

Crossing and Recrossing “Woman Hollering Creek”

by Sandra Cisneros ¹

*Teresa
Fiore*

Sandra Cisneros' short-story "Woman Hollering Creek" is not only an eloquent account of a young Chicana's dramatic experience as an abused woman but also, at the level of *inventio*, a narrative *bridge* connecting different cultural spaces, genres, voices, and idioms. The story is told in the restricted third person and blends diverse perspectives ranging from the communal voice of the town to the free indirect discourse of the protagonist. In effect, the story is a rich weave of different ways of recording and assessing a variety of speech acts.

Like Cleófilas, the protagonist of the story, I will cross the 'text-bridge' once in order to disclose what the story is about thematically and what conclusions may be drawn from this first reading. Then I will recross it in an attempt to underline Cisneros' peculiar narrative astuteness. Hopefully my return journey will clarify not only the story's technical achievement but also its feminist intentions. A poetic of re-vision underlines Cisneros' writing practice throughout the collection *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Thus, while she freely reuses a number of conventional cultural motifs in order to dramatize the plight of the young Chicana woman as victim, she also subverts them by giving the victim-narrative a liberating gendered twist.

As if to suggest that Cleófilas cannot escape her unenlightened Chicana condition, Cisneros imprisons her in a cyclical plot. She leaves her father's house at the beginning and returns to it in the end. At the same time, however, this narrative circle is interrupted rather abruptly in the story's closure, which provides a countervailing, open ending. This linear

alternative concerns the protagonist's feminist initiation and is generated by her own attempt to understand not only why the creek outside her door is called Woman Hollering, but also her own plight as a Chicana.

From the outset the story is organised spatially. The very first sentence is overburdened with prepositions suggesting Cleófilas' removal from her father's house "across her father's threshold, over several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond to a town *en el otro lado* - on the other side" (43, my emphases). Indeed, the whole story is based on an elementary geographical dichotomy, namely the border separating Mexico from the United States and South from North. Cleófilas' departure from home and her arrival in a new one, her husband's, is motivated by that crucial event also alluded to in the opening sentence: "The day Don Serafín gave Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez permission to take Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón Hernández as his bride" (43). Not only two cultures, therefore, but two homes. And within the space of the home the narrator insinuates still other dichotomies: father/daughter, husband/wife. In both instances, however, a single gender code prevails: man is guardian and proprietor of woman. The opening *donnée* of marriage is further enhanced in the story by the telenovelas or soap operas, where romance and courting and the dream of living happily ever after are common everyday fare. The narrator informs us that Cleófilas never had a mother and so had to teach herself just about everything: "Poor thing. And without even a mama to advise her on things like her wedding night" (45). The television set, with its *telenovelas* and easy-to-absorb culture, becomes her substitute mother, filling her with precooked, easily digestible ideas.

The immobile framework of the soap opera, based on a circular time structure, provides us with an immediately accessible code to "Woman Hollering Creek". As Cleófilas' gospel, the soaps merit our close attention. Not a little of their popularity is due to their reliance on a de-historicised milieu where standard characters and situations recur over and over again. In short, human experience becomes immobile (see Dupont 84-7). In addition, the consumption of this popular celebration of the epic of daily life is exclusively female. Soap operas offer a stagnant set of images through which women either celebrate their reflected condition or try to improve it. Generally speaking, the soap opera characters' personalities are rigid and one-dimensional and resistant to psychological manipulation.

Their roles never change. The fact that Cleófilas gives the female protagonist of her “current favorite *telenovela*”, “*Tú o Nadie*. ‘You or No One’ “, the same name as the actress starring in that role suggests how easy it is for the television audience to conflate fiction and reality. Lucía Méndez is “beautiful” and “lovely” (44); she loves her man “more than anyone in her life” (45) and has “to put up with all kinds of hardships of the heart” (44), “[b]ecause to suffer for love is good” (45). Similarly, in the *telenovela* “*María de Nadie*” María’s heart breaks because she feels compelled to refuse a rich man’s courtship (52). The matching of personal desires with the prepackaged values and behavior promoted in the *telenovelas* as well as in “books and songs” leads to frozen images. “[P]assion in its purest and crystalline essence” (44) becomes the main goal of the young Chicana’s life. In fact, Cleófilas stakes her future on this *figura* of love as a trial to be borne patiently.

