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THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE ETHNIC DISCOURSE AS REFLECTED IN THREE NOVELS WRITTEN BY WOMEN

de

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To my mother

To my husband and siblings

To my family

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GENERAL INDEX

ABSTRACT

In the present work, by means of a critical analysis based on postcolonical and feminist theories, I intend to show firstly, the topic of patriarchy in three representative novels The House on Mango Street, The Farming of Bones and Wide Sargasso Sea written by Sandra Cisneros, Edwidge Danticat, and Jean Rhys respectively, and the way it affects the most important female characters. Also, considering their respective contexts, my purpose is to show women's positioning in relation to hegