Spanish 365:

Final Examination

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Chicano Literature, Fall 2016

Dr. Donaldo Urioste

I. Discuss the Portrayal of women in the following works: "Woman Hollering Creek" [the story] by Sandra Cisneros, Memories of Ana Calderón by Graciela Limón; Across a Hundred Mountains by Reyna Grande; and Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. (50 points)

In many cultures, often times women are seen as inferior to men.Hispanic derevin culture is no different and in fact these undertones seem to be a driving force for many Hispanic novels. That being said I would argue that Chicano novels introduce a new point of view on a woman’s role in society, though not always in the same way.

In Woman Hollering Creek we, at first, see a portrayal of what some would argue to be a stereotypical subservient woman. A woman who was given to her new husband by her father who had idealistic views on love and romance. Once married Cleofilas’s notions of romance are shattered by an environment that deems the abuse and control of women as a norm. Her character is essentially reduced to that of a victim but I feel this victimization serves to highlight another character and what she represents in a new wave of women in society. Felice's character is so much the opposite of Cleofilas that it is almost comical. I my opinion Felice is this novel's embodiment of a chicana. A woman who is neither fully Mexican or American but this hybrid who is moving past norms such as gender roles. A woman who is empowered by the fact that society sees she as a divergent being. To me a large part of the Chicano/Chicana movement is finding strength in not only your traditional identity but also finding strength in change. Unfortunately we do not get to witness the transformation within Cleofilas character in this novel. We see that she is exposed to a new kind of femininity but not how she moves on from there. The next two novels explore more the transformation and then an even further look into a more modern woman.

Memories of Ana Calderon we are faced with a woman who for all intents and purposes is dragged through life and constantly faced with tragedy. Throughout the novel it appears that she faces many of these tragedies not only because she is an immigrant but also because she is a woman. Once again we see the tale of a woman in a role forced onto her by society. A key difference in this is that Ana is able to in a sense overcome many of these obstacles and move forward in life. These successes are overshadowed by the struggles that persist despite her best efforts. Ana’s character moves from a stereotypical mexican woman to a more empowered version of herself but an interesting aspect of this novel is that her transformation comes at such a terrible cost. Like many immigrant women Ana is forced to become strong or be devoured by an unforgiving society. In my opinion this strength actually became a driving force within the chicano movement, which is why stories like this are so important. Chicanos and chicanas grew up watching their parents strife and tribulations and although a parent’s choices are not always the best. Overcoming such obstacles left them with wisdom and knowledge needed to usher in a new generation of mexican americans that knew they could create change.

Across a Hundred Mountains was an interesting story that showed us a point of view that is often overlooked, the story of those left behind in Mexico. In this mini odyssey we follow Juanna in her journey to find her father. I appreciated this story immensely because Juanna is forced to overcome her feelings of obligation at the start of the novel. I feel that these feelings of obligation affect almost all Mexican women. The thought that as a women you have certain responsibilities and duties that must be met. I grew up watching my mother strive for the approval of her parents at every turn. I knew she felt a need to live up to the expectations they had of her despite the fact that they had left her to fend for herself at a very young age. I never fully understood her way of thinking and i’m not sure I ever will completely understand but I think this novel helped to give me a better look into aspects that may affect her way of thinking. That being said, Juanna’s overall suffering is so unjust, just as Ana’s story was, there were times where I felt the need to stop reading. These issues these women are facing are real to this day. Machismo attitudes have not disappeared from the world and women are still trapped in many ways.

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

A. Discuss the role of dreams in ***Bless Me, Ultima*** by Rudolfo Anaya. Cite at least three dreams in your response.

In the novel *Bless Me, Ultima* we have the opportunity to see into the main character’s (Antonio Márez y Luna) subconscious in order to give us a better understanding of what he was feeling and how he viewed the world. In addition, It was used as another means of highlighting Antonio’s otherworldly abilities. This aspect of the story was, in my opinion, a great avenue of incorporating another layer of magical realism. Thus making the transition from Antonio's real world issues and more fantastical issues much more believable in a narrative sense. In one of Antonio’s earlier dreams we see large shadows symbolizing his brothers return from the war. As readers we are well aware that Antonio has little prior knowledge of his brothers return but this dream indicates; issues he feels his brothers are facing, his internalized sense of responsibility, and alludes to Antonio’s magical ability to foresee the future.

In his dreams Antonio often faced his inner demons and fears that prevented him from progressing as a character. Antonio did not always find the answers to his questions in these dreams but it helped underline the depth of his understanding towards a situation. For example, Antonio had a dream in where his brothers were entering what was a known whore house. In this dream he was tasked with helping save his brothers from the evils of the world despite his young age. I feel this again reflects his notions that he is to be a savior. Coupled with the fact that his brothers do in fact leave the family for instant pleasures, demonstrated Tony’s ability to understand and represent future problems and his childish hope to have the strength to combat them.

Furthermore, his dreams of things to come are often linked

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])

 Although I felt that Memories of Ana Calderón was a wonderfully captivating novel but over all my favorite had to be Bless Me, Ultima. The book was such a fascinating read, Bless Me Ultima used an interesting balance of emotional and mystical influences on the life of an astute and inquisitive child as he comes of age. This story illustrates the innocence of childhood and the harshness of growing up in a less than perfect environment.
 The overarching theme of growing up with the pressures of parental expectations is further highlighted by the conflict between Antonio’s parents wanting him choose between their families. The relationship between Tony and Ultima is written in a way that despite explicitly stated interactions, it is easy to infer their closeness. Ultimas role in this story is irreplaceable and my favorite as Ultima represents the unknown and the inquisitive nature of adolescence.

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 of them all was Pocho.Although an interesting read, I felt that the overwhelmingness of male bravado and the amount of times male characters were given leeway to harm others were too much for my liking. I understand that this novel is quite influential and needed as a reference but I could not relate to the main characters. The book didn’t captivate me as other books did and for that I had to chose it as my least favorite.

That being said, I will admit to richard being a very interesting character in his later years at the end of the book.

**List of literary works read for the class**

***Pocho*** (1959) by José Antonio Villarreal

***And the Earth did Not Devour Him*** (1971) by Tomás Rivera

***Bless Me, Ultima*** (1972) by Rudolfo Anaya

***Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*** (1991) by Sandra Cisneros

***Memories of Ana Calderón*** (1994) by Graciela Limón

***Across a Hundred Mountains*** (2006) by Reyna Grande

***Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*** (2006) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba

***Into the Beautiful North*** (2013) by Luis Alberto Urrea