Watching television is also at times a social occasion. As the narrator says, “In the town where she grew up, there isn’t very much to do except ...walk ... to the girlfriend’s house to watch the latest *telenovela* episode” (44). Such get-togethers help bolster the solid unbroken image of the female role and even contribute to the definition of its contours. Since this image belongs to the collective imagination and reflects the popular perception of women as passive (especially in the Mexican tradition), it also becomes an unquestioned symbolic representation of an accepted social position. In this way the *telenovelas* help to imprison women in their traditional role. This version of romantic love also encourages women to dream about the future and nurture illusions of marital bliss. The narrator says of Cleófilas, “She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez” (45). And the fact that Soledad, an abandoned woman and Cleófilas’ neighbor, watches *María de Nadie* suggests that the soaps can also serve as a means of survival (52).

The use of these ready-made plots has important implications for the structure of “Woman Hollering Creek” itself. The story is spatially fragmented into brief snatches reminding the reader of the rapidly shifting episodes of a soap opera. In fact, each narrative section is typographically divided by two wavelike lines which also function as a graphic rendering of the creek mentioned in the story’s title. Just as the women of the story imitate the female characters of the soaps, so Cisneros adopts *telenovela*

patterns, but with the idea of subverting them. The beginning of the story suggests the cyclic formula typical of the magic realism of many South American authors, whereby the incipit also contains the story's denouement. Thus Cisneros:

The day Don Serafín gave Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez permission to take Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón Hernández as his bride ... already did he divine the morning his daughter would raise her hand over her eyes, look south, and dream of returning to the chores that never ended.... (43)

Through an astute mixing of past and future tenses, the narrator allows us to anticipate, if not predict, Cleófilas' circular destiny. Marriage to Juan Pedro initially represents Cleófilas' dream come true. Her future is depicted as positively "new". In the third episode the adjective is repeated six times in four sentences. As for her husband, he is portrayed as a businessman - "He has a very important position in Seguin with, with ... a beer company, I think" (45). By filtering Cleófilas' inner vision of things, the story draws heavily on the *telenovela* stock in trade. It uses one of its central *topoi*, marriage, but in order to give it a new twist. In "Woman Hollering Creek" the traditional view of marriage as an opportunity to improve one's social position is presented here through the journey motif. To Cleófilas marriage also means crossing the border and leaving her country to begin a new life "*en el otro lado*" (43). Entrance into the United States symbolizes another dream come true which such soap operas as "*The Rich Also Cry*" (46) helps to keep alive, namely the dream of becoming wealthy. In Cleófilas' opinion even the very name of the town connives to back up her best hopes: "*Seguín*. She liked the sound of it ... *Seguín, Tejas*. A nice sterling ring to it. The tinkle of money" (45).

The illusions shaped out of the modern myths of the *telenovelas* are deeply imbued with the consumer values of the capitalistic system (see Dupont 91), yet their golden patina of honeyed feelings and tear-jerking emotions ultimately obfuscate their inner meaning. Having internalised these vital mirages, Cleófilas is deaf to her father's words "in the hubbub of parting" (43). From the outset she is enflamed with her desire to experience what she "has been waiting for, has been whispering and sighing and giggling for, has been anticipating since she was old enough

to lean against the window displays of gauze and butterflies and lace” (44). For her, therefore, love’s pain is “all sweet somehow. In the end” (45). So the story begins.

