

✦ MYTHS AND LEGENDS AS STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE IN HELENA MARIA VIRAMONTES'S THE MOTHS AND OTHER STORIES

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The studies of man's history prove that there has always been domination or the desire of domination of certain civilizations upon others. Some peoples around the world have exercised power and force with success to rule over others. But, in spite of the military weakness of the dominated, in many situations this domination has never been perennial, nor complete, on account of the often seemingly undermining presence of signs of resistance on the part of the subjugated individuals.

Rome, which was one of the most important ancient empires, for instance, took over Greece and proclaimed that an ideal society, with more benefits than the existing one, would be built. Greece was defeated and dominated, but a zone of cultural contact was established and the Greek culture prevailed. Of course there must have been a spirit of tolerance among the intelligent Romans allowing them to appropriate the genuine Greek values, which favored the accommodation of possible prejudices. One should not forget that Romans and Greeks belonged to different ethnic groups and spoke different languages, but this did not prevent Romans from assimilating the Greek culture, including their rich literature.

This is exactly what the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, explains in his concept of transculturation. According to Ortiz, the process of transculturation doesn't consist of acquiring a distinct culture in substitution of another, but of losing or partially leaving behind a precedent culture, opening space for the acquisition of elements of a new culture. He explains that, in the same way a child brings traits of his mother and father, yet is different from both; likewise, the new culture is also different from the ones which gave birth to it (ORTIZ, 1983:90).

Focusing now on more recent episodes of colonial domination of special relevance for the purposes of this article, it is worth recalling that in the 19th century vast portions of the territory belonging to the Republic of Mexico were invaded by the American imperialist forces. Those lands became part of the United States of America. When those invasions began, the number of American inhabitants there was already larger than the number of Mexicans.

Political events, as well as a distortion of the interpretation of the universal rights led the Mexican authorities to accept the new situation, and Mexicans became foreigners in their own country. Some stayed and some went away for what was left of Mexico: more or less half of what it had been before. A new frontier was demarked: a new borderland, a new zone of contact. Nevertheless, instead of more benefits, a draconian code was enforced to deal with illegal immigrants. Inhabitants or immigrants of Mexican origin came to be known as Chicanos. It is of utmost importance to make it clear that the term Chicano, once a derogatory one, was reappropriated by the activists of the Chicano Movement (60s/70s) and has then been employed with a political connotation. Chicanos are Mexican-Americans who fight for social inclusion in order to invert their institutionalized negation. When it comes to the specific questions concerning Chicana women, there are some specificities which must be taken into consideration, according to what Paula Moya brings up as follows:

What distinguishes a Chicana from a Mexican-American, a Hispanic, or an American of Mexican descent is her political awareness; her recognition of her disadvantaged position in a hierarchically organized

society arranged according to categories of class, race, gender, and sexuality; and her propensity to engage in political struggle aimed at subverting and changing those structures (MOYA, 1997:139).

Like Romans and Greeks, Americans and Chicanos belong to different ethnic groups and speak different languages, but Americans, so far, have not been able to accommodate prejudices. Anyway, as times are now different in all respects and Chicanos will not, nor have any intention of introducing arts in America, all they want is to be accepted as they are, to preserve their culture and to survive with dignity.

American literature is not thin blooded and art in general is highly prized there. America is not exactly violent as Rome was, but undoubtedly would be enriched with the assimilation of the literature produced by the Chicano writers, especially with the introduction to the Aztec mythology, which is one of the most important points of reference in their work. And, provided that myths and legends are so emblematic in the approach of the Chicana's questions in this article, it is worth noting that among the most ancient peoples myths and old stories had the function of explaining the historical past of a race, beliefs or natural phenomena. They also used to relate the paradigmatic events, conditions and deeds of gods or superhuman beings that are outside life and yet are basic to it. Besides all that, when relations of domination and subjugation are on the spot, myths and legends generally mediate the strong sense of the tragic that both dominating and dominated peoples generally develop: the tense relations between the two parts make the exterior world so overwhelming and absurd that the only refuge from it is the inexhaustibility of gods and superhuman beings. This is more or less the pattern for the function of myths and legends in the relations between dominating and dominated peoples, with slightly noticeable differences between the ancient times and the contemporary ones.

