

**Citlalie Del Carmen Tello**  
**Spanish 365: The Chicano Novel**  
**Professor Donald W. Urioste**  
**Final Exam: Spring 2018**

I. (50 points) Portrayal of women in:

*House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros

In the *House on Mango Street* Cisneros is successful in conveying the struggles one must overcome or live with while living under such conditions through Esperanza's coming of age story. Esperanza Cordero is a young Mexican American girl who lives in what's considered a "barrio". Due to her family's low income, they are unable to achieve better for themselves as well as the other members in the community whom face the same adversity. This shared strife in a sense is what brings the community together and we see this through Esperanza's many encounters with her neighbors. During our many class discussions we touched base upon the idea of gender roles under machismo, waiting, and domestic violence. They are all recurring themes for people whom live in poverty and especially women who live in poverty beside a man considered "machista".

The general portrayal of women in this novel is seen through the eyes of Esperanza. She never directly describes them (besides Sally and Marin), but through their situations we learn about what they have to endure. As a force of poverty we see it explicitly in the Vargas family where the mother has so many children to care for that she can't keep up with them. This leads to the misbehavior of all of them and the death of one. Meanwhile, Cisneros draws a parallel between innocence and the abuse of men with Minerva. She is the same age as Esperanza and just as intelligent but is married with an abusive man that disappears for long periods of time. In this instance we can see the dynamic of waiting coming into play because she has to wait for him and maybe even hope that he doesn't come back while Esperanza is still free to live her childhood. In Alicia's situation she's oppressed by machismo while her father expects her to cook and clean in her mother's place. She's primarily someone that Esperanza eventually follows as an example for herself because regardless of her struggles she manages to go to college.

The women in the book were all options for Esperanza to pick and choose who would be her role model. For a time, she wanted to be like Marin, then like Sally, and finally became and followed Alicia's example the most. Women are portrayed as a reflection of oppression by machismo, society and economic status. This serves a purpose in the book as a means of a slowly developing and gentle wake up call for Esperanza. The book provides many different kinds of portrayals of women whom suffer abuse, language barriers and oppression. However, although many of these women fall victim to their distinct form of oppression, Esperanza's story is about overcoming and making something of herself to escape. In other words, most of the women are portrayed as oppressed and examples of what Esperanza should not want to become, but later on she writes about them to share their stories and free them figuratively.

***Memories of Ana Calderon*** by Graciela Limón

In *Memories of Ana Calderon* by Graciela Limon, we see the coming of age story of Ana who is an immigrant from Mexico that is later shunned by her family for becoming pregnant. We follow her experiences of physical development from getting her period, recognizing the changes of her body and her first experience of intimacy. Later through her eyes and respectively through an omniscient narrator we follow her through many hardships such as being beaten and almost killed by her father, being left at the altar, losing her son, going to prison and ultimately committing incest. Although she endures many hardships she also experiences good moments in her life such as expanding the farm and source of income with the Carney's, obtaining an education, then finally inheriting a successful clothing company.

The primary focus in this novel is Ana since she is the main character and she herself is the portrayal of women by the author. She is represented as an immigrant child later growing into womanhood. At one point she reaches stability under her father but lives under his oppression due to his inherent *machismo* and unexplained hatred towards her. Under her father she is not allowed to go to school and is forced to support the family financially. Later, once becoming pregnant she is cast away by

the family and is eventually taken in by the Carney's. A significant scene arises when Ana sees Amy's husband washing the dishes with surprise because it's something a man is never expected to do in her culture. This provides a portrayal of Mexican women being constantly expected to be submissive as a social standard because cooking and cleaning is never assumed by a man.

Once having her child, she also represents a strong-willed mother that is determined to do anything to retrieve her son which causes her to nearly kill Octavio. This portrayal is almost extreme, but even if it may be an exaggeration, it's well recognized that mothers that are brought up within social standards stemming from Mexican culture are willing to do anything for the well-being of their children. This is not only in Mexican culture but a recurring characteristic for mothers everywhere. This highlights the nature of maternity and how it is almost inevitable for women which also ties into what her aunt Calista had warned her about before her family immigrated north.

Lastly, when Ana leaves prison, she demonstrates her perseverance in getting her son back. We see a development in her character as someone that is willing to go against the norm and social standards of the patriarchy when she questions authority at her new job asking for better working conditions and coordinating the workers. This is a more positive and progressive portrayal of women and while it's centered on her maternal yearning for her son. Through this determination she is able to get an education and gain the intention of her employer whom later passes away to later leave the company for her to inherit. This is a cliché rags-to-riches story, but although Ana becomes a successful woman in the novel, she is never complete until she is reunited with her son, although she doesn't know who he is. This ties back to the idea that as a woman and as a mother, she would never have been able to be happy without being reunited with her son.