In the above passage the use of the window as a frame has Cleófilas looking outside from the inside and emphasizes the one-way direction of her longing (see Simmel 6). Her gaze also draws attention to the story’s spatial semiotic, which is epitomised in the image of the bridge. A chronotope of connectivity, the bridge first appears in the story as the place where marriage as a rite of passage is sanctioned: Juan Pedro’s and his wife’s act of crossing it will become symbolically dynamic as the story begins to revise or recross itself. The bridge, in effect, at first constitutes a triumphal entrance. After having lived off of her hopes and illusions for some time, Cleófilas’ dream seems to have come true. As an iconographic frame the bridge functions as the visual celebration of a potentially eternal and happy union between a man and a woman.

It is also worth noting that the conventional soap opera plot is further enriched with fairy-tale elements which pop up now and then in varying degrees of explicitness. Cleófilas’ departure from home is embedded in a fairy-tale atmosphere in which temporal specification remains undefined. In her father’s house, for that matter, Cleófilas was “*la consentida*, the princess” (47-8), and now it seems her dream is about to come true. Thus the creek itself is “full of happily ever after” (47), as all fairy-tale endings go. Even Cleófilas’ family seems to belong to a world of fantasy. For example, she has “six good-for-nothing brothers” (43), “six clumsy brothers” (45), suggesting a certain magical effect. Then there is her assessment of Juan Pedro, her husband, who takes on traits that are clearly larger than life, as if he too were part of a fairy-tale plot: “This man, this father, this rival, this keeper, this lord, this master, this husband” (49). The enumeration of attributes is of course yet another characterising device of this text-type. The above sentence then ends, “till kingdom comes”.

The *telenovela* and the fairy-tale are woven into “Woman Hollering Creek” from beginning to end. As the incipit anticipates, Cleófilas actually does return home. In the final scene we are given a flashforward in which she is telling “her father and brothers” (56) about her encounter with Felice, the woman who gave her a ride to the bus station so that she could go back home. At the close of the story, therefore, Cleófilas completes the

circle. Her father's premonition comes true, as if her fate were predetermined and her life were truly a fairy-tale. Indeed her return home is sealed when she recrosses the bridge, though now under quite different circumstances: "Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy Just like that. Who would have thought" (56)?

While the *telenovela* and the fairy-tale offer Cisneros ideal conventions for exhibiting the Chicana's condition and world view, she chooses the more fertile terrain of myth and legend to inscribe her story with a feminist perspective. At first, myth too seems just one more way to illustrate the Chicana's typically submissive role. Interestingly enough, though, this time it involves a female protagonist: La Llorona. The Weeping Woman is a legendary figure of Mexican culture variously described as a mother who died in childbirth, a girl who died just before her wedding, a woman who was brutally assassinated. Yet she is most often portrayed as a mother - perhaps La Malinche, the conquistador Cortés' mistress - who murdered her children after being abandoned by her lover and as a result is eternally condemned to wander about in search of them, weeping and complaining about her cruel fate. Patriarchal culture has always used this mythical figure to point to a moral. La Llorona stands for those wicked women who refuse to obey the laws of 'normal' female conduct (see Mirandé 31-3).

In "Woman Hollering Creek" Cisneros reconsiders this mythic figure in a new key. Most importantly, in her hands La Llorona is transformed from object to subject. That is, we see her story from Cleófilas' point of view. In fact, it is Cleófilas, at first almost unconsciously, who is invested with Cisneros' revisionist fervor. As soon as she crosses the bridge the first time, she begins to wonder what the name of the *arroyo* means. She notes right off that "La Gritona" is a "funny name", and yet "a name no one from these parts questioned, little less understood" (46). In the general indifference she finds she cannot share her curiosity with Trini the laundromat attendant who, although Mexican herself, is depicted as a biased representative of "this country" (46), the United States, which cares little for its Spanish-speaking minority.