Therefore, suffering multiple and simultaneous oppressions, torn between two worlds and cultures, facing the second-class status of the hyphenated (Mexican-American), Chicano/a's situation can be clearly understood through Rosaura Sánchez's explanation of their process of acculturation:

If we consider acculturation at both ideological and material levels, ethnic groups in this country can be seen to suffer both inclusion and exclusion. Ideologically, thanks to the media and to our educational system, these groups will probably have swallowed the same myths and yet, materially, be excluded from the lifestyle, goods and services that characterize the life of middle classes in the U.S. (QUINTANA, 1996:58)

Needless to say, Chicanos have swallowed the myth of the American dream. However, it is exactly in myths that Chicana writers have found their "Balancing Act" as Gloria Anzaldúa defines it. By revisiting old Aztec myths and Mexican legends, they have been able to establish a mediation process between their Mexican past and their American future, which has given Chicanas the necessary strength to engage in a more active struggle to guarantee their present reality. According to Bakhtin, when separated from the past and future, "the present loses its integrity, breaks down into isolated phenomena and objects, making of them a mere abstract conglomeration" (QUINTANA, 1996: 21/22). In fact, not only mediation and revision, but also negotiation and transformation have been imperative for those who live "on the border", which can be seen in many of Chicanas' writings, as, for instance, in Anzaldúa's lines "the mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium", or in Pat Mora's "Legal Alien" when she says "sliding back and forth / between the fringes of both worlds / by smiling / by masking the discomfort / of being pre-judged / Bilaterally" (QUINTANA, 1996: 22,1).

In order to mask their discomfort and resist oppression and drudgery, Chicana writers have taken advantage of the emphasis on the local, on the margins and on difference brought by postmodernism and have created their own space, which Ellen McCracken calls "the feminine space of postmodern ethnicity" in *New Latina Narrative* (1999). Their narratives redefine the concepts of multiculturalism in the

U.S. once they take part, simultaneously, in mainstream and in “borderland” writing. According to Ernesto Laclau, one of the most relevant and amazing characteristics of multiculturalism is that of inclusion through difference: “the discourse of integration was founded on the articulation of an increasingly complex system of differences” (LACLAU, 1981:92).

Chicana writers have looked back on old Aztec myths and Mexican legends as strategies of resistance in order to subvert not only patriarchy and the consequent male dominance, but also the hardships imposed by the post-colonial oppression, undermining the condition of subalternity imposed by those dominant forces.

By revisiting their indigenous past, Chicana writers have built up an identity of their own, an identity that has marked Chicanos as a nation. They have reappropriated the Aztec myth of Aztlán, which was the land of indigenous peoples in America. By joining Aztlán, representing the lost territory of Chicanos, their language and their culture, Chicanos have established a national identity.

For Chicana writers, three old myths and legends have been extremely important once they represent women who transgress their culture, fight for self-assertion, and cannot be silenced or contained: La Malinche, La Llorona and The Hungry Woman.

La Malinche refers to Malintzin Tenepal, who was an Indian girl from a noble Aztec family. After her father’s death, her mother married again and had a son. Malintzin was, then rejected by her mother, who sold her as a slave to the Xicalango tribe. She was sold again to the Tlaxalteca tribe. She got in touch with different tribes and cultures, which made it possible for her to learn new dialects.

When the Spanish invaded Mexico, Malintzin was offered to them as a gift. She was only 14 and soon became Hernán Cortés’s translator, interpreter and mistress. She received a Christian name: Doña Marina.

It is clear that the strategy used to destroy the Aztec empire depended greatly on Cortés’s ability to communicate with his opponents. That is the reason why Doña Marina, known as “la lengua” among the Spanish soldiers, was of utmost importance for the success of the Spanish conquest. Doña Marina was not only a translator. She used to give Cortés and the indigenous tribes pieces of advice, helping the Spanish conquest and contributing to the formation of a new culture, the one which was a blend of Indian and Spanish characteristics.

La Malinche is considered a traitor by the Mexican people. She is usually referred to as “la Chingada” (the fucked one), the mother who sold her children to a foreign people. However, she has another role. She is considered the symbolic mother of the Mexican people once her son with Cortés, Martín, was the first “mestizo”. Thus, it can be said that Malintzin gave birth to a new race, the Mexicans.

La Malinche has become a myth in the Mexican imaginary, a historical character seen as paradoxical. This myth carries a special meaning for Chicana writers in their search for identity and self-assertion. According to Donna Haraway “stripped of identity”, “the bastard race teaches about the power of the margins and the importance of a mother like Malinche. Women of color have transformed her from the evil mother of masculinist fear into the originally literate mother who teaches survival” (HARAWAY, 1990: 218/219).

