deny La Malinche’s importance in her heritage by acting as La Malinche, but Cisneros often uses irony to show the ambivalence of living on the borderlands. Thus it is Clemencia who has “sold out” La Malinche in this small private moment with Drew, as Gloria Anzaldúa powerfully states in another context:

Not me sold out my people but they me. Malinalli Tenepat or Malintzín has become known as la Chingada—the fucked one.... Because of the color of my skin they betrayed me. The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century. (44)

In her sado-masochistic sexual relationship with Drew, where she essentially has no problem in readily accepting the role of the conquered woman of color, and makes light of the rape that was committed against the colonized by the colonizer, she is accepting the role of the “fucked one” who was the victim of violence. This bedroom scene is also symbolic of their entire relationship as she also readily accepts Drew’s rejection and never questions it because she feels it is understandable due to her race.

The “valorization of the visual realm” (von Duyvenbode 205) also plays a big part in Clemencia’s struggle with her identity as she is entrapped in the binary construct of white-dark. Clemencia compares her dark skin with Drew's light skin and is glad that he finds it beautiful. The way she has worded it in her monologue, shows that in her mind’s eye he finds the *contrast* of their skin color beautiful, and not simply the color of her skin. Furthermore she only states that she is beautiful when Drew *says* it (74). Thus it is only Drew's acknowledgment and appreciation of the contrast of their skin tones that Clemencia herself values. She also discusses her relationships with men in “[d]ark bars, dark restaurants” (68) and compares her skin with Drew’s noting that it is darker (74). She feels that it is her *difference* that leads to Drew's desire for her.

She begins to look back on how her “difference” also shaped paths for her career as an artist. In her career she also fulfilled the role of the exotic Other as she speculates, “Any way you

look at it, what I do to make a living is a form of prostitution. People say, 'A painter? How nice,' and want to invite me to their parties, have me decorate the lawn like an exotic orchid for hire” (71). Although she finds herself representing the Other, an exotic “work of art” in the flesh, she notes that no one really appreciates her work as no one buys her paintings. However, she is acknowledging her own feelings of frustration in regards to race and her shame in not contesting others' reactions toward her; as Kenneth B. Clark claims in his book *Prejudice and Your Child*,

Self-hatred is not an isolated phenomenon.... It cannot be understood in terms only of the minority-group member's reactions to other members of his group.... As he learns from the whites the stereotypes about himself which form the substance of his self-hatred, he begins at the same time to resent the whites for imposing this stigma upon him. (51)

This again links her to La Malinche as “la vendida,” a sell-out, in that she feels herself being “bought” for these social affairs to represent, as she states, the “exotic.” Toni Morrison notes in her work *Playing in the Dark*, “As a reader my assumption had always been that nothing 'happens': Africans and their descendants were not, in any sense that matters, *there* [emphasis in the original]; and when they were there, they were decorative—displays of the agile writer's technical expertise” (16). This statement reflects Clemencia's own view of her career as an artist, that she is merely “decorative.” She also feels that she is only there to provide, as Morrison writes, a “fabrication... reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self...” (17); her presence is an extension of the elite whites at the events, self-reflexive. Her work as a Chicana artist and her acceptance into that community “could never be *about* [emphasis in the original] anything other than the 'normal,' unracialized, illusory white world” (16). She identifies with La Malinche not

because she is unaware but rather because she *is* aware of what she represents for others and she at first feels it is advantageous to accept it.

Jane Davis says of Richard Wright's work *The Long Dream*:

Tyree, when with whites “becomes something different from his former self...”

Tyree's thought patterns, moreover, illustrate other key ideas held by Wright:

oppression has so altered the personality of many blacks that they merely present themselves as images of what they surmise would be pleasing to whites....

[S]ince blacks, in Wright's view, are good performers, the act that such people as those represented by Tyree substitute for their true character traps them in a demeaning position. In Tyree, therefore, Wright dramatizes that blacks whose identity is shaped by white expectations are mere shadows without substance, robbed of any authenticity as their lives become a mere performance for whites who cannot accept them as fully realized human beings. (113)

This is what leads to an identity crisis for Clemencia as she is seemingly just acting, but in real life taking on the role of an image of what she feels Drew wishes to see. Her desire to become what Drew most desires, and in her mind this implies “difference,” is what causes her to “become trapped in a demeaning position” and to “become a mere performance for whites” in her love life and in her career as an artist; a huge problem for an artist who is by definition constantly seeking originality. However, Clemencia's own insistence of this difference and adamant belief that she is in fact completely different and cannot or rather *must* not share any similarities with whites leads to her own view of herself as foreign/Other. Her sexual relationship with Drew gave her a sense of power in her role as “the enticing sexual Other.” In his book *Authority*, Sennett goes on to call this the “delusion of power.... Once their [authority figures]

will is known, a person can proceed to act—against them. But they are the central characters... [the behavior] has very little to do with autonomy” (33). Clearly Drew, the powerful white male, is the central character as she wishes to represent and embody all of his hidden desires. The power structure in their relationship and the frame of their “Malinche and Cortés” love affair well represents Clemencia and the Chicana's inner struggle to sustain a binary construct of race especially with the history of being both European and Indian, colonizer and colonized. The strict adherence to a structure based on two oppositional images is self-destructive as was seen in times of deeply rooted racial binaries which often resulted in extreme inequality and dehumanization. As Clemencia's self-hatred grows with her developing sense of self, her existence becomes an existence rooted in denial. She attempts to grasp what whiteness *is* in order to *be* the opposing Other. Her understandable veneration of Drew because of her mother's own veneration of whites and her desire not only to have what men (white or not) have, but what whites have, leads to what Anne Anlin Cheng calls “the promise and denial of whiteness” (200).

Clemencia has begun to define herself as a foreign being or non-white Other partly placed on her by the mainstream dominant white culture but also by her own mother and family. Clemencia has invested in her “otherness” in her sexual relationships with white men as she takes pride in Drew calling her “my Malinche” and in her career as an artist. Davis goes on to say:

This acceptance of white racism leads to one of Tyree's main conflicts: he is equally afraid of racism and of losing the status that he has earned by complying with the racist system that could result from challenging it. Thus, as much as Tyree resents racism, he has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo: he can benefit from doing so. (112)

Seshadri-Crooks points out in her work *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, “We seem to need such a refuge in order to preserve the investment we make in the signifier of Whiteness” (9). Clemencia has invested in the signifier of whiteness not only in her career and worldview but also in her definition of beauty and femininity. This firm belief and investment in whiteness will go on to affect her perceptions of others not just her lover Drew. In the following chapter I argue that Clemencia’s “investment” in the “signifier of whiteness” is what drives her obsession and desire to have and possess Megan, her lover’s wife. Megan will come to represent the mainstream ideal white beauty and ideal wife and mother for Clemencia because of her dependences on the “signifier of whiteness” to shape her own identity. It is Clemencia’s value of and dependence on whiteness that will also cause her to have an identity crisis, because she will try to simplify her racial identity to a dehumanizing binary of dark/white. This uncomplicated structure will hinder her from fully identifying with other women, specifically Megan the white Other, which is the only way for her to transcend racist, sexist, and classist structures within patriarchy. Saldívar-Hull writes “What Cisneros offer[s] is the possibility of social change through communal female solidarity” (117), and that is what Megan as the white Other represents for Clemencia. I argue Megan is a transcendent figure for the protagonist not because she is the “ideal” of femininity but as a bridge across the divisions set by patriarchy.

CHAPTER III

CLEMENCIA AND MEGAN: THE ILLUSORY MYTHIC WHITE MOTHER

One of the most memorable images from the story “Never Marry a Mexican” is the scene of infantile vandalism Clemencia commits against her lover’s wife Megan’s possessions. In this scene, Clemencia takes gummy bears and strategically places them in Megan’s beauty products and even in her diaphragm. It is the climactic scene because the protagonist finally expresses, even if in a childish way, her *own* desire to connect with Megan. It is also important because it shows the protagonist seeking a connection with another woman despite race or class, in many of Cisneros’s stories the female-female connections sought by the characters often don’t require transcendence of both racist and classist barriers. In this scene her longing, even if subconscious, to transcend race and class (barriers often fortified by gender divisions) becomes clear. Her desire to connect with Megan truly defies patriarchal gender divisions because of the traditionally oppositional roles they are in, Megan as wife and mother, and Clemencia as mistress. Clemencia would be labeled as a “home wrecker” in English, which implies that simply by her existence she threatens the family structure, and if we take this one step further, we could say she threatens the sanctity of motherhood. In Spanish, her role as mistress would label her as a “cualquiera,” which translates to “anybody’s” making it clear that she doesn’t follow the traditional patriarchal rules in which she belongs to a man, i.e., her husband. Maythee Rojas also notes that as mistress “Clemencia survive[s] by living between and among the margins.

Manipulating, usurping, and contesting the structures that oppress [her] reflecting agency on her part” (154). However, ultimately Clemencia fails to make this connection.

Her inability to establish a meaningful connection with Megan leaves the character feeling alienated from others, especially women, as the story comes to a close. She never attempts a real relationship with Megan, and thus never seeks or can attain a “woman-centered power and community-driven socialism” (Chancy 124) because she only views Megan “...through men’s eyes” (Landry 34). Myriam J. A. Chancy explains in her book how necessary it is for women to act out on their desires to form bonds with one another and that in loving other women they can love themselves. She asserts that:

To recognize vital connections among women is to break away from prescribed patriarchal definitions of womanhood. And to affirm those connections is to begin to see the world in new ways and to shift our ways of dealing with that world and the oppressions that all women face, but women of color in particular.
(125)

The female-female connections must be made to surpass the barriers of race and class. Chancy goes on to say, “The lesson to be garnered.... The lesson of loving women as women, and not as an extension of men, or of male desires,” (124) which is exactly what Clemencia needs to do, and has the opportunity to do, if she were to fully recognize Megan woman-to-woman and as subject not object.

Even though Clemencia only comes into contact with Drew's wife for a brief moment, Megan's presence is hardly that of a minor character because of the significance she holds for the narrator. In Clemencia's internal monologue she repeatedly refers to Megan. She is constantly obsessing over her lover Drew’s wife in spite of her passionate feelings for Drew. She obsesses

over Megan's character, physical attributes, and her material possessions, especially her clothes and makeup. This obsession stems from Clemencia's real desire to be and have her lover's wife Megan. However, Drew is frequently influencing some control over Clemencia's worldview, his significance as mediator will most significantly be *as obstacle* [emphasis mine] (Girard 7) because he represents patriarchy. This shows that Clemencia's feelings to *possess* and *be*, in other words, "look" like Megan, are deeply rooted in her looking at Megan "through men's eyes" (Landry 34), through white patriarchy specifically, which ultimately hinders her from forming any real and meaningful connection with Megan. Yet it is significant that Clemencia tries to make sure that her link to Megan is never broken. Even after Drew ends the affair, she waits until Megan and Drew's son is legally old enough to become romantically involved with him, thereby acting out her deep-seated desire, even if only in fantasy, to completely eliminate Drew from the "family" structure.