The only people who might know the hidden narrative of La Gritona don't seem to remember it. They are Cleófilas'"neighbor ladies" who represent modern personifications of the old myth. These two women are separated from the rest of the people of the town and live next to the *arroyo*,

“the woman Soledad on the left, the woman Dolores on the right” (46). Precision of place offers further evidence of the importance of spatial orientation in the story. Both Soledad and Dolores are living alone: the former has been abandoned by her husband, and the latter is a widow whose two sons are dead. Initially, Cleófilas hopes they will serve her as sources of the old wisdom, but their ineffectiveness as matriarchal authorities soon becomes evident: “they were too busy remembering the men who had left” (47). Thus, Cleófilas finds herself alone with her curiosity and with no help in sight.

But this situation does not last. La Llorona’s real attributes are bound to come to the surface as Cleófilas continues to ask herself questions. Her first reaction upon hearing the name of the creek was to laugh. “La Gritona” struck her as being “funny” and “curious” (46), although it is not clear to her “whether the woman had hollered from pain or rage” (46). By keeping the exact motivation ambivalent - “pain or rage” - the narrator anticipates the emotional shift that will lead to a new interpretation of La Llorona’s role in feminist consciousness raising. Once the traditional image of a complaining woman, she will come to stand for woman enraged. Cleófilas, too, will learn to rethink her marriage to Juan Pedro, after undergoing his physical abuse all too patiently. Ultimately, she moves from a fairy-tale world enhanced by the sweet dreams of soap opera to a life of misery and shattered hopes. When her husband Juan Pedro strikes her for the first time, she immediately sees the gap between her original expectations and her actual condition. She also begins to compare her present situation with life before marriage. “In her own home her parents had never raised a hand to each other or to their children” (47), she observes. But she must still face up to her passivity which conforms to the pattern of the *telenovelas*: “she didn’t fight back, she didn’t break into tears, she didn’t run away as she imagined she might when she saw such things in the *telenovelas*” (47). The series of negative verbs here underline her own shocked passivity. After her first beating she is left totally empty, unable to react either verbally or physically. “[S]he didn’t cry out or try to defend herself” (47), as the narrator notes.

The scene of abuse in the fifth episode presents us not only with gratuitous male violence but also with female acceptance, and culminates in Cleófilas’ forgiving her husband. For that matter, he usually repents

immediately after so that there inevitably follows a moment of reconciliation between them. The only problem is that the scene is repeated over and over again. “[She] ... just stroked the dark curls of the man who wept and would weep like a child, his tears of repentance and shame, this time and each” (48), the narrator says. After the first act of abuse, the difference between her and Juan Pedro is explored step by step. Cleófilas begins to meditate on the causes of the gender wall that divides them. Her sense of estrangement when in the company of her husband and his friends (48) and her being excluded from male conversation goes hand in hand with their disagreement over domestic tasks (49). Their gradual indifference towards each other is also reflected in the radically different worlds they inhabit during the day; he out in the world, she at home busy with domestic chores. This mutual estrangement culminates in Juan Pedro’s adulteries (50).

Cleófilas’ reaction to her husband’s despotic control over her undergoes a number of phases. Initially, she tends to play down his carelessness. Relying on understatement, she concludes: “not that he isn’t a good man” (49). For the most part she chooses to ignore her husband’s psychological violence, his verbal attacks against her provocative behavior (she asks “suspicious questions” [49]), and his attempts to ridicule her (“if she had any brains” [49]). In order to do so, the narrator tells us, “she has to remind herself why she loves him” (49) and pretend that he is not playing around with other women: “No. Her imagination. The house the same as always. Nothing.” (50). Of course all the evidence goes the other way. As for household management, Juan Pedro gives her so little money to get by on that she ends up wanting to ask her father for money. Juan Pedro naturally forbids her to - “Well then if he’d rather she didn’t” (53) - and has her promise “she won’t mention” she has been beaten. In conclusion, “if the doctor asks she can say she fell down the front steps” (53).