Norma Alárcon, in “Traddutora, Traditora: a Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism”, shows that Octávio Paz in his essay “Los Hijos de La Malinche” (PAZ, 1959) is the first writer to subvert the traditional myth of La Malinche, not considering her a traitor (ALÁRCÓN, 1994:114). Alárcon explains how the concepts of translator and traitor are blurred into the figure of La Malinche:

Malintzin elicits a fascination entangled with loathing, suspicion and sorrow. As translator she mediates between antagonistic cultural and historical domains. If we assume that language is always in some sense metaphoric, then any discourse, oral or written, is liable to be implicated in treachery when

perceived to be going beyond repetition of what the community perceives as the “true” and / or “authentic” concept, image, or narrative. The act of translating, which often introduces different concepts and perceptions, displaces and may even do violence to local knowledge (ALÁRCÓN, 1994: 113).

Many women who took part in the Chicano Movement were called “Malinches” as their husbands and Chicanos in general thought they should be at home, performing their assigned role: take care of the house and the children. Chicana women were quickly transformed into the subordinate class within Chicano nationalistic literature. According to the masculinist point of view, Chicanos and Chicanas suffered the same kind of oppression. For Chicanas, however, oppression came not only from their post-colonial status, but also from the traditional masculine interpretation of their culture.

This situation has led Chicana writers, especially since the 80s, to admire and revisit the myth of La Malinche, the indigenous woman who transgressed her culture. They have revisited the myth and subverted its traditional Mexican interpretation, the one of La Malinche as “la Chingada”, as a traitor. For Chicanas, Malintzin is not a victim, seduced and raped by the invader, but a woman who made her choice. Her role as a translator and a mediator during the Spanish invasion and conquest of Mexico contributed to save many lives and avoided the annihilation of innumerable indigenous tribes in Mexico.

In many legends the myth of La Malinche blurs into the myth of La Llorona, the weeping woman. La Malinche, then, becomes La Llorona who cries for Cortés, her children and her lost nation to the Spanish.

According to the legend, La Llorona is a descendant of the goddess Cihuacoatl, who encompasses both death and creation. Associated with her precursor, La Llorona also encompasses death and creation. La Llorona is described as a traitor, a bad woman who drowns her children due to various reasons: madness, parental neglect or abuse, and/or revenge for being abandoned by her lover. La Llorona is also the one who murders other children, women or men out of envy or desire to cause pain.

In the legendary Mexican figure of La Llorona, she is associated with water once she drowns her victims. She is always portrayed wearing a white dress and wailing at night regretting the loss of her children.

As La Malinche, La Llorona is also a paradoxical figure. She is the symbol of maternal betrayal as well as of maternal resistance. This portrayal of La Llorona as a symbol of maternal resistance comes from the time the Spanish invaded Mexico. It is said that the Spanish, finding the Indian children very beautiful, chose the most beautiful ones to give to their wives. Some Indian mothers decided to kill their children not to give them to the invaders. Many Chicana writers have drawn on La Llorona as a symbol of maternal resistance, and in their short stories she has become a heroine.

The Aztec myth of “The Hungry Woman” also works as a space of resistance for Chicana writers. According to the myth, this woman was always in need of food as she had mouths throughout her body. She lived in a place where there were only spirits and they realized she couldn’t remain with them once they had no food for her. At that time the world had not been created and the spirits were surrounded only by air. However, they could see something below them that seemed water and decided to put her there. As soon as she started floating, the spirits Quetzalcoatl and Texcatlipoca transformed themselves into snakes and began pulling her hard in different directions. The hungry woman was, then, cut in half at the waist. Frightened and not knowing what to do, the spirits carried the bottom half to the place where they lived. The other spirits did not approve of what Quetzalcoatl and Texcatlipoca had done and had the idea to use this part of the woman’s body to make the sky. The other parts gave origin to the grass, the flowers, the forests, the mountains and valleys, and also the springs and pools. They thought that she would be finally satisfied. To their surprise, her mouths reappeared and she continued crying for food. At night, so goes the myth, when the window blows it brings the sound of her lament for food.