In this chapter, I discuss the triangular desire that the narrative presents in the relationship between Clemencia, Megan, and Drew which has not been fully explored in Cisernos's works though the topic of desire has been addressed. Jean Wyatt explains that "Clemencia does not so much want to *have* Drew as to *be* Megan" (emphasis in the original 251). I agree that Clemencia wants to *be* Megan but suggest she also wants to *have* Megan. I argue that Clemencia's link to Drew is because of her desire to be and to have Megan. However, my focus is less on Clemencia's desire to nurture or mother, and more on her need to bond with Megan, someone she superficially rejects because of her chosen role as wife and mother and race and status. I look closely at how her desire to both be and have Megan is tied to Megan's taking on both the active role as rival (subject) and the passive role of Drew's possession (object) because of the powerful influence of patriarchy on her mindset. Megan acts as both the object and subject in the triangle.

I also argue Clemencia's mimetic desire reflects her adherence to racial constructs. I assert that Clemencia does not really begin to understand how she relates to Megan until Drew, who acts as both link and obstacle for the two women, thrusts her into what Gloria Anzaldúa calls the "Coatlicue State," where she must begin to examine herself and reflect on her racial identity. I further explain how her desire ties into her feelings of being overpowered and trapped by whiteness or the "simulacrum of whiteness" (Landry 29). I suggest that her desire for Megan is driven by her need to desire what her white lover Drew, a member of the dominant culture desires, or desire according to the Other (Girard 5). Yet it is also driven by a repressed and unconscious desire to connect with Megan, essentially connecting with another woman in spite of race or class, and in this way transcending the barriers put in place by the dominant culture.

Clemencia does not fulfill this desire, however, as she never forms any real connection with Megan. She fails to see or acknowledge the power and control Drew really has over Megan, and so Clemencia is blind to the control he holds over her, too. Her inability to form a strong relationship with other women, specifically the Other woman represented by Megan, only serves to maintain and exacerbate the harmful and destructive effects of racism and sexism. This becomes evident in her affair with Megan and Drew's son. Clemencia can only really begin to understand herself when she views Megan as Landry states "free of male imperatives" (Landry 43).

First, it is important to discuss Girard's mimetic or triangular desire because Clemencia's desire is not original, or autonomous, but rather always influenced by others (Girard 4-5). Girard analyzes the traditional Western European novel and triangular desire present among male characters. The desire Clemencia feels is mimetic or triangular desire which Girard defines as, "The impulse toward the object [which] is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator; in internal

mediation this impulse is checked by the mediator himself since he desires, or perhaps possesses, the object” (10). Clemencia's obsession with Megan reflects her desire to be and have her lover's wife Megan. Girard goes on to say, “Jealousy and envy imply a third presence: object, subject, and a third person toward whom the jealousy or envy is directed. These two 'vices' are therefore triangular...” (12). To further elucidate mimetic desire and its connection to the Self and Other, Girard uses the model of Don Quixote and his idol Amadis of Gaul in chapter one to show how the configuration of the triangle in mimetic desire works:

Don Quixote, in Cervantes' novel, is a typical example of the victim of triangular desire... [Don Quixote's] Chivalric passion defines a desire *according to Another*, opposed to this desire *according to Oneself* that most of us pride ourselves on enjoying. Don Quixote and Sancho borrow their desires from the Other in a movement which is so fundamental and primitive that they completely confuse it with the will to be Oneself. (4)

Just like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Clemencia's desires are “according to Another” rather than “according to Oneself.” This naturally leads the character Clemencia from “Never Marry a Mexican” to break down at the end of the story, because she comes to feel that what she was attempting to be for Drew, the opposite of Megan in order to fulfill what she believed he most desired, was not enough. She is no longer sure how to continue to shape her identity, or even of who she really is, since she has identified with this misperception of what Drew most wanted.

Initially, Drew serves as mediator because he is Clemencia's mentor and art teacher. He presents for Clemencia a worldview and helps her to develop an eye for aesthetic value as mentor, and even as a father-figure since he is older. She is his model for his artwork, but this is really an inversion because he is the actual model. She idolizes him, as is usually the case with

the subject's mediator (Girard 8). She also wants to advance in her career like he has done. However, once Clemencia begins to have an affair with Drew he begins to take on the role of object because he is already married. Thus he presents an unattainable object she can never possess displayed in the configuration of mimetic desire (Girard 13). Girard explains "...the subject is less capable than ever of giving up the inaccessible object: it is on this object and it alone that the mediator confers his prestige, by possessing or wanting to possess it" (13-14). It is clear from the start that this has always driven Clemencia's desire as she remarks that all her lovers have been "borrowed" (69) because they were married. She desires what she feels she can never possess. This is linked to what Cheng refers to as "the promise and denial of whiteness" in which there is a "psychical investment" for many women of color and "that insists upon the racial dimension of that rivalry between white and black girls in which the latter could never truly compete" (200). Although Cheng is specifically referring to black female characters in Toni Morrison's works, it still applies to Clemencia as a woman of color. Clemencia really struggles with a sense of inferiority, and feels she cannot have what she believes Drew's wife possesses because she is not white. Clearly her desire for her lovers has always been mimetic and linked to race, driven by the Other woman (white woman), because she makes it clear that she did not want to date men of her own background as she states, "Mexican men, forget it. ...those weren't men. Not men I considered as potential lovers" (69).³

She, not surprisingly, views Megan his wife as a sexual rival and feels "jealousy and envy" toward Megan. This is a significant relationship because she feels drawn toward Megan

3. Cisneros also illustrates this concept of the Chicana's sense of rivalry with the white Other and her fear of coming face to face with the Other through the figure of "la otra" [the other woman] in "*Bien Pretty*": "Not because I was afraid of running into Eddie, but because I was terrified of confronting 'la otra.' My nemesis, in other words. A financial consultant for Merrill Lynch. A blonde" (142).

even if only in her attempts to outshine her in order to impress Drew. It is also important that she connect with this other woman. Cisneros makes Drew the object in this configuration and the female characters the subjects in this deceptively “boy meets girl” narrative. Thus Cisneros is breaking away from the traditional Western European story because Girard’s analysis is focused on the rivalry between two males where the object is a woman since this has largely been the configuration.

Cisneros’s female-centered story does not display the “relation of rivalry between the two active members of an erotic triangle” as we typically see with two male rivals in traditional Western literature. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* that the Girardian model of triangular desire presented in literature usually shows “the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved...” (21). However, Cisneros shows what a difficult task this feminist re-configuration really is as the character Clemencia will fail to bond with Megan and oftentimes views Megan as object, even sexually objectifying her, because of Drew’s (representative of the dominant culture) powerful and pervasive influence. The two women are not able to bond due to societal structures. In a male-dominated society it would make sense that the two male rivals could share this intense and potent bond but not the case for two female rivals since female-female bonds are not given much importance in a male dominated society. Gayle Rubin argues in her work “The Traffic in Women...” that “As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges—social organization.” She also says that women are “...conduit[s] of a relationship rather than a partner to it.... And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage” (174). In traditional “male-

centered” (Kosofsky Sedgwick 21) works the rivalry also represents, and in fact, brings to the fore the bond men are encouraged to have in patriarchy. However, by reversing the roles and creating a female-female-male triangle, Cisneros magnifies the great divide that exists between women; the rivalry here stresses the lack of societal support for any bond to be formed and maintained. For men, even as rivals, there is a relationship that is appreciated in the competition because of the recognition of the rival as someone to be admired and respected out of this bond that has been established. However, one sees that Clemencia is in competition with someone whom she has no contact with and certainly minimal, if any, influence upon, simply because she believes she should view Megan as rival due to her race. While the rivalry does stem from an adoration, or “rever[ence],” (Girard 13) the bond is not potent because there is no bond. Rather than encourage such a bond from forming, it is beneficial to the dominant culture that she and Megan remain divided so that members of the dominant culture will not have to face accountability for their actions. Thus the adoration comes from her sense of inferiority and so is meant to foment resentment and thus set up divisions.

As stated earlier, mimetic desire has not really been explored in Cisneros’s works, though there has been some critical analysis on desire in her writings. Catrióna Rueda Esquibel discusses female-female desire in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*: "Esperanza admires Sally, and desires her, although that desire is not explicitly sexual" (“Memories of Girlhood” 98). Esquibel states “...Esperanza’s desire... is less about being *like* Sally than it is about being *with* Sally” (emphasis in the original 99). She explains that Esperanza feels rejected by Sally who prefers being with the boys over her and wishes to die, “Although Esperanza frequently expresses feelings of rebellion and resistance toward the limited gender roles available to girls, in this instance, she resents heteronormativity as well as sexism, because it limits not merely what

she can do but also who she can love and how...” (101). Clemencia also thinks about dying or suicide at the end of the story. Esquibel mentions some other things about Esperanza that further elucidate the similarities between herself and Clemencia: “...Esperanza ...is violently initiated into it [heterosexuality] because of her desire to be with Sally...” (103). Clemencia, too, allows her desire to be with Megan influence her own pursuit of men, e.g., Drew and Megan’s son. Her relationship with Megan’s son is violent because it is vengeful and self-destructive in the irreparable damage it does to any possible relationship she could have formed with Megan. However, the story of Esperanza is a coming-of-age story and although she is violently initiated into heterosexuality she still values her relationships with other young women whereas Clemencia cannot bring herself to connect with other women because of her inability to transcend racist and classist barriers.⁴

Thus, it is not important whether the desire between herself and Megan may be “explicitly sexual” or lesbian desire, but rather that Clemencia’s desire acts as a drive toward something. Clemencia's desire is a drive toward Megan in that she wishes to form a real meaningful bond with Megan in spite of Drew acting as obstacle. It is a drive to conquer/subvert oppressive power represented by Drew. Maythee G. Rojas illustrates that Clemencia has a “need to appropriate the dominant male’s conquering mask and modus operandi as a means of liberating herself” (145). Drew is not just an obstacle in his role as mediator in triangular desire but also symbolically as the white male and member of the dominant culture. He controls the

4. Another important similarity between Esperanza and Clemencia in regards to their desire to strongly identify and build relationships with other females is their reaction after they fail to connect with other girls/women. Esquibel explains, “These traumatic events are marked off, as is Esperanza’s perception of her self: ‘I looked at my feet in their white socks and their ugly round shoes. They seemed far away. They didn’t seem to be my feet anymore’ (98). Esperanza’s world, her self, and the way she views everything have dramatically shifted as a result of the loss of Sally’s friendship” (103). Clemencia also looks at her own shoes and remarks that she “felt ashamed at how old they looked” (79) when she runs into Megan for the first time and stays silent rather than let her know the truth about Drew, marking her own loss of any connection with Megan.

societal structures in place that work to keep her away from other women and the constructed Other/white woman. It is the dominant culture that has created this construction. Drew and Megan, who both represent the white Other, interchange in the role of mediator and object for Clemencia, according to Girard, “The power of the Other over the Self is greater than ever and we shall see that it is not limited to a *single* mediator...” (32). The desire Clemencia feels is mimetic or triangular because it is always at some point driven by a “third presence.” The mediator or “third presence” that determines Clemencia’s desire changes from Drew to Megan and psychologically stems from her own mother; race and sex are significant factors in determining her desire and who acts as mediator/object in the triangle since racism and sexism both work to divide and control those who are not members of the dominant culture.