***Across a Hundred Mountains*** by Reyna Grande

In *Across a Hundred Mountains*, the main character Juana, (a.k.a. Alicia), is the primary focus for the portrayal of women while her mother Lupe and the actual Alicia are the secondary focus. Through the

novels development, we follow Juana's many adversities prior to and after her father immigration to "el otro lado." Her childhood is tainted with the unfortunate death of her little baby sister causing her mother to resent and neglect her emotionally. Meanwhile, her father, who is also affected by his child's death, forgives Juana but is forced to leave home in an attempt to make a better wage for himself and the family. Juana feels guilt believing that it's her fault that her father needs to leave and through this guilt she feels the need to redeem herself.

Poverty is a strong force that drives Juana into being determined and strong willed. It's because of the adversities that she faces from poverty that she develops herself into a self reliant person. Her mother goes into a deep depression after being left by her husband to be later raped and taken advantage of by Don Elias. Not only does she suffer rape but she also loses her son after bearing what Don Elias believed to be his son. Juana, although still a child, has to take on the role of a parent and take care of her mother while she refuses to care for herself properly. She stops bathing, never brushes her hair and continually drinks. During this time, we see how Juana is willing to do anything to keep what's left of her family together. She goes as far as looking for food in the trash just to bring home food when her mother is unable to afford to buy any.

Generally, Juana is portrayed as a Mexican immigrant with honorable virtues who is set on a goal with no intention from straying of it. During her journey to Tijuana, she demonstrates above all that she is a humble and generous person when she offers help to a mother that lost her son on the bus, and also when she misses her bus in order to help a blind man gather his alms. Even as honorable as this is, Juana goes beyond this and shows how she is willing to sacrifice her life for her family. Her longing to bring back her father and reunite her family forces her to adapt to the lowest of circumstances and is seen when she arrives to Tijuana and resides there looking for clues, until she acknowledges that she must become a prostitute in order to obtain useful information. Although she was not willing at first, she knew she had to swallow her pride because there was no other. She is aided by her friend Alicia whom is another prostitute, but is immature and unfortunately does not acknowledge that her boyfriend is a bad person.

In short, the portrayal of women in the novel is different amongst its many characters, but when highlighting Juana, the author Reyna Grande gives light to her strength, perseverance, family orientation and her innate need for redemption in order to be find happiness.

**Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders** by Alicia Gaspar de Alba.

Desert Blood has such a wide spectrum of portrayals in regards to women, this topic could easily be its own capstone. We see Ivon whom is a strong willed lesbian with a PhD, her mother whom is a conservative Mexican American mother, her sister Irene, an accomplished young student, and then we have tertiary characters such as the women being murdered from the maquiladoras, Cecilia, the strippers in the bars, the transgendered men that gave Ivon a clue to finding her sister and many others. Each character can be analyzed and represented through the way the author presents them in the novel. Each character serves a purpose in telling the stories of the Juarez murders but some serve a more explicit purpose than others. Ivon as a lesbian protagonist is by far the most crucial to the story because it is through her that we find out and experience what is happening during her stay in El Paso and in Tijuana.

Without getting too in depth about the story, I would like to focus on how the author portrays Ivon in the novel. There are specific words that can define and reflect the portrayal that the author noticeably wanted to transmit to her audience. Ivon is intelligent with a noticeably rebellious background. Even though she is not heterosexual, she is still sexualized and objectified by men which is seen in a few occasions where she is cat called. So forth, she always keeps her head high and makes a conscious attempt at not backing down in the presence of a man that judges her or tries to demean her. While she tries to look for her sister she embodies the importance of family and how she is willing to put herself in danger to find her sister. This highlights a characteristic stemming from Mexican culture that family is first. Another important representation to touch on is the innate nature of a woman and her need to have children. Ivon and her partner are not willing to inseminate, but strongly wish to have a child together.

When Ivon see's that the woman bearing the child she would adopt was murdered, an urge to obtain justice overpowers her, leading her to involve herself in the mystery of the Juarez murders.

In doing so, even once her sister gets kidnapped, Ivon shows her determination, intelligence and persistence in how far she's willing to go for these women and for her sister. Her astuteness helps her solve a mystery by investigating and putting together clues that she herself obtains. Another important scene in the novel worth noticing is the way that she's able to talk herself out of near death with the federal agents in Tijuana. As a female protagonist and a hero she is left with little trauma after what she witnessed in her hometown showing once again how strong minded she is.

The following portrayal regards the women from the maquiladoras in brief, one word descriptions followed by a reference from the book.

Expendable and without value – Symbolism of pennies, killed with no remorse, easily replaceable at the maquiladoras.

Prey- They are preyed upon, watched upon and picked by a sexual predator.

Victims- In all sense of the word they are victims of feticide, hate crimes and

Oppressed by their culture, do as your told, you deserve this, it was your own fault.

Desperate- They are willing to put themselves in an unsafe, unknown environment to earn a better paying living at the maquiladoras.

Vulnerability- Are easy to overpower physically and take advantage of.