In view of all that, my aim here is to show how Helena Maria Viramontes employs the myths of La Malinche, La Llorona and “The Hungry Woman” as strategies of resistance, agency and transformation. I have chosen two stories from her collection *The Moths and Other Stories*: “The Cariboo Café” and “The Long Reconciliation”. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the presence of the myths as strategies

of resistance in “The Cariboo Café” and in “The Long Reconciliation”, respectively.

In the opening lines of “The Cariboo Café”, Helena Maria Viramontes refers to displaced people who arrive in the secrecy of night in foreign hostile places looking for safety and a better life. Even though not clearly mentioned, the story takes place somewhere in the United States. The reader is immediately put in contact with the sad reality of the post-colonial subject always on diasporical dislocations. As Roberto Fernández Retamar explains, these massive migrations of people from the poor countries into the rich countries produce conflicting situations:

As I write this essay they constitute more than two-thirds of the human beings now living; by the beginning of the twenty-first century (which is to say, tomorrow), they will be three-fourths of the world, and by the middle of that century, nine-tenths. (RETAMAR, 1997:169)

In the story, these people have their own rules for self-protection and rule one is “never talk to strangers, not even the neighbor” (65). The only protection children have are the walls of the apartment and its key should be seen as “a guardian saint” (65).

Soon after the arrival of the family and the incident of losing the key, the reader is introduced to the logical structure of the story built on a stream of thinking organized to cause a strong impact. Losing the key and preserving herself are mixed preoccupations in Sonya’s mind. She is worried about being punished not really for Lalo’s having seen her underwear, for “she wasn’t quite sure which offense carried the worse penalty” (65). Lalo and Sonya are at the same school, and during lunch break he throws her down to see her underwear.

The presence of an external narrator is used to explain the process of thinking of the characters and to clarify certain developments as when Sonya watches an old man and becomes aware of their mutual loneliness. Identification is made clear but it is also the external narrator that interferes with the narrative, suggesting the possibility of wrong-doing and slight general vice on the part of Sonya: “the old man eventually awoke, yawned like a lion’s roar, unfolded his limbs and staggered to the alley where he urinated between two trash bins. (She wanted to peek, but it was Macky who turned to look)” (66).

The use of certain words and expressions indicate the state of things displaced people have to endure: “guardian saint”, “sorry for”, “naked girls”, “loneliness”, “urinated”, “penalty”.

Sonya and her brother Macky run when the police arrive. They enter “a maze of alleys and dead ends” (67), and are involved in darkness, but Part I ends with Sonya’s conclusion that the shadows would disappear at the zero-zero place – the Cariboo Café.

Part II begins with a long interior monologue about the name of the café. A new character, the owner of the place, demands not to be blamed for the name: “Don’t look at me. I didn’t give it the name. It was passed on”. He says he likes the name because “it’s, well, romantic, almost like the name of a song” (68), but the question of meaning remains and is left to the reader. The name is no longer The Cariboo Café but The Double Zero Café as the paint had peeled off and the two O’s remained. The sign now reads OO Cafe. It is hard not to think of the possible meanings of the expression double O and in the deconstructing strategy of the author, once the name goes from Cariboo to Zero Zero place.

At this point, it becomes necessary to refer to Jacques Derrida and his widespread philosophical movement known as “deconstruction”. In this regard, Cuddon gives the following definition of deconstruction, as Derrida employs the term: “Deconstruction is not synonymous with ‘destruction’, however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word “analysis” itself, which etymologically means “to undo” – a virtual synonym for to de-construct” (CUDDON, 1992:222).

To begin with, according to Derrida’s deconstructive ideas, at least four meanings can be inferred from the deconstruction of the word Cariboo. The café becomes a strong metaphor for the kind of acceptance

that downtrodden people can expect to receive: a mixture of commercial interest and hospitality, the virtues and vices of capitalism. People go there for survival and they guarantee the survival of the owner: "Like I gotta pay my bills, too. I gotta eat. So like I serve anybody whose got the greens, ... The boy's a sweetheart" (69/70).

Other people are introduced and scrutinized in the stream of thinking of this character. In the English language the expression double O is used as a slang meaning careful scrutiny or close inspection (after the two O's in once-over). It is in the Double Zero Café that the reader is told about Jojo, Paulie, Delia and Nell. Their personalities and behaviour are cross-examined and justified in detail: Nell, the café owner's ex-wife, would know what to do in any situation, but she was a pain in the ass; Jojo, the café owner's son, who had died in Vietnam; Paulie, who seems to be Jojo's age if he were alive; and Delia, who is often with Paulie. The café owner goes on to an expansive, painstakingly, detailed explanation about his relationship with the Café, his customers, the illegal workers and the cops.