However, Drew is essentially the obstacle and the ultimate struggle is to connect with Megan and thus move her from object to subject and maintain that point of view of this other woman. This is because for Cisneros the female-female relationships are really at the heart of the matter in her stories. The female-male, or “boy meets girl” plot, only serves to shed some light on the real connections women are forming, or trying to form, with one another in her stories. Cisneros masterfully shows how women are not given opportunities to form strong relationships which can only help rather than harm women in creating a society better suited for their own needs. In using the romantic love story between a woman and a man she emphasizes the divisions and, in fact, the obstacles placed between women by men. Cisneros emphasizes these female-female relationships in the titular story “Woman Hollering Creek” and in the story “One Holy Night.” Throughout the collection *Woman Hollering Creek*, the female-male romantic relationships reveal underlying female-female relationships. Clemencia’s link with Drew, her teacher, leads to her obsession of his wife which draws her closer to Megan, therein lies the

potential for Clemencia to transcend race and patriarchy. Cleófilas, a character from the story “Woman Hollering Creek,” meets Felice, the independent woman who helps Cleófilas escape her abusive husband, as a result of her union with her abusive husband.⁵ The connection that Cleófilas and Felice make does transcend class but not race because Felice appears to be a Chicana thus sharing a similar racial background with Cleófilas. In the story “One Holy Night” the narrator sleeps with an older man and becomes pregnant; however, she first explains that the sexual encounter with this man links her with all other women. She describes it as follows:

The truth is, it wasn't a big deal. It wasn't any deal at all.... I thought about all the world and how suddenly I became a part of history and wondered if everyone on the street, the sewing machine lady and the *panadería* saleswomen and the woman with two kids sitting on the bus bench didn't all know.... We were all the same somehow, laughing behind our hands waiting the way all women wait, and when we find out, we wonder why the world and a million years made such a big deal over nothing. (30)

She then discusses how her pregnancy that her grandmother is so ashamed of actually allows her to spend time with her own grandmother, “Abuelita took me out of school when my uniform got tight around the belly.... I was happy. I liked staying home. Abuelita was teaching me to crochet the way she had learned in Mexico” (33). The female-male relationships often do not have a positive impact on the main characters' lives or lead to any real change; however, the female-

5. “The title story of *Woman Hollering Creek* tells of the young woman Cleófilas, who is brought to Texas from Mexico by the husband she hopes will transform her life into the kind of romance she knows from magazines, novels, and telenovelas.... She discovers instead a life of neglect, abuse, beatings, loneliness. This is until a nurse introduces her to an entirely different kind of woman—someone who will help her leave her violent husband.... This woman, Felice, introduces Cleófilas to a whole new perspective on femininity and a range of previously unthinkable possibilities for living her life. Felice fractures the patriarchal narratives of womanhood that have constrained Cleófilas' thinking about herself and her potential” (Madsen 118).

female relationships do cause an upheaval and change in the main characters' world-views, or in Clemencia's case, can potentially lead to change.

Drew acts as both the link and obstacle between Clemencia and Megan as he thrusts her into the "Coatlicue State" (Anzaldúa 63). Coatlicue is the Aztec goddess who represents duality (68). Clemencia doesn't begin to understand the link between herself and Megan until she is in this state. When Drew rejects her, he thrusts her into the "Coatlicue state" where she begins to reflect on her identity and begins to question her racial identity. She starts to undergo an identity crisis because she has been using Megan as a conduit by which to shape her own identity. Gloria Anzaldúa explains that the "Coatlicue state,"

slow[s] us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes.... Those activities or *Coatlicue* states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. (68)

In this state, the "Coatlicue state," Clemencia comes face to face with her repressed desires and must confront them to better understand herself. Her "candied" or futile and infantile vandalism of Megan's possessions stresses her entrance into the "Coatlicue state," as Harryette Mullen points out "According to the author, 'an upside-down gummy bear' resembles 'a Mexican statue of Coatlicue....' Thus... connect[ing] her to the creative/destructive potential invested in the Aztec phallic mother goddess Coatlicue ..." (9). Furthermore, her identity crisis results as she begins to attempt to really look at Megan or try to understand her. In studying Megan's possessions in the bathroom, which either represent race performance or gender performance,

she begins to see similarities and this is the trauma and crisis for her. When she finds the “wooden babushka dolls” (81) Drew had given to her and Megan as a gift that’s when she really falls into her crisis, because she had long denied any similarities between herself and Megan. She is finding that Drew may not have viewed the women as differently as she had viewed herself and Megan and this really causes an identity crisis for her. Here is where Clemencia “look[s] into the mirror” (Anzaldúa 64). She must begin to really examine Megan if she is to positively overcome the trauma of racism. If she can face her own inhibited desires rather than simply wishing to embody others’ desires, i.e., Drew’s she can begin to accept Megan’s wish to be wife and mother and look past their racial difference. She will be able to relate to Megan as a woman and really *see* Megan, which will in turn help her transcend the divisions in place that have led her to feel abandoned and rejected by those around her. But first we must look at why Drew's rejection so easily causes this trauma and identity crisis.

It is obvious from the beginning of the story that Clemencia is unable to look beyond boundaries and labels. In the first paragraph we see that the U.S.-Mexico border is already a marker for difference as she says of her parents, “But she [Clemencia’s mother] was born here in the U.S., and he [Clemencia’s father] was born there, and it’s not the same, you know” (68). We also see right away that Latinos of any nationality are all placed in one category for Clemencia (69). She also relegates Latinos to working or lower class status equating them all with service industry workers (Wyatt 247). She allows such strictures to rule her life and her perceptions. She mentions right away “Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always” (68). “Once” was enough to mean “always” for her because her mother’s narrative shapes her life many years later, as embodied by the fact that Clemencia refuses to marry anyone, believing this act defies prescribed gender roles. Yet we could read this act as resistance to her culture’s traditions when

in fact she is adopting male-identified behaviors, which is an inversion, and not a real challenge to patriarchy. Wyatt explains, “Clemencia adopts the aggressive, violent sexual stance of the ‘chingón,’ but that tactic fails to release her from the influence of the Malinche legend. Escaping the crippling polarities of gender is not so simple as appropriating the gestures of masculinity....” (245). Most significantly, she adopts this role of “chingón” when Drew rejects her and thrusts her into the “Coatlícue State”; she objectifies Megan because she begins to view Drew as a rival and now wants to possess and take what he possesses, viewing his wife as an object he owns.

Just as Clemencia is bound by strict gender roles, she also submits to an acceptance of the American construction of race into a binary of white/black. Wyatt suggests, “[Clemencia] borrows the Anglo habit of lumping all Latinos into a single monolithic identity--'Mexican'--a label that erases individual differences and distinct cultures to consign all brown-skinned persons to a single category” (247). This goes on to have damaging effects as she takes her mother's advice to an extreme only dating white men, however, since she is now following the white/black binary of U.S.-Anglo culture she is robbing the term “Mexican” of any meaning which leaves her feeling worthless, without a racial identity, especially when her mother's words overlap with Drew's after he ends the affair, and she applies the term “Mexican” to herself (247-8).

However, it is mainly Clemencia's strict following of gender roles that leads her to readily accept all aspects of patriarchy, including racial constructs that oppress her and other women. Her mother plays a significant role in shaping her idea of what Drew's views on race may be, a point I will discuss further in Chapter IV. Drew's words to Clemencia when he decides to end their affair are linked to her mother's own words of advice to “never marry a Mexican” in her memory, as she recalls “Besides, he could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think...? *Never marry a*

Mexican. Never marry a Mexican... No, of course not. I see. I see” (80). We are not sure what it is that Drew has told her including whether or not it had anything to do with her race. It is much more likely he did not want to break his family apart and never had any intention of committing to Clemencia since she was well aware of his marriage.

All we see here is Clemencia’s mother’s voice and words coming through after Drew has ended their affair. What we are left with as readers is the damaging effect such words had on her because she concludes that her race as a Mexican American is the reason, and only reason, Drew has rejected her. This has the power to thrust her into a “Coatlicue State” as she has suffered a racial trauma. Because of her mother, she is certain he has rejected her due to her race. Her mother’s words to her as a child: “Never marry a Mexican” had led her to label all Latino men as “Mexican” and to equate “Mexican” with working class/lower class. This also caused her to enter into relationships based on race; she would only date white men. Now these words were causing her to lump herself into this category after Drew has rejected her, just as she had previously rejected all Latino men. Thus Drew’s action only strengthens her adherence to the construction of the two polarities of light/dark. Before, she, like many Mexicans and Mexican Americans, used the geopolitical border, put in place by the dominant white culture--in the U.S. this would be male Anglo-American culture--to categorize and define oneself (Wyatt 244). Now after Drew's rejection she feels “foreign,” or like the Other, which she had no problem accepting when she felt it gave her the upper-hand in her rivalry with Megan, when she felt she could laugh at La Malinche.