This gradual process of consciousness raising begins when Cleófilas realizes how great the gap between her and her husband is and when she can no longer tolerate being a victim. Her awareness, I repeat, comes gradually and is often repressed simply because for her to accept defeat is to acknowledge the crumbling of her whole world. And so she tries to reason her way around the truth, arguing to herself, “He is not very tall, no, and he doesn’t look like the men on the *telenovelas* ... This man who farts and belches and snores as well as laughs and kisses and holds her” (49).

Her sense of disorientation and isolation results from living in a town where women “have to depend on husbands” and where “there is no place to go” (51).

As Cleófilas and Juan Pedro increasingly move about in separate worlds, another dichotomy emerges which helps to polarize Cleófilas’ nascent feminist consciousness, namely that between day and night. Though she is cautioned not to go there by her neighbors, it is “after dark” (51) that Cleófilas begins to visit the creek as her own personal retreat. In effect, the creek becomes an alternative place where a different kind of communication is transacted. Cleófilas remains silent there, but she receives the answers her husbands never gave her. Her quest for a private place in which both patriarchal and American codes are ineffectual leads her to the creek as an enchanted source. The Gritona becomes an “alive thing, a thing with a voice all its own, all day and all night calling in its high, silver voice”, a sort of seductive melody which “drives a woman to the darkness” (51).

It is Cleófilas, then, who investigates the mythic figure of La Llorona from a feminine point of view by identifying the creek’s voice with her.

“Is it La Llorona, the weeping woman? La Llorona, who drowned her own children. Perhaps La Llorona is the one they named the creek after, she thinks, remembering all the stories she learned as a child”. (51)

But for Cleófilas La Llorona no longer weeps; on the contrary, the creek’s music has a “high, silver voice”. Its “edge” (43) represents that liminal place where the protagonist can sit and meditate on the past in order to better understand the present. She too relies on that politics of recollection which is so central to contemporary ethnic storytelling. The act of revisiting an established mythic figure like La Llorona leads to the creation of an open form more amenable to women’s needs (DuPlessis 133-4).

Cleófilas’ ability to read a conventional myth against the grain, her successful attempt to reverse its perspective, results from her woman-to-woman relationship with it, and it is as feminine discourse that “Woman Hollering Creek” breaks new ground. Throughout the story Cleófilas is a perfect example of the muted woman: she is “speechless, motionless, numb” (48). Even when struck hard in the face, “she could think of nothing

to say, she said nothing" (48). Yet this state of submission and introversion is dramatically broken when she goes to the doctor. By having her go to a female physician, the narrator sets up an ideal context for the dynamics of explosion. "I was going to do this sonogram on her - she's pregnant, right ? - and she just starts crying on me" (54), Graciela, the doctor, tells her friend Felice in one of the story's most subtly woven episodes. The entire scene is presented in the form of a telephone call, which nicely echoes the mysterious voice of "La Llorona calling to her" [Cleófilas] listening "in the dark" (51).

Part of the verbal richness of the story is due to the resemanticization of the various lexemes provided for "La Gritona". The story begins with the negative connotation of "cry" (La Llorona as a "Weeping Woman") and concludes with the positive ones of "holler" and "laughter." The protagonist's initial doubt about the origin of the creek's name is finally resolved when the myth is personified in an actual woman, who happens to be named Felice. A strong happy woman, Felice is Cleófilas' *alter ego* on the onomastic level as well, since Cleófilas reminds the reader of Mary the wife of Cleophas, the Virgin Mary's sister, who was among those who wept for Jesus when he died on the Calvary. It is no accident, then, that La Llorona, who embodies feminine sorrow, is substituted by Felice, the epitome of happiness. This reversal provides the key to the story's conclusion. Since the story is about Cleófilas' initiation into feminine suffering and consciousness raising, Felice becomes a natural guide even if she only appears in the last episode. Cleófilas can escape from her marriage to Juan Pedro because of her female kinship first with Graciela, the doctor, and then with Felice. Through their solidarity Cleófilas discovers a community of women and the values of sisterhood.

As Cleófilas' *alter ego*, Felice represents freedom, especially freedom of movement, since she not only knows how to drive but also owns her own pick-up truck. Normally a man's vehicle, at the beginning of the story it is in fact referred to as "his [Juan Pedro's] new pickup" (45). What is more, it also symbolizes women's lack of independence: "Or you stay home. Or you drive. If you are rich enough to own, allowed to drive, your own car" (51). In the final episode, Cleófilas is duly amazed at the fact that Felice drives a pick-up, and that "[t]he pickup was hers" (55). Thus, while Cleófilas first crosses Woman Hollering Creek in Juan Pedro's pick-up, she recrosses it

in Felice's. And it does not escape us anymore than it does Cleófilas that a traditional male emblem is thereby being gendered as female.

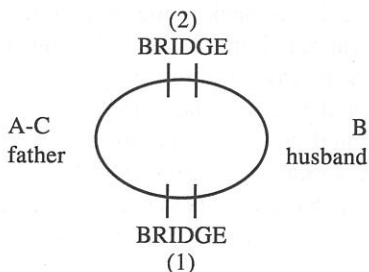
It is also significant for the advancement of the story's newly introduced notion of sisterhood that unlike "a Pontiac Sunbird" (55), for instance, a pick-up has room for two only. The new coupling of Cleófilas and Felice seals the act of reparenting by which Cleófilas will presumably acquire new feminist behavior patterns. Indeed, Felice performs a liberating gesture when she hollers while driving across the bridge: the shout not only "startled" Cleófilas but also "scared" her (55). As for Felice, it was just something she usually did when she crossed the bridge: "Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler. She said this in a Spanish pocked with English and laughed" (55). And so hollering is made over into laughter, every time Felice goes over "La Gritona" with her truck.

Felice's amphibious existence between the two sides of the creek invests her with a sacred role. Like a modern female Charon, she 'ferries' Cleófilas over the creek and back home in a carefree gesture of sisterly solidarity. As Graciela puts it during her telephone call to Felice, "If we don't help her, who will" (54)? Interestingly, the rendezvous between the two women is referred to as a "date" (54). Thus we have a complete reversal of traditional heterosexual affiliation, triggering off the establishment of new subtle genealogies (DuPlessis 66). Since Cleófilas is pregnant, Graciela says half jokingly to Felice, "When her kid's born she'll have to name her after us, right" (55)? As if it were obvious that Cleófilas' baby will be a girl.

All these implications are added to the iconographic image at the end of the story of Felice and Cleófilas crossing Woman Hollering Creek. Coming as it does both at the beginning and at the end, the image nicely sums up the story's achievement not only as the narrative of a journey (crossing the creek into the United States) but also as the journey of a well-known narrative (recrossing a legend in a feminist key). Felice has now taken the place of La Llorona as the "hollering" woman. The new feminist Llorona laughs instead of weeping; triumphs instead of ending up in defeat; gathers up her lost sister in a pickup - "At the Cash N Carry off I-10. Noon." (54) - rather than wandering off after her vanished children without the least hope of finding them.

Through the author's strategy of crossing and recrossing her narrative, the creek alluded to in the story's title refers both to the traditional mythic figure and its new feminist version. We can perceive its duplicity in the very structure of the syntagm, the immediate unscrambling of which reads "the creek of the woman who hollers." This intersects with "the woman who hollers creek", in which "to holler" means "to shout a cry of protest", while "creek" may also mean "break of day." The idea of a breach is also confirmed by the phonetic similarity between "creek" and "crack" or "creak".