In addition to all that, the circumstances under which the sudden speculation about the name of the café on the part of its owner are embedded in ambiguous and ironic implications that may report us to other levels of meanings: "Didn't even know what it meant until I looked it up in some library dictionary. But I kinda liked the name" (68). Thus, keeping in mind the Derridean principles of deconstruction, dissemination and deferral of meaning, the word "Cariboo" is originally the name of a mountainous place in British Columbia, Canada, supposed to be an attractive countryside for families to spend vacations or newly-married couples to enjoy their honeymoon. Nevertheless, on account of being so close both in spelling and pronunciation to "Caribou", a deerlike animal typical of North America, an easy prey for bigger animals and hunters, we may come across another set of meanings showing more appropriacy if we take into consideration the very situation of the Latinos who frequent the Cariboo Café. In a word, if the café's name originally meant something bucolic and romantic – a refuge from the tensions and nuisances of urban life – we are suddenly before a tremendously ironic and cruel situation, for to the Latinos the café is exactly the site of death, annihilation and despair. It is there that they become "caribous", an easy prey for "La Migra". Therefore, it is very emblematic to see the metaphorical effect caused by the effacing of the letters of the word Cariboo in the café's name: from a romantic site to a zero zero place, a new site in which the Latinos must bitterly endure the consequences of being caught in the crossroads of post-colonial predicaments.

Another possible explanation for the remaining O's in the word Cariboo is given by Ana Maria Carbonell in "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros". She says that, according to Debra Castillo, the remaining letters point to a new name: Zero Zero. The missing part "Carib" is the name of one of the first Indian tribes conquered by Europeans and implies, then, the annihilation of these Indians. Following this rationale, the café also becomes a place of annihilation, which leads again to the previously mentioned idea of caribou, the deerlike animal, an easy prey for hunters, running the risk of being annihilated. This is exactly the risk the washerwoman takes once she frequents the café.

It may be even added, if we take the woman as a post-colonial subject suffering double exclusion, that the expression double zero in the Double Zero Café is an allusion to women's predicament as subaltern colonial subjects. To reinforce this idea, it is important to take into consideration what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says on the subaltern condition of women in the colonial arena:

The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence'. It is rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow (SPIVAK, 1997:28).

It is exactly in the Double Zero Café that a washerwoman from El Salvador dies facing the police. It is there that the double exclusion occurs. This refugee woman had a five-year-old boy named Geraldo.

Once, when he went out to buy his mother a mango, he was arrested by Nicaraguan revolutionaries. He was taken as a criminal and probably killed to pay for his supposed activities as a contra. A ruthless aggression for the suppression of dissent; a criminal act to preserve the oppressive institutions of class domination.

In this respect, a careful choice of words and expressions is made to convey a shocking vision of good and evil, giving a detailed picture of the wicked and immoral people found in human society: "...under the rule of men who rape women, then rip their fetuses from their bellies" (75).

The interpretation of rape, which women are victims of, points out to the metaphorization of the bodies. If we think in terms of Mexico as an ex-colony and the United States as the major contemporary representative of superpowerful neocolonial nations, it is possible to interpret the bodies, not only of Chicanas, but also of all post-colonial women, as metaphors for both colonized nations and colonial empires. Rape can be, then, interpreted as the devastating attack of the colonial powers against the colonies in order to explore their richness and "virgin" territories.

Viramontes goes even further, recurring to scatological terms in order to criticize male domination: "These men are babes farted out from the Devil's ass" (75). However, Tavo, the washerwoman's nephew, is sweet and is to be thanked for making her believe in the goodness of people again. The washerwoman is firmly convinced that Macky, Sonya's brother; is her lost son, Geraldo. She takes care of both children, who have lost their way home, and goes to the Cariboo Café with them. When the cops arrive there, she realizes she has been betrayed by the café owner: "She jumps up from the table, grabs "Geraldo" by the wrist, his sister dragged along because, like her, she refuses to release his hand" (78). The washerwoman fights for her "son", shouting, crying, and screaming, joining La Llorona and other desperate women who had their children murdered or taken away. She identifies with La Llorona and says: "It is the night of La Llorona. The women come up from the depths of sorrow to search for their children. I join them,..." (72)

This is La Llorona's version of colonial Mexico, the one who represents maternal resistance, and is in constant search for her children. That is why the washerwoman sees her lost Geraldo in Macky. The resistance shown by the washerwoman transforms her from Llorona into Gritona. According to Ana Maria Carbonell in "From Llorona to Gritona: Coatlicue in Feminist Tales by Viramontes and Cisneros", women "reclaim their voice by transforming themselves from Llorona figures who wail at their loss into Gritonas who holler at their oppressors". This Gritona washerwoman does exactly this: she cries, throws hot coffee in the cops' face, and holds Macky with her until she is shot. She is killed, washed in blood, but motherhood is regained: "We are going home. My son and I" (75).