This developed adherence to the “visible difference in race” (Seshadri-Crooks 9) strengthens her desire for Megan. It causes her to fixate on Megan because of her latent and unconscious desire to be Megan and to look like Megan because Megan is white. She fixates on

Megan's whiteness. For instance in the climactic scene where she enters Megan's bathroom, she carefully studies and describes Megan's personal belongings including the name brands of Megan's things, "Her Estée Lauder lipsticks." She also tells of what they are made of: "bone-colored sheepskin slippers... a white robe with a MADE IN ITALY label, and a silky nightshirt with pearl buttons," thus focusing on the "whiteness" of all the products, Maythee Rojas points out that this scene shows Clemencia's "preoccupation with Megan's whiteness" (145). She even describes the light pink tones for a fair skinned person in Megan's make-up which in fact is representative of the performance of race. She consistently remarks on the expense or the "quality" of Megan's belongings. Clemencia links Megan's belongings with quality. She states everything Megan has is of "quality" much like her father who represents the "visible difference of race," although he was from Mexico her father looked white. She remembers her father's belongings were also of "*Calidad. Quality.*" (81). It is evident that her father looks like a white man because Clemencia mentions that when living in the southern U.S. he was told to sit in the front of the bus rather than the back of the bus (70). Clemencia is clearly attracted to, and values Megan as a white woman of a higher class status, even though it is a "secret admiration concealed by hatred" (Girard 11). She values whiteness as she associates it with quality and looks upon it with longing, wishing to be, or to have whiteness although she cannot define or grasp it (Brivic 80). Her gazing at and admiring all of Megan's possessions in Megan's bathroom including Megan's diaphragm, which she has no qualms about touching, can be read as a fetishization. Toni Morrison argues in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, "This [fetishization] is especially useful in evoking erotic fears or desires and establishing fixed and major difference where difference does not exist or is minimal. Blood, for example, is a pervasive fetish: black blood, white blood, the purity of blood; the purity of white

female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex” (68). It is important to discuss Morrison's statement “the purity of white female sexuality” because Clemencia adheres to this view, even if not on a conscious level. She describes Megan's space much like a shrine. She also looks upon Megan as a religious idol. Her inability to look beyond whiteness as seen through her obsession with Megan is a key factor in keeping the two women divided. For Clemencia, Megan represents whiteness, or the ideal white beauty, along with the racial construction of the pure white woman. The description of Megan's diaphragm as a “luminescent rubber moon” (81) is reminiscent of one of the familiar images of the Virgin Mary in South Texas: the Virgen de San Juan (Anzaldúa 51-2) which has a golden crescent moon beneath her gown; this shows her stripping Megan of her humanity and deifying her, but ironically also shows her getting closer to humanizing/transforming the figure of the Virgin Mary presenting it as an opportunity to transcend barriers and connect with Megan. She comments on Megan's lipstick colors stating that “mauve is as bold as she would go” criticizing what she believes to be Megan's prudish behavior although she has never communicated with Megan. Thus her thinking is modeled after the purity of the white woman (Hall 465-7) and placing herself in the exotic Other stereotype. Once again Clemencia falls into the stereotype of the exotic Other, sex object, as Mason Stokes states in his book *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, “Black female bodies are sites of ungovernable lasciviousness.” Clemencia's internalization and performance of herself as the exotic Other exemplifies this centuries-old “white supremac[ist]” stereotype of women of color (133); she has applied it to herself.

It is whiteness that first attracts Clemencia and inspires her desire for Megan. H. Jordan Landry explains this “overvaluation of whiteness” and how it inspires desire in the mulatto female protagonist who is also struggling with her identity in the American novel *Passing*,

“Most critics who read lesbian erotics in *Passing* agree, then, that whiteness is the initiator of lesbian desire between the two women. Critics intend this reading as commentary on Irene’s overvaluation of whiteness, high-class status, and bourgeois domesticity...” (Landry 27). We already know that unlike the characters in *Passing*, who pass for white because of their light skin, Clemencia’s skin is not light but dark. She compares her skin tone with Drew’s “My skin dark against yours” (74), and she also recollects, “I was his *doradita* all golden and sun-baked, and that’s the kind of woman he likes best, the ones brown as river sand, yes” (76). Thus Clemencia’s value of whiteness reflects a real desire to be something she is not which emphasizes her mimetic desire for Megan. Jules de Gaultier calls this desire “to see themselves [Flaubert’s personages] other than they are...” as Bovaryism and goes on to say, “Endowed with a determinate character they assume a different one under the sway of an enthusiasm, an admiration, an interest or a vital necessity. But this weakness of the personality is in them always accompanied by an impotence...” (4). Clemencia feels inferior to Megan because she is not white like Megan. However, it is important to note that this is a subconscious desire in Clemencia. Instead she outwardly professes that she hates Megan and is everything Megan is not, noting how different she is from Megan. It is almost as though she is trying to convince herself that she is *different* and that she is better than Megan. This is tied to her resentment toward her mother whose over-valuation of whiteness caused bitter and angry feelings in Clemencia. It is also due to her lover Drew because she had erroneously believed she would become and *stay* sexually desirable for Drew if she was everything his white wife was not. Both motives show that she is influenced by a “third presence,” whether it is Drew or her own mother.

Yet she is using Megan as a model, too, in forming her own identity, in attempting to be the *opposite of* what she thinks Megan is. This is still “according to another” rather than

“according to oneself.” It shows that Megan is the center and reference for Clemencia. Shelly Brivic explains this use of the white Other as a center or reference point in shaping one’s identity by looking at Richard Wright’s novel *Native Son*

The white power that subjugates Bigger appears most intensely as a white blur.

This blur is a loss of definition because for Bigger the position of the whites cannot be looked upon or detected. Like Lacan’s Other, it cannot be seen or defined, yet it watches one from all sides, and one gains identity by being reflected by it. (80)

Megan is her center as she uses her as a model to form her own identity. However, she believes to be “acting against” Megan by attempting to embody everything Megan is not, and feels that in this way she is simultaneously fulfilling Drew’s inhibited desires.

Megan is like a “white blur” for Clemencia because she has never had any meaningful interaction with her. The lack of Megan’s physical presence shows that whiteness is an illusion. Megan’s make-up, too, represents the performance of race. Her attempts to be what Megan is not, while projecting her own view of the ideal white woman onto Megan, is essentially attempting to be a non-entity since there is no way to be someone else's oppositional double. This powerfully illustrates whiteness to be an illusion. This also displays a self-effacement on Clemencia’s part because as Brivic states, “the [white] Other is constantly denying” (80) her. Yet, instead of the person of color as the shadow in this story it is the white individual who has an almost ghostly presence like the haunting, white-clad, mythic mother of Mexico La Llorona.

Cisneros has gone one step further than other writers who, as Landry illustrates use “triangulations [...] to expose false beliefs about whiteness,” because Cisneros has made one subject in the triangle a ghostly presence. This shows how the “simulacrum of whiteness,”

(Landry 29) or race tied with gender, keeps women deeply divided and even denies their existence, thus complicating their endeavors to break away from being object and becoming subject. Megan is a real person that Clemencia has had some contact with but she is essentially an imaginary mediator, (Girard 6) since Clemencia has not had any meaningful interaction with her; her existence, much like Clemencia's, is denied because of patriarchal structures in place.

After Drew's rejection Clemencia begins to think back on how he painted her and reflects on his comments about "liking his women the color of sand" (76) and calling her his "Malinalli" (74). Now, beginning to view herself as foreign, all these memories are more significant as she ties them to the light/dark of skin color. She followed Drew's lead and uses whiteness as a reference point. However, this exacerbated her fixation on whiteness because of his rejection. This binarism becomes a problem because she had felt not only that she must be *for* Drew everything she thinks Megan is not but after Drew's rejection that construction of non-white womanhood or not-Megan unravels. Her belief that she was the most sexually desirable object for Drew falls apart. She then begins to view Megan as a sexual being, but not in a positive light rather in a negative way. It is as object, rather than as woman. This proves how she does not come out positively from the "Coatlucue state" (Anzaldúa 68). This also shows the complexity of the configuration of the triangle in which two women act as subjects and the man as object in a patriarchal society. Megan interchanges in the role of mediator and object, objectified by Clemencia. In the "Coatlucue state" Clemencia does not overcome and positively transform hence she becomes more deeply entrenched in the performance of gender roles and this cyclical pattern is displayed in the oscillating and unstable roles for Megan. Megan is viewed as rival (subject) and also objectified and viewed as Drew's possession (object). And when Megan does act as model or subject, she is a ghostly presence, an abstract, ever-present haunting white Other.

She not only negatively and destructively objectifies Megan but also begins to resent Drew. She believes Drew does not want her because she is not white after she had long felt that it was because she was not white that he sexually desired her. Her hatred and resentment leads to her determination to rival Drew including in taking what he most desires and possesses, but only because she is simply inverting the prescribed gender roles. As Jean Wyatt points out, “‘Never Marry a Mexican,’ however, complicates the notion of subverting feminine gender roles by borrowing from masculinity: in reaction to the passive sexuality ascribed to La Malinche, Clemencia adopts the aggressive, violent sexual stance of the ‘chingón...’”(245). After his rejection she is angry with Drew, she casts off the role of object and is determined to be his rival. This only leads her to objectify Megan, further distancing her from Megan. She refers to Megan as “a redheaded Barbie doll in a fur coat. One of those scary Dallas types...” (79). The patriarchal white father, represented by Drew, has led her to view Megan as an ideal she should mimic and essentially desire. Now that she feels Drew sexually desires the white Other, and wishes to become that in order to be sexually desirable for Drew, she begins to view Megan more as a sex object and trophy wife. She looks upon Megan as Drew’s doll. She sees Megan’s “beauty as a possession (Hall 467),” something Drew possesses and now wants as Drew’s rival. She continues to view Megan “through men’s eyes” (Landry 34) and sexually objectify Megan in her sexual relationship with Drew’s son as she consistently notes how much he resembles Megan:

He’s got the same kind of skin, the boy. All the blue veins pale and clear just like his mama. Skin like roses in December. Pretty boy. Little clone. Little cells split into you and you and you. Tell me, baby, which part of you is your mother. I try to

imagine her lips, her jaw, her long long legs that wrapped themselves around this father. Who took me to his bed. (77)

She also adamantly insists how much she had to do with his birth, “I was the one who convinced you to let him be born. Did you tell him, while his mother lay on her back laboring his birth, I lay in his mother’s bed making love to you” (74) and “All I know is I was sleeping with your father the night you were born. In the same bed where you were conceived” (76). Eventually, she eliminates Drew from the picture entirely as she states, “I think of that woman, and I can’t see a trace of my lover in this boy, as if she conceived him by immaculate conception” (82). She has omitted Drew from the picture and has sexual fantasies about Megan as though she and Megan gave birth to Drew’s son. The trauma of racism in the “Coatlicue state” leads to Clemencia’s embracing gender divisions rather than overcoming them because she seduces Drew’s son and attempts to make him view her as she viewed Drew.

As mentioned before, while in this “Coatlicue state” her repressed desires surface, and all the things within herself that she has tried to deny begin to surface as her anger causes her to distance herself from Drew and she comes closer to Megan. Just like in Nella Larsen’s novel *Passing*, in which triangular desire is also used to stress the illusion of whiteness, the protagonist Irene Redfield feels a desire for her friend Clare because of “those aspects of the psyche Irene denies within herself” (Wall 130). Much like Clemencia who has denied many aspects of herself such as her European/white heritage, traditional roles such as wife and mother, and even her denial of the mythic mothers of Mexico she finds herself now attracted to Megan because of this denied self. Clemencia, similar to Irene and Clare’s attempts to keep in touch, also attempts to communicate with Megan, Wyatt writes, “Clemencia’s use of gummy bears to mark her invasion of Megan’s territory also demonstrates her ambivalence toward Megan.... This is a language of

signs legible to women on both sides of the race/class barrier: 'I was here.'" She also mentions that it "carries a maternal subtext," Clemencia is "borrowing motherhood" when she steals the baby doll from the babushka dolls and puts a gummy bear in its place (251). The Coatlicue message is really a testament that she is viewing her other self through Megan, a denial of her European heritage but also a denial of motherhood. Wyatt goes onto say that "Clemencia's rage is... directed against the woman who occupies the position she wants as Drew's lover and mother of his son..." (252), I would also add as Drew's wife or legitimately recognized partner. Megan has become a saintly figure, the ideal wife and mother much like the icon of the Virgin Mary. She does refer to Drew's son as having been conceived through "immaculate conception" (82) removing Megan's sexuality entirely.

She is doing exactly what Anzaldúa claims white males did "After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continued to split *Tonantsi/Guadalupe*. They desexed *Guadalupe*, taking *Coatlalopeuh*, the serpent/sexuality, out of her. They completed the split... by making *la Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen María* into chaste virgins and *Tlazloteotl/Coatlicue/la Chiganda* into *putas*" (49-50). She is thus denying the humanity of women as she clearly is adhering to the "virgen/puta" (whore) dichotomy" (Anzaldúa 53). She is declaring vengeance on Megan to destroy this image and to resist this figure of motherhood and even resisting her heritage. Throwing the baby doll from Megan's babushka dolls into the dirty water displays her wish to defile the sacredness of that motherly figure, which she not only resents, but which has damaged her. As Maythee G. Rojas points out her mother did not fit into this image, "Clemencia's mother betrays the patriarchal structure of Mexican society when she becomes an adulteress to Owen Lambert," (140) so she denies her own *real* mother which is damaging for her. The Virgin Mary is like La Malinche, a mythic mother of Mexico who has a great part in shaping Chicano/as like

Clemencia (52-53). She is a mythic mother Clemencia denies as she readily accepted La Malinche the “sexual mother” (Esquibel 23). She denied one to embody the other, thus adhering to the virgin/whore dichotomy and denying self. Yet by trying to be the stereotypical exotic Other, she is also denying her European heritage as well as her Indian heritage because this is a false, one-dimensional representation. This shows how they are linked and how Clemencia's inversion of gender roles keeps her trapped in sexist and racist structures.

Clemencia is face to face with her self, the denied self. Megan is the “mirror” of herself, her Other self. Megan is a ghostly presence because Clemencia has constructed her. Thus the difference between Clemencia and Megan *is* minimal, much smaller than Clemencia cares to admit. She says of Megan, “She's not my sister. If she was a brown woman like me, I might've had a harder time living with myself, but since she's not, I don't care” (76) not only justifying her affair with Drew because Megan is white but because she does not want to face those repressed desires. Clemencia subconsciously wants to identify with Megan as a woman but refuses to accept “sameness” and insists that she is different. She refuses to see herself in this mirror image and to acknowledge all her repressed desires.

Unfortunately, Clemencia fails to see the structures in place that encourage her, to her own detriment, to view Megan only as rival, and nothing else because Megan is white. Because Clemencia has tried to embody everything Megan is not for her lover Drew and projected all her denied and repressed desires onto Megan, she is in fact unwittingly following the pattern of the traditional signifier's (white male) construction: shaping her own identity by means of this Other self (Morrison 6-8). But much like whites this “mirror” of her other self really represents her denied self, her erotic “fears or desires” (Morrison 68). Thus her real wish is to embrace this Other. In fact, her identity crisis develops as she begins to come closer to Megan her

mediator/obstacle and she begins to attempt to really look at or try to understand Megan, even if only as rival for Drew. The most poignant example of Clemencia's inability to view Megan "free of male imperatives" (Landry 43) is in her determination to seduce Megan's son. The only way she sees the possibility in maintaining a connection with Megan is through a white male.

Cisneros is showing the inner struggle within the Chicana who, as Gloria Anzaldúa states in her chapter, "The *Coatlicue* State," "has had to work twice as hard as others to meet the standards of the dominant culture which have, in part, become her standards" (71). Clearly she has adopted these standards to an extent that she has denied her own self. The dominant culture has become the standard. The dominant culture which Brivic explains, "denies," her as a person of color (80) making her feel empty and worthless.

She makes the decision to seduce Megan's son when she steals the baby from the one item that most closely links the two women and tries to defile the item and the sacredness of motherhood. It is a vindictive and selfish act but it is also an unconscious decision to continue to be linked with Megan through her son. She fondles the tiny doll and finally dumps it into a dirty river which is a cathartic experience for her (Rojas 146). However, this "infanticide" similar to La Llorona (Mullen 8) foreshadows what she is determined to do to Megan and Drew's son out of revenge and her true desires. This act is also symbolic of oppressive and racist structures and how they infect generations to come, not just those of color but whites, too, (Brivic 31-2) which I will discuss further in my fourth chapter. Thus mimetic desire, in which "[h]atred is individualistic" and "[hatred] nourishes fiercely the illusion of an absolute difference between the Self and that Other from which nothing separates it" (73), parallels Clemencia's obsession with the embodiment of whiteness through Megan and reveals that whiteness is an illusion. Clemencia like other minorities in American Literature, e.g., Irene Redfield in Nella Larsen's

Passing and Bigger Thomas in Wright's *Native Son*, experiences a crisis because of her inability to recognize race as illusion. Her desire to build positive relationships with others, more specifically the Other, is never realized. Drew's rejection caused Clemencia to question what her lover really desired, had it been the ideal white beauty all along rather than the exotic Other? Thus she still fails to see that neither is real, Jean Baudrillard uses the term "simulacrum" which is:

an illusion preserved and perpetuated by an intricate sign system whose very scope endlessly validates the verity of the illusion. Moreover, precisely because the sign system so widely disseminates it, the myth takes on material form in the world as it comes to inform human relationships, forms of knowledge, and social institutions. (1-4)

H. Jordan Landry says that "Whiteness fits this definition of a simulacrum. It is both a constructed illusion and one that has real-life consequences" (29) as we see with Clemencia's identity crisis, trauma, and her obsession. It eventually leads to her attempts at vengeance on Drew's son and possibly Drew's entire family. Essentially sabotaging any bond she could have formed with Megan, even if only in their shared recognition of Drew's infidelity and lack of consideration for either woman, recognition of his control, and exploitation and its damaging effects on his son. And this self-destructive personality and her great investment in sexist and racist structures has led her to believe that she can only be connected with other women through their unfaithful husbands because she needs them to "see" these women. This link is false and damaging, more-so to herself than the Other woman, as she is constantly attempting to oppose them and to set up the barrier of *difference* rather than making any attempts to bond with them. If she could bring herself to identify with them then she could begin loving herself through loving

this Other or as Landry writes in regards to the novel *Passing* “Loving the symbols of blackness as well as femaleness in the other brings about a new ability to love the self” (37). Clemencia must cast off the role of “chingón” (Wyatt 245) and not deny her own “symbols of femaleness,” or resent and attempt to destroy it when she sees it in the other, in order to “love the self.” Yet she truly believes the bond with Megan’s son to be her only real link with Megan. The fact that Clemencia as an artist does not reconstruct the mythos of La Malinche but rather chooses to follow the centuries-old racist and sexist model of La Malinche means that she feels she will not exist or be recognized by the Other if she does not perform the sexist and racist role of sex object. Even in her role as “mother” to Drew’s son she attempts to take on the role of the “sexual mother” (Esquibel 23), again performing what she believes is the expected role, the role of La Malinche. But just as Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that women (objects) in the triangle “are merely the vehicles by which men breed more men, for the gratification of other men” and “introduced... mostly as suggesting possible obstacles” (33), Cisneros has emphasized that Drew is mainly an obstacle; even though the two women do not have a potent bond, he is essentially their burden. He is not just an obstacle as mediator in triangular desire but literally an obstacle because he has created for his own benefit the barriers that divide the two women.

Clemencia must connect with Megan if she is to break out of the racist and sexist structures that dominate her life. She cannot see that whiteness is an illusion and, as aforementioned, that “[e]xploring the structure of race requires a toleration of paradox, and appreciation of the fact that it is an inherently contradictory discourse” (Seshadri-Crooks 9) nor does she possess the “tolerance for ambiguity” needed by the mestiza according to Gloria Anzaldúa (101), so she cannot understand her own inability to connect with Megan. It is this possible connection with Megan, who has come to represent the Virgen in Clemencia's mind that

can really change Clemencia's world-view for the better. In fact, La Virgen or Virgin Mary has served as a transcendent figure for many Chicanas (Arrizón 37-42). If Clemencia were to truly look at her heritage "free of male imperatives" (Landry 43) she could also find support in this figure rather than simply elevating Megan to this false iconic status that she mockingly censures as "Mary the mild" (128) a phrase the author uses in another story within the collection, "Little Miracles, Kept Promises." This blind and confused worship of Megan denies her humanity placing an impossible false ideal on women of color as well as white women, dividing them but also isolating them. Thus "their attempts to live up to a fictionalized ideal of femininity increases their sense of failure and self-blame;" they do not love themselves but blame themselves and each other (Landry 26). The identity crisis or entrance into the "Coatlicue state" that Clemencia faces is only significant in that it could potentially lead to a realization of her inner desire to connect with other women no matter what their race or status. Unfortunately, Clemencia is never able to connect with Megan because Megan never becomes real for her. Toward the end of the story she attempts to communicate with her lover and his wife Megan but fails to do so:

That's when I get on the telephone, dangerous as a terrorist.... Why is it worse at night, when I have such an urge to communicate and no language with which to form the words? Only colors. Pictures. And you know what I have to say isn't always pleasant. Oh, love, there. I've gone and done it. What good is it? Good or bad, I've done what I had to do and needed to. And you've answered the phone, and startled me away like a bird. (83)

Clemencia makes attempts to communicate but cannot speak or even confront Drew about his refusal to consider her as someone he could possibly marry. Clemencia also cannot bring herself to talk to Megan about her relationship with Drew because she doesn't feel that anything she

could say would have any impact on Megan or Drew due to her race and status, she remains powerless. Megan remains just as illusory as the simulacrum of race and is only a projection for Clemencia. She begins to define herself in opposition to this projection or false image. As I argued in Chapter II, she defines herself as anything that is “other than Megan” and the only way she can fathom maintaining a steadfast and strong connection with Megan is only through a white male like Megan's husband or Megan's son. Clemencia only attempts to communicate or connect with other women by “borrow[ing]” their men, and so she is constantly performing race and gender and using the Other to define herself an unsatisfying and meaningless existence for her.

CHAPTER IV

A MOTHER'S DESIRE AND A DAUGHTER'S BURDEN: ETHNIC SELF-HATRED IN SANDRA CISNEROS'S "NEVER MARRY A MEXICAN"

In Chapter II, I specifically looked at the relationship between Clemencia and her lover Drew; I discussed Clemencia's admiration for Drew and her desire to please Drew because of his success in his career and also because of his status as a member of the dominant culture. I also argued that Clemencia has denied her true self in her attempts to act, or be a certain way, in order to please and even fulfill what she believes to be Drew's desires.

In chapter III, I looked more intently on Clemencia's obsession and secret admiration for Megan. I focused on her inability to understand that she longs to make a connection with Megan because of her repressed desires. I suggest that Megan is a projection of the ideal white beauty, wife and mother; she has come to embody Clemencia's repressed desires to take on the roles of wife and/or mother, but also represents her denied self, aspects of her culture and heritage which she denies.

In this chapter I argue Clemencia's mimetic desire toward her lover Drew's wife Megan originates from a deep-seated, ethnic self-hatred instilled in her by her own mother during childhood. Thus it makes sense that Clemencia desires Megan because of her whiteness. Clemencia is a Mexican-American woman residing in San Antonio. Her father is from Mexico and her mother is Mexican-American, born in the United States. Living along the borderlands, "Mexican" is a term that is used interchangeably to apply to both Mexicans from Mexico and

Mexican-Americans who are U.S. citizens. Clemencia's mother uses this term in a negative way despite her own Mexican ancestry, which does negatively influence her daughter and causes her to devalue herself. As Gloria Anzaldúa states, “[the Chicano] has an excessive compensatory hubris when around Mexicans from the other side. It overlays a deep sense of racial shame,” (105) Cisneros’s “Never Marry a Mexican” supports this claim. Clemencia's mother displays this “compensatory hubris” toward her husband, who is from Mexico and whose family she resents because they felt he had “married down by marrying her” since she wasn't a “white woman from *el otro lado*” (69). As a Chicana, Clemencia is strongly affected by her mother's “deep sense of racial shame” and undoubtedly her father's family's social racism. Although both her parents are of Mexican ancestry she is an individual of mixed race because of their *mestizaje*, or mixture of both European and indigenous peoples. In fact, *mestiza*, which means mixed race, *is* her racial identity. Thus denying either her European or Indian heritage is to deny self so her mother’s actions cause Clemencia to go through an identity crisis. Her desire for Megan parallels her desire to reject her racial identity, her *mestizaje*. It is caused by her destructive desire to reject both her European/white ancestry and her Indian ancestry; this rejection allows others to determine who she should be and how to act. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this reaction to *mestizaje*, “un choque, a cultural collision.” She explains,

Within us [mestizas] and with *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat and we attempt to block with a counterstance.... A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed.... All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting

against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. (100)

Anzaldúa goes on to argue for a new consciousness in which “[t]he possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react,” (101) unfortunately Clemencia only reacts.

Clemencia's mimetic desire, driven by her mother's over-valuation of whiteness, is not unlike other individuals of color in American Literature whose desire toward others has also resulted from the “indiscriminate internalization of white Western mores” (Cormier-Hamilton 115). In Toni Morrison's book *The Bluest Eye*, the black female character Pauline Breedlove “begins to hate herself” and feels “that only beautiful women like Jean Harlow and Norma Shearer deserve love and happiness. Not only is Pauline's awful sense of self-worth passed on to her child, her impossible dream of blond blue-eyed beauty is passed on as well” (Cormier-Hamilton 120). A more comparable novel would be Nella Larsen's *Passing*. H. Jordan Landry observes in her article “Seeing Black Women Anew Through Lesbian Desire...,” “Most critics who read lesbian erotics in *Passing* agree, then, that whiteness is the initiator of lesbian desire between the two women. Critics intend this reading as commentary on Irene's over-valuation of whiteness, high-class status, and bourgeois domesticity, all of which she associates with safety” (27). Much like the mulatto women in Harlem Renaissance novels, it is over-valuation of whiteness that leads to Clemencia's desire for Megan. H. Jordan Landry points out African-Americans have used “their construction of triangles” in their works and “revise[d]... the two-suitors convention in order to expose whiteness as a simulacrum” (28). Traditionally “an author often plots the development of a female character by representing her choice between two

suitors, one of whom signifies negative values the heroine must reject and the other positive values she must develop a taste for” (Kennard 13-15). Landry argues

The African-American revision of this white Western tradition foregrounds a choice between whiteness, the deviant possibility, and blackness, the proper possibility, within the triangle. In these triangles, the character’s choice of the wrong beloved reveals his/her internalized racism and corrupt value system; the character desires the deviant possibility precisely because he/she invests unquestioningly in popular myths about the superiority of white culture. (28)

She goes onto say that Larsen also displays this simulacrum through the erotic triangles present in her novel *Passing*. Cisneros also does this in her story. Although Clemencia is not an African-American woman, as a Chicana she is an individual of mixed race who shares both European and indigenous peoples’ ancestry. Thus denying, rather than embracing, either her European or Indian heritage, or both, is to deny self.

As a person of mixed race, mestiza, she comes face to face with an erasure of self or as Anzaldúa stated “cultural collision” in which her instinct is to simply “react” and be in a “counterstance” attempting to oppose both sides that make up her identity. Perhaps even more problematic and confusing for Clemencia is how she deals with this “choque” is not to “pass” as white or to deny her Indian heritage but rather to adopt either/or when it pleases the dominant white culture, represented by Drew. She asserts neither identity because she wishes to please Drew and the dominant culture. She claims in a defiant tone “I’m amphibious” and “I don’t belong to any class” (71-2). We know that she links class with race as she admits early on “Mexican men, forget it. For a long time the men clearing off the tables or chopping meat behind the butcher counter or driving the bus I rode to school every day, those weren’t men. Not men I

considered as potential lovers” (69) then she goes on to identify these working class men as Latinos. She even states, “Any way you look at it, what I do to make a living, is a form of prostitution” (71) her jobs are not illegal or immoral but she links these things to prostitution because those who accept and demand her work are not Chicanos but whites. She says people “want to invite me to their parties, have me decorate the lawn like an exotic orchid for hire” clearly the “exotic” other is what she feels defines her and what she feels she needs to be to have her work accepted. However, she is also displaying resentment and anger, referring to herself as a prostitute, in acting as that “exotic orchid for hire” (71). She is accepting a long held Mexican, Chicano, and even African American belief that as a woman of mixed ethnicity, being both European and a person of color, she is likely to be a “race betrayer” and, in fact, are often portrayed as having “promiscuous sexual habits” and even “participat[ing] in sexual prostitution” (Landry 32-3). She is doing the thing she loves, but she feels she is a “race betrayer” because in doing this work she cannot completely reject whites since they are the ones who accept her work. She remarks that “[t]he poor don’t mind if I live in their neighborhood because they know I’m poor like they are, even if my education and the way I dress keeps us worlds apart.” She also mentions that it is “the poor, whose neighborhood I share” and from her description it is a Mexican/Chicano neighborhood as she describes it as a “barrio” and mentions the “Mexican bakeries” (72) so she feels that the Mexicans and Chicanos don’t accept her work. Mexicans and Chicanos accept her because of her economic status but she feels alienated from them because they do not recognize her work as an artist.

Clearly she feels it necessary to shift from one culture to another, to be “amphibious,” which Anzaldúa claims is how “[t]he new *mestiza* copes.... She learns to juggle cultures” (101). She does so when she feels it will help her economically and will please others but not to please

herself, or to firmly identify with her *mestizaje*. Thus, she is unable to do what Anzaldúa says is also necessary for the “new *mestiza*.”

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. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. (102)

Because she allows others to determine her racial identity, she cannot escape from this subject-object duality which is clear in her relationship with Drew. She allows Drew to objectify her and thus she maintains the split “between males and females” and unwittingly “between the white race and the colored” (Anzaldúa 102). When reminiscing about her affair with Drew, she states, “I liked when you spoke to me in my language. I could love myself and think myself worth loving” (74). Drew is the one who affirms her self-worth. She can feel that she is “worth loving” when Drew uses the Spanish language. Drew speaking in Spanish acknowledges existence. The reason for this is, unbeknown to Clemencia, not just her passion for Drew but linked to her mother's over-valuation of whiteness. This has led Clemencia to devalue self and value what her lover Drew, representative of the white Other, values. She allows him to determine her self. Clemencia has denied and repressed her self in her relationship with this older white man Drew. Deborah L. Madsen points out in her book *Understanding Contemporary Chicana Literature* “Romantic love tempts women to adopt a particular sexual vocabulary and emotional register, and in this way to adopt a persona or mask, that of the patriarchally approved 'lover.' This inauthenticity and self-denial represent the death of the self...” (66).

Clemencia is in constant denial and never sees that she follows in her mother's footsteps in valuing whiteness. This over-valuation of whiteness, in spite of her conscious effort to resist, shows how deeply ingrained her mother's influence is on her subconscious. Her insistence that she is rebellious to the dominant standards only shows a delusion on Clemencia's part and emphasizes her inability to overcome the encompassing structures in place based on the illusion of whiteness. Patrice Cormier-Hamilton explains in her article "Black Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey away from Self-Love in *The Bluest Eye*" that "minorities" go through "complex *psychological* struggles..." "as they attempt to resist influences from a dominant society..." (114). Seeing her mother's over-valuation of whiteness, her mother's value of whiteness over her own family's culture, has greatly influenced her. It has even infected her relationships with all those around her, including her own parents. She disowns her mother and even after her mother dies only seems to resent her. Her father's advice or words are not remembered. She even recalls his death and how he could not speak, lost his voice, figuratively losing efficacy and influence. Her father only symbolizes the visual difference or social racism she adheres to as she only remembers that his belongings, like Megan's, were always of "Calidad. Quality" (71).

Her mother's over-valuation of whiteness eventually leads to her devaluation of self and this leads her to seek out a much more stable family unit to replace her own family. Thus her reference for identity will center entirely on the dominant culture or will be "defined by the dominant order" (Brivic 79). This over-valuation of whiteness begins even before she is born with her parents' relationship and then with her mother's remarriage. We see three different marriages in the story: her parents', her mother's marriage to a white man, and Drew and Megan's marriage. Marriage is emphasized because it is a structure that helps to maintain the illusion of

whiteness. Marriage is a key institution that allows individuals of color to attain white privilege which is associated with stability. It has allowed one's whiteness to be capitalized on (Hall 467). Patrice Cormier-Hamilton explains that "...there is a direct relationship between economic gain and light skin: a black individual's chances of achieving both social and economic advantages is in direct correlation to his/her ability to correspond more closely to... common ideologies of dominant society" (115). This can also mean providing them with the opportunity to marry a white individual and possibly "pass" as white. Marta I. Cruz-Janzen explains, "To marry a white person, especially a Spaniard, European, or white American, is *dando pa'riba* (moving up); to marry a darker person is *dañar la raza* (damaging to the race)" (179). Clemencia's father's family disapproves of his marriage to her Mexican-American mother because she is not white. They adhere to the dominant views of many Latin American countries where value is often placed on visible difference and skin color not necessarily nationality or culture, Cruz-Janzen calls this "*blanqueamiento* (whitening of the race)..." (175) and goes on to say "The policies of blanquemento, [are] prevalent in most Latin American countries..." (176). She also states that "In many Latin American countries white Europeans, including U.S. mainstream white Americans, have always been highly admired, and marriage to them is encouraged" (179). Clemencia's father's family is not concerned with her mother being foreign or even poor, "If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would've been different. That would've been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor" (69). Because of this disapproval, her mother feels resentment toward her husband and his family and advises Clemencia to "Never marry a Mexican" (68).

Although her mother may have merely been referring to nationality, it becomes clear how damaging such a statement is because, whether she had been born on the U.S. or Mexican side of

the arbitrary geopolitical border, “Mexican” is part of who Clemencia is. Patrice Cormier-Hamilton writes “Morrison indicates how damaging careless adoption of Western values can be for African Americans,” as it is with Clemencia, whose mother advises “never marry a Mexican” and does not take into consideration that “Mexican” is a fluid term. She is unaware that she is harming her daughter by essentially displaying racial exclusion toward her husband, labeling him as “Mexican,” as a means to mark him as inferior, in front of their own child.

Throughout the narrative, Clemencia's recollection of her past focuses on her mother and her mother's words. This displays the powerful influence her mother has had on her. These memories are not happy memories for Clemencia and are, in fact, flooding her mind as she thinks about the painful memories of her past affair with Drew. As I discussed in Chapter III, Clemencia is thrust into the “*Coatlicue* State” (Anzaldúa 63) because of the traumatic effect of Drew’s rejection. It gives rise to Clemencia’s repressed feelings. When Drew ends his relationship with Clemencia, the reader is not sure of what reason he gives for ending their affair. Cisneros only allows the reader to see Clemencia's reaction many years after the affair has ended. This clearly shows that it is something that has had a traumatic effect on her because she cannot seem to move past this memory. The reader only sees what Clemencia is thinking, her internal monologue: “All for the best. Surely I could see that, couldn't I? My own good. A good sport. A young girl like me. Hadn't I understood... responsibilities. Besides, he could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think...? *Never marry a Mexican. Never marry a Mexican....*” We see that her young age and his responsibilities, probably to his wife, son, and his job, are pointed out as reasons for his ending the affair, all plausible reasons in spite of his lover's ethnicity. However, what is key here is that Cisneros italicizes the words “never” and “me” when she thinks to herself “Besides, he could *never* marry *me*” then this train of thought leads to her question: “You didn't think...?”

and finally her mother's words come into her mind "Never marry a Mexican." A phrase the author repeats twice and italicizes. It has led her to come face to face with what she has long denied and repressed in herself. Peter Brooks explains in his book *Reading for the Plot*, "Repetition in the text is a return, a calling back or a turning back... both returns to and returns of the repressed... we cannot really move ahead until we have understood that still enigmatic past, yet, ever... forward, since revelation, tied to the past, belongs to the future" (125). The repetition of her mother's words represents "both returns to and returns of the repressed." The italics is much like the stream of consciousness technique used by William Faulkner in his book *The Sound and the Fury* in which "the italics... signal to the reader that there is a shift in time" (Humphrey 57). However, it is also a revelation into her psyche and the italics of the words "never" and "me" with the phrase "never marry a Mexican" also being italicized clearly links the words together. She is linking "me" with Mexican and has deduced, accurately or not, that this is the reason for Drew's decision. The overlap of her mother's words "never marry a Mexican," italicized to show the transition into the past, makes it unclear for the reader whether Drew stated this as the reason. However, the "repetition-compulsion" and its ties to the repressed (Murdoch 334) makes it powerfully clear that her mother's words lead her to strongly believe that this *is* the reason for Drew's rejection. It doesn't matter whether it is truly the reason or not, she will believe it because of her mother. She will link what she felt to be a rejection by her mother with the rejection by her lover Drew. Her passive acceptance of his decision is due to her own strong belief that Drew would never consider her as someone he could marry, that marrying her would be beneath him as marrying her mother was considered beneath her father. She is unhappy to find herself in the same place as her mother whom she never forgave and even rejected. It haunts her and also keeps her from ever confronting Megan honestly because these words have also

made her really believe Megan to be the better choice for Drew, not only is Megan a U.S. citizen but she is also white. She would have fit into the acceptable and ideal U.S. citizen for her father to marry.

Her mother's words and over-valuation of whiteness have led her to passively accept Drew's rejection because it has led her to devalue herself. It has set her up to allow others, and men like Drew a member of the dominant culture, to decide and influence what she should be. It is also a trauma because she suddenly realizes that she had rejected Latin American men due to her mother's advice to "never marry a Mexican" so how could she honestly fault Drew for not marrying her now that she applies the label to herself? Rather, how could she expect Drew to "marry down" by choosing her over Megan? She could not have expected Drew to really see or value her as she had not "seen" men whom she identified as "Mexican." The term "Mexican" now has new meaning as she applies it to herself. She now sees the invisibility and degradation it can carry with it in her borderland culture.

The trauma lies in her denial of her heritage. She denies her European ancestry by adopting fully the exotic other for Drew, explained in Chapter II, as displayed in their role-play of Hernán Cortés/conqueror and La Malinche/conquered. But for her it is a joke and she laughs at being called "Malinalli," clearly she doesn't place much value in this figure and her representation of the Indian mother of Mexico. She tried to be for Drew what he wished her to be. She felt that he wanted her to be the opposite of his wife Megan. Thus she attempts to be the opposite of his wife Megan in her role as "la otra" or as mistress but also the Other as in the exotic Other. She feels that Drew wants the opposite of the traditional housewife. She tries to oppose what she believes the traditional wife and mother to be which leads her to project this onto Megan. She does this as an act of rebellion to the dominant race but ironically to please a

member of the dominant culture. She is actually adopting the gender stereotype of the traditional housewife and investing in the patriarchal beliefs of what the ideal wife and mother should be, “rely[ing] on the unquestioned simulacrum of women's sexuality and gender” (Landry 30) in order to oppose it. She is willing to be anything Drew wants her to be to please him, leaving her with nothing, because she denies both aspects of her culture if she thinks it is what Drew wants. This again ties into what Deborah L. Madsen writes about “adopt[ing] a persona or mask” for the “patriarchally approved 'lover.’” Madsen reflects on Bernice Zamora's poem “Open Gate” and states, “In this poem the unnamed woman surrenders the opportunity to choose her own identity” because of “romantic love” (66). Clemencia does the same in her relationship with Drew who is a “patriarchally approved 'lover’” because he is a member of the dominant culture approved by her mother because he is not “a Mexican.” Clemencia desires whiteness because it helps her define herself as she is greatly influenced by her mother’s over-valuation of whiteness, and she feels that “restless search for identity” (Hostetler 44) because she is using the white Other to define herself. She is using a simulacrum to determine her identity. This illusion leads her to also create a fantasy around Drew’s wife making her an iconic saintly personage instead of a real person. She is using a mainstream view of the traditional wife and mother which is a “reaffirmation of longstanding white middle-class ideologies about women” (Larsen 30). Thus Megan becomes the ideal mother and a saintly figure like the Virgin Mary as Clemencia adheres to the “virgen/puta (whore) dichotomy” (Anzaldúa 53). Clemencia allows Drew, and later Megan, to be her “reference” (Brivic 79) for her identity due to her mother instilling within her the immense value of the dominant culture; as a result she essentially depends on them for her existence in the sense that they determine her sense of self. They take the place of her mother and father. Essentially Clemencia seeks the stability of the white family; a myth constructed by the

dominant culture, and she will seek a “synthetic family” as she further rejects her own family (Brivic 27). Thus Clemencia does not only look at Drew as her lover but also as a father-figure and this will cause her to transform Megan into a mother figure.

Her mother's over-valuation of whiteness also sheds light on Clemencia's memories that stress the emasculation of her father by her mother. The society emasculates her father not her mother but Clemencia blames her mother. This emasculation of her father is best represented in her memory of her father when he was dying:

When my father was coughing up blood and phlegm in the hospital, half his face frozen, and his tongue so fat he couldn't talk, he looked so small with all those tubes and plastic sacks dangling around him.... And I remember the doctor scraping the phlegm out of my father's mouth with a white washcloth, and my daddy gagging and I wanted to yell, Stop, you stop that, he's my daddy. Goddamn you. Make him live.... Everyone repeating over and over the Ave Marías and Padre Nuestros. The priest sprinkling holy water, *mundo sin fin, amén*. (74)

We see here the emasculation of her father by the Westernized European traditions that dominate represented by the white washcloth. She thinks about her father losing the ability to speak and “gagging” shortly after she recalls her mother's affair with “Owen Lambert, the foreman at the photo-finishing plant, who she was seeing even while my father was sick” (73). Her mother's affair with her white boss represents the over-valuation of whiteness but her blaming this emasculation entirely on her mother is what H. Jordan Landry explains as “seeing... through men's eyes” stating that this reflects an “unconscious desire to align... with the dominant perspective, no matter how wrong” (14). The memory of her father's death and his inability to speak represents his inefficacy because of racist structures, in place even before her parents'

marriage. This racism caused her mother to feel rejected and resentful toward her husband and led her to advise her daughters not to “marry a Mexican.” However, it has damaged Clemencia, as she cannot help but link her memory of her father’s death with her mother’s affair or betrayal. This is again similar to Larsen’s character Irene Redfield who views other women “through men’s eyes” and Landry explains “blam[es]... women of mixed ethnicity, including herself, for men's egregious behaviors” (14). She has no understanding for her mother, as Maythee Rojas illustrates, “...the agency Clemencia's mother actually has in this relationship invariably remains questionable: As her boss Lambert holds a certain amount of power over her, and she may have no choice in the matter her” (140). After her father dies, her mother marries Owen Lambert and her “half-brothers” (73) move into what she states was hers and her sister's home. Her mother's actions after her father's death make her feel abandoned, linking her more closely with La Malinche who has historically been represented as abandoned by her mother and as the abandoned mother by the Mexican people. This is where Clemencia comes to symbolize “the spiritual orphan” (Brivic 26). Clemencia's sense of abandonment by her mother because of her mother's over-valuation of whiteness, places Clemencia in the role of the “lost child” and “spiritual orphan” (26). Cisneros's choice to frame her story with the tale of La Malinche and La Llorona works well because they are representative of “lost children” and the damaging effects resulting from the illusion of whiteness. La Malinche abandoned by her mother and La Llorona, who is not only looking for her lost children, but represents a “spiritual orphan” because she was abandoned by her lover due to her race and/or status. She even chose to murder her children as a result according to Brivic racist structures can cause individuals to be “drive[n] to murder” as it did to Bigger Thomas in Wright’s *Native Son* (75).

There are many similarities between Clemencia and La Malinche that link them to the “lost child” Brivic describes. Clemencia is a woman of color like Malinalli Tenepec (La Malinche). She is rejected by her white lover Drew, just like Malinalli was rejected by her white lover Hernán Cortés and this led to a troublesome inheritance for the Mexican people. Octavio Paz explains that they have always felt the rejection of this mythic mother representative of their Indian heritage by their white father (86). It is important to focus on the similarities between Malinalli's relationship with her mother and Clemencia's relationship with her own mother because this shows the powerful effect the dominant culture has in infiltrating the family structure and the mother and child relationship. This is what causes racism and patriarchy to be carried on into future generations. Sandra Messinger Cypess explains that Malinal/La Malinche was “a member of a privileged, educated class” (33) and Clemencia is not rich but of a middle class family and educated, she states on page 72, “I don't belong to any class.... Not to the middle class from which my sister Ximena and I fled.” Second, after Malinalli's father died, her mother remarried and “[i]t is possible that Malinal's mother then sold her into slavery... in order to safeguard the inheritance of the son and his right to rule...” (Cypess 33). Just like Malinal/La Malinche, Clemencia's mother remarries after her father dies and she explains that her inheritance was taken from her. She feels abandoned as La Malinche was abandoned by her own mother and she has an illicit affair with a white man as does La Malinche and as her own mother had done. Thus her mother, as Doña Marina's mother had done, has led her to feel like a “spiritual orphan;” she rejects her mother because she feels that is what her mother has done. She begins to feel this rejection when she sees her mother's over-valuation of whiteness and it is confirmed with her mother's remarriage and “new” more desirable, white family.

In his book, Brivic explains the “lost child” motif in literature by black authors. It also applies to Cisneros’s “Never Marry a Mexican” as Clemencia also falls into this role of the “lost child.” Brivic goes on to explain that the reason for this repeated motif is “The lack of family stability that has often characterized American fiction may involve a sense of not feeling at home in America.... This politically orphaned state leads the white writers to project alienated pessimism and the black ones to seek synthetic families” (27). Clemencia seeks this “synthetic family” as she rejects her mother because she resents her mother’s actions. She recollects, “I used to have a little finch, twisted one of its tiny red legs between the bars of the cage.... The leg just dried up and fell off. My bird lived a long time without it.... My mother's memory is like that, like if something already dead dried up and fell off...” (73). She feels resentment toward her mother's over-valuation of whiteness like Claudia in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* who feels “rage against such maternal preference for the other” (Cheng 199). However, it is something that is so powerful that she cannot help but have been influenced by it. She denies it consciously, but it is still there on a subconscious (repressed) level as we see her mother's racism haunt her again when Drew rejects her.

This will cause her mother to become ineffectual, too, “‘Race’ parallels patriarchy as an inheritance that warps human life by claiming an absolute identity that no one can fill. This can destroy one whether one is trapped by patrimony... or excluded from it...” (Brivic 31). It does destroy Clemencia as it causes her to become destructive rather than creative and causes the breach between herself and her mother. She says that her mother doesn’t exist anymore once her father dies, “Once Daddy was gone, it was like my ma didn't exist, like if she died, too” (73). Her mother’s worth is tied to her father’s worth in a patriarchal structure that her mother is teaching her to adhere to and value. Adhering to this structure also means that her mother cannot represent

the ideal maternal figure because women of color are devalued in this patriarchal structure and white women are valued as the ideal mother. Marta I. Cruz-Janzen explains that women of color are “viewed as lesser wives and mothers than white women” (179).

Clemencia begins to seek out the ideal “synthetic family,” the white family just as her mother had done. The stability of Drew's white family is what she seeks and desires. The mainstream and long held view of the stable white family, which may be a myth and an illusion, is what she has come to believe in and want, greatly influenced by her mother's rejection of her daughters and husband. This in turn gives rise to her desire for Drew's wife Megan, a mimetic desire. She is, as Girard notes, influenced by a “third presence” (12) in this desire to be and to have Megan. I explain in Chapter III, the mediator interchanges between Drew and Megan but when Clemencia wishes to *have* Megan the “third presence,” or influence, is Drew. Her wish to have/possess Megan is influenced by Drew or white male society and its objectification of women. However, it is rooted in her mother's value of the dominant culture. It is only possible for Drew to have this influence if she initially values him and his point of view. Thus it is essentially her mother who inspires her desire for Megan and causes her to view Megan as the ideal mother and wife because of her whiteness. Girard goes on to explain that “Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration concealed by his hatred” (10-11). This ties in with her mother's racist views and what Ann Anlin Cheng refers to in her article “Wounded Beauty: An exploratory Essay on Race, Feminism, and the Aesthetic Question” as “the promise and denial of whiteness” (200).

We see this hatred displayed toward Drew and her mother, who have inspired a desire for whiteness that they have both denied her, Drew, in his refusal to marry her, and also her mother

who embraces a newfound white family. Her mother has also inspired her love of Drew and has led her to believe she could never be good enough to marry because Drew is white. Girard goes on to say, “He [hero] wants to become the Other.... The wish to be absorbed into the substance of the other implies an insuperable revulsion for one’s own substance,” (54) this explains Clemencia’s self-hatred. Her mother's racism toward her own race leads Clemencia to idolize and imitate Megan. Her mother has internalized the dominant standards and has passed that on to Clemencia. Anne Anlin Cheng explains this in looking at Claudia's “love [of] Shirley Temple” in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* that it is “not merely or even primarily... a gesture of social compliance, but rather as a response to the call of the mother, as a perverse form of maternal connection. Only by learning to love little white girls can little black girls be like their mothers” (200). Clemencia does display this “perverse form of maternal connection” as she does obey her mother in not marrying but this is a “subversive, interpretation” (Mullen 10) and again in imitating Megan as the ideal which is most obvious in her attempts to “mother” Megan’s son toward the end of the story.

Clemencia's seduction of Drew and Megan's son, especially her vengeance which she had harbored for many years, shows that “race can destroy one” whether trapped by or excluded from patrimony as Brivic points out. It is evident that she long ago made the decision to corrupt or destroy their son, symbolized by robbing the tiny baby doll from Megan and throwing it into filthy water after Drew ends the affair. Significantly she robs the baby doll from their home on the day that she and Drew are supposed to meet together for the last time. This not only shows the trauma or psychological damage from racism but also its long term damage and its effect on the individual toward “destructive” ends (Mullen 9). It also emphasizes Brivic's point that “Race' parallels patriarchy” (31) because it shows her desire to pollute the maternal figure that Megan

represents in the dominant patriarchal society. This damage is carried on through generations in “Never Marry a Mexican,” as it is in *Native Son* and *Absalom* (Brivic 26-7), as Clemencia seeks insidious means to claim her own identity and visibility. The same damaging institutions that caused African Americans to “los[e] children” (26) can cause other individuals of color to work toward destructive means rather than channel their anger and rebellion into creative means. Brivic points out that it causes Bigger Thomas to murder (83-4) and Sethe in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* to murder her baby (174). Clemencia does something similar in her act of vengeance on Drew and Megan’s son. She doesn’t attempt to physically murder their son but rather spiritually do so and deteriorate his sense of self by destroying his foundation, his family, just as her sense of self and family had been destroyed by the insidious white Other. Brivic refers to this “white power that subjugates” as a “white blur” and states that “the position of the whites cannot be looked upon or detected. Like Lacan’s Other, it cannot be seen or defined, yet it watches one from all sides, and one gains identity by being reflected by it” (80). The white racist structure has destroyed her own family and Clemencia destructively inverts the stereotypical masculine and feminine roles by mimicking Drew in taking advantage of her position of power as Drew’s son’s teacher and seducing him. In simply inverting the roles, she maintains the insidious patriarchal structure. She “replace[s] the object of... value without questioning the primacy of that value” (Cheng 193).

This reflects what Brivic argues is the damage that’s passed on through many generations because of racism. Brivic claims that in Faulkner and Wright’s novels,

...*Absalom* and *Native Son*, the lost children are sons, Charles Bon and Bigger Thomas. In the modernist framework of these books, the son seeks a legitimacy that he can never attain because he is black and the family is built on racist

principles.... In the later novels [Thomas Pynchon's *V.* & Toni Morrison's *Beloved*] the lost child is a daughter who is recovered through another daughter.... While the sons try to claim dominant identities, the surviving daughter stands for the passing on of a diaspora culture..." (26-7).

Clemencia does both: she "seeks legitimacy" in her desire for a legal marriage with Drew rather than a clandestine affair. She also tries to "claim [a] dominant identit[y]" by adopting the stereotypical and patriarchal role of "el chingón" and imagining Megan having sex with Drew when she is with Megan and Drew's son, "I try to imagine her lips, her jaw, her long long legs that wrapped themselves around this father who took me to his bed" (77). She is also "borrowing from masculinity" and acting as "el chingón" (Wyatt 245) when she says she enjoys imagining her lovers' wives giving birth and thus "being torn apart" this would fall into what Octavio Paz says represents the "aggress[or]" and thus "masculine" (80-1 Paz). However, she also represents the daughter who is attempting to "be recovered" in her wish to replace Drew's son as Megan and Drew's child. Maythee Rojas explains her wish to take on many roles including the child:

Throughout this passage, Clemencia's desire is to forcibly replace (or, in her own words, "kill"), if only for an instant, the other women with whom she competes so that she may become simultaneously wife, mother, lover, and killer. To do so would result in altering Clemencia's outsider status because it would thrust her into the center of everyone's life-lover, wife, and even child. (144)

Not only does she want to replace his mother and legitimately become Drew's partner but she also wants to take his father's place. She wants to become for him everything Drew was for her,

and Drew was a father-figure for Clemencia, too, in this way she will take on the “dominant identity.”

However, just as Brivic states this destructive act of revenge only causes a greater separation between herself and Megan. Brivic says “Beloved is also severed from her family, and insofar as her motive is revenge, she is alienated from Sethe” (26). This act of vengeance is truly damaging for Clemencia because it further alienates her from Megan. She cannot see Megan for who she really is, only viewing her “through men's eyes,” and thus making it impossible for her to transcend racism and sexism. This divide, which she only increases, results from the traumatic breach between herself and her mother. She cannot transcend racist and sexist structures if she cannot heal the breach between herself and her mother, if she cannot see the damaging and powerfully influential effects racism had on her mother. Cormier-Hamilton points out that Toni Morrison emphasizes in her work that “self-realization for African Americans *can only* [emphasis in the original] be achieved through an active acknowledgement of one's cultural past. Only by understanding and accepting the past can African Americans achieve a psychological wholeness in the present...” (111). It is the same for Clemencia, who denies aspects of herself that she feels will not please Drew or the dominant culture. Thus as rebellious as she believes herself to be in attempting to oppose Megan who is representative of the white Other it is still not “an active acknowledgement,” of her Mexican heritage, because she is only attempting to please Drew. It is easy for her to do this because she denies her past through denying her mother and simply blames her mother rather than confront the structures in place that deeply affected her mother and father.

She resented her mother's new marriage but fails to see how much her father's family's racism had hurt her own mother and came to influence her own values. She also viewed her

mother as a “race traitor” (Landry 26) and thus as emasculating her father. She is putting the blame on her mother rather than the racist structures in place. Her belief in the illusion of whiteness and dominant culture has led her to view herself and her own family in a negative light and simply place herself in opposition to white culture. This is damaging and ultimately only maintains racial and patriarchal structures.

Clemencia’s mimetic desire for Megan, her desire to be and have her lover’s wife, reveals her internalization of racist and sexist beliefs due to the dominant culture’s influence, but it is also a drive toward the white Other. Her value and investment in whiteness stems from her mother’s own internalized racism, but in connecting with Megan she can transcend racist, sexist, and classist structures, thereby developing a greater understanding of the constraints all women face under patriarchy including her mother; this will help to repair the damage done to the development of her sense of self and lead her to challenge patriarchy by simply moving toward solidarity with other women despite difference.

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