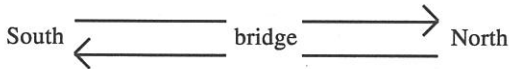
In the light of what I have said so far, it is worth noting that Cisneros' emphasis on the narrative strategy of recrossing traditional narrative *topoi* amounts to an interpretative practice informing all the stories of her new collection. In "Woman Hollering Creek" the first crossing suggests a circular narrative underlining Cleófilas' return to Mexico and her father's house. Thus, we have the following diagram:



In part, Cleófilas' home suggests the inevitability of the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the patriarchal system which the majority of Chicanas are still subject to. Cisneros, in fact, offers us no instant happy ending, for Cleófilas remains in a sense a victim of circumstances she cannot immediately overcome. From a feminist point of view, the story's ending may even seem disappointing since Cleófilas is merely a witness, and not the protagonist, of Felice's liberating deed (see DuPlessis 98). Furthermore, at the very beginning of the story we can find clues which suggest that the narrator does not anticipate the weakening of traditional familial values: "How when a man and a woman love each

other, sometimes that love sours. But a parent's love for a child, a child's for its parents, is another thing entirely" (43).

On the other hand, this sense of *nostos*, if not nostalgia, may also be read as Cleófilas' rediscovery of her cultural and racial origins, as Cisneros' attempt to mingle the narrative components of gender and ethnicity in a single act of closure "where ideology meets narrative and produces a meaning-laden figure of some sort" (DuPlessis 19). Felice thus becomes the strong figure who breaks into the text, the new role model at the center of the story Cleófilas tells her father and her brothers when she gets home: "Felice was like no other woman she'd ever met" (56). As the woman who crosses borders, Felice embodies the ability to live in different worlds and express a multiple identity. While her Mexican heritage is sedimented in her Spanish name, her anti-conventional ways seem distinctly American. At any rate, Felice is meant to be a hybrid figure, a sort of feminist trickster. It is her point of view, therefore, that insinuates a rival cultural topography into the text's circular structure. Thus the above diagram can be reinterpreted in terms of a linear, open-ended journey suggesting Cleófilas' rite of passage from victim to potentially liberated woman:



In this perspective Cleófilas' return actually signifies a new beginning based on a new awareness. Indeed, the story ends with her as storyteller in the process of retelling what now becomes *her* narrative. Felice's final "hoot" (56) is as fierce as Tarzan's, but with a major difference. Hers is female. Cleófilas once laughed because she found the creek's name funny. Instead, Felice notices "how nothing around here is named after a woman ... Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin" (55). This she says laughing, thereby confirming our sense that she is the central agent of the narrator's "revisionary mythopoesis", to borrow from R.B.DuPlessis (105). And Felice laughs as hard as the Gritona of patriarchal fame weeps. It is her sympathetic bonding with an amazed Cleófilas that points to a new joyous ending. "Woman Hollering Creek", in fact, goes beyond marriage as the only goal available for the unenlightened Chicana.

Cleófilas' new baby will be sponsored not by her brothers but by her newly acquired sisters. As the voice of the creek and Felice's laughter merge, we are given a perfect symbol of feminine semiosis, of Julia Kristeva's chora and of Luce Irigaray's speaking "fluidly" Even the imminent birth of Cleófilas' baby seems to contribute to the raising of her feminist consciousness, as the final words of the story suggest: "Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water" (56).

If, out of some happy vaguery, the reader extrapolates beyond the story's ending, it comes natural to think that Cleófilas' child will be born laughing, will be a girl, and will be given the name Felice.



Note, Notes, Anmerkungen



- 1) Sandra Cisneros (Chicago, 1954) is one of the most accredited among the contemporary Chicana writers. Recipient of many literary awards, in 1980 she published *Bad Boys*, a collection of poems now available in a revised form under the title *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987). She is also the author of two works of fiction: *The House On Mango Street* (1989) and *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), from which the text analysed in this article has been excerpted. Cisneros' stylistic attitude to create amphibious works living on the margin undergoes a trial in her last book, showing her higher level of artistic maturity in a richer thematic choice, in a more assertive ideological stance and in a more refined use of technical devices.



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