The Hungry Woman, the one who cannot be silenced, also appears in the moment when the washerwoman is dying, but is still howling and speaking. Thus, the washerwoman's behavior trying to save her son and facing the dominant order embody the three myths mentioned earlier. The washerwoman is La Malinche, a symbol of transgression; La Llorona, a symbol of maternal resistance, and The Hungry Woman, the one who cannot be contained, satisfied or silenced.

Viramontes's female characters are not idealized feminists making use of force to achieve power. Rather, the women in her stories are real people, with strengths and weaknesses, conscious of their unfulfilled life and of their need to conform to patriarchy to be able to survive. Most of them, however, display resistance.

Amanda is no exception. In "The Long Reconciliation", she is married to Chato and decides to abort their child because "it would have been unbearable to watch a child slowly rot" (84). She defies her husband, her community and the church, incorporating the mythic figures of La Malinche and The Hungry Woman, as she refuses to perform prescribed roles and to conform to subjugation.

Amanda's speech is subversive and transgressive as she exposes clearly what she thinks, not worrying about raising "prohibited" questions. This can be seen when she is talking to the priest, and refers to God in the following disillusioned way: "But Father, wasn't He supposed to take care of us, His poor?" (89). She keeps on speaking freely, subverting patriarchal ideology: "Sex is the only free pleasure we have..."

you, God, eating and drinking as you like, you, there, not feeling the sweat or the pests that feed on the skin, you sitting with a kingly lust for comfort, tell us that we will be paid later on in death" (90).

Both passages above reinforce the presence of La Malinche in Amanda's behavior as she transgresses her role as a wife, talking freely about sex and questioning the priest about God. She is also The Hungry Woman. She cannot be contained, silenced or satisfied.

Amanda goes even further in her transgression: not only does she abort the baby her husband wants so much, but also engages in adultery. The dialogue that takes place between Amanda and Chato about her killing of their baby and Chato's killing of her lover shows how empowered she is by La Malinche and The Hungry Woman. When Chato tells her that he has killed for honor, she says:

...I killed for life... Which is worse? You killed because something said, "You must kill to remain a man..." For me, things are as different as our bodies... But you couldn't understand that because something said, "You must have sons to remain a man". (84)

In most of Viramontes's stories, women pay dearly for fighting against the dominant male ideology and for exploring their sexuality. Because of her abortion, Amanda is rejected by her husband. Her affair with Don Joaquín does not bring her happiness. Much on the contrary, she feels sad and guilty as she is still in love with her husband, who has decided to leave her.

Many years later, as Chato is dying in a hospital, Amanda visits him and they start "The Long Reconciliation". Chato explains to her that forgiveness was for him like a huge mountain, and regrets he has waited 58 years to see that the mountain was just a stone. He recognizes his dreams were nothing but dreams, represented by his carousel, and concludes: "Maybe we were all born cheated"(95).

Amanda is punished for having displayed La Malinche's transgression and The Hungry Woman's lack of containment. After all, in a male-centered world, Amanda is not La Malinche, but la Chingada; and women betray, but men do not.

Although the traditional male interpretation of myths has pointed to women's passivity, showing La Malinche as la Chingada, the raped Indian who brought shame to Mexican people, and La Llorona as a long-suffering woman, for Chicana writers both La Malinche and La Llorona rise as The Hungry Woman, the one who cannot be contained or silenced. Viramontes in "The Cariboo Café" and "The Long Reconciliation" reappropriates the mythic figures of La Malinche and La Llorona, transforming them into heroines. They become hungry women who are able to fight against poverty, man's control of sexuality, the dominant order, the double exclusion suffered by women and dictatorship.

The myths in Viramontes's stories provide models of courage, strength, determination, agency and transformation. They are real sites of resistance.

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