II. Respond to one (1) of the following options: (30 points)

C. Discuss the life of Agricultural Migrant Workers as portrayed in the novel *And the Earth did Not Devour Him* by Tomás Rivera. To support your ideas please refer to at least three individual stories from the novel.

The three individual novels that I will be focusing on are: *The Children Couldn't Wait*, *A Silvery Night*, ...*And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*.

### ***The Children Couldn't Wait***

This story shows the dynamic between white power over the lives of undocumented immigrants with their children. Here we see how greed leads a farm owner to unreasonably limit the amount of water that the workers and their families can drink through out the day. He neglectfully brings only buckets of water that hardly sustains the workers while under the heat of the sun. Although this is a risk, a problem arises when one of the children is so thirsty that he starts drinking water from a tank that is meant for the cattle belonging to the farm owner. So immense was his unjust rage that he took a gun and shot at the boy trying to scare him but he inadvertently kills him.

What's interesting about this section in the book is the speculation behind the man's insanity. One of the men talking about what occurred is convinced that the Rancher went crazy from losing his farm and money rather than for his actions. He also managed to get off without a proper conviction demonstrating his unjust privilege since he killed a child in vain and suffered no real consequence. I vivid idea of a child being killed because he wasn't allowed to drink water is what is disturbing in this section. This may not be the case in many stories but it is a similar form of violence and degradations that Migrant Workers face when living under people in power that would never bat an eye at exploiting them.

### ***A Silvery Night***

In a slivery night I contemplated the significance of witch craft and how that has always played a part of Mexican culture, but it wasn't until the end of the book that the author employed a very creative way of making it about God while searching for the devil. The protagonist while being outside at night during the

devils hour calls out for him in the hopes of finding him. Maybe it was curiosity or because he needed something to believe in. What was most fearful for him is that once he realized that there was no Devil, he came to the conclusion that there must be no God either. This is where we can see a loss of hope in the individual and is a recurring theme for people that come into the United States. I think that this story reflects how so many people are willing to go beyond what is considered holy in order to find answers from God and when they don't receive them they look the other way still hoping to get answers from the Devil. When there is no response they are left with nothing and left with no God as well. Through this story it can dawn on the reader the feelings of hopelessness that many of these workers feel which ties into the next story.

***...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him***

In this section of the book, the most significant one since it is the title of the book, we see how the protagonist is questioning God and why he makes it so difficult for the Migrant worker to survive in the fields trying to make a decent living wage. He holds a conversation with his mother while expressing how angry he is with their state of poverty. His family is dying due to sicknesses and extreme working conditions. His father after suffering a stroke is what triggers the protagonist to go on a tirade of how unfair God is to the poor. Meanwhile his mother is still a dedicated Catholic and asks her son to stop speaking in such a way because it goes against her faith and the hope that she clings on to. Even so the protagonist has to further question "why?" when his little brother is the next victim of a sun stroke. Once cursing God out of anger he feels a sense of relief and this brings me to believe that the author one way or another feels that in order for one to thrive here as a migrant worker, you have to give up your faith because it won't give you anything but false hope.

III. Of all the literary works read for the class (see complete list below), which was your absolute favorite? Why? (Give a detailed explanation [10 points])



Dessert Blood was my absolute favorite for various reasons. Although the subject was very tragic, I learned a lot about something I had never heard about before. I felt just like Ivon did when she found out about all the murders that were happening between the border. I really like the way the author created suspense in the novel and how it was a definite mystery what was going to happen next. I also really liked how the characters were interconnected one way or another. Like the way Raquel was so close to the porn ring but was oblivious to their involvement and Alicia meeting Ivon in person and lying to her face so well about what she knew. I like how there was graffiti involved and the way Ivon was able to decipher it in such a critical way being that it was her specialty with previous knowledge. Lastly, I like how there was a happy ending for the family, but there was still a huge change in setting for Ivon now that she knows the truth about Juarez.

IV. Of all the literary works read for the class (see complete list below), which was your least favorite? Why? (Give a detailed explanation [10 points])

My least favorite novel was Memories of Ana Calderon. I really enjoyed the first part of the book and felt a sympathy for Ana but as the story progressed I felt that one tragedy after another became one too many when she committed incest with her son and he just happens to die in a plane crash. I think that the odds of committing incest on accident and the odds of dying in a plane crash are too small to happen one after the other. Also, I disliked the cliché rags to riches story, I would have liked it more if Ana had worked her way up in the company first and became independent from her employer rather than inheriting the company. Even so, she still earned a decent wage before Ezra died so if she had just become his business partner I also think that would have been more realistic, even so, the author does a good job at using Shelly as an excuse for Ezra to die and all of a sudden leave off his entire fortune to Ana out of all people. Lastly, I personally can't stand the typical novella type villains like Octavio and Alejandra. It angers and frustrates me when people can be so wretched but I had to remind myself that this is a fictional story so I wouldn't feel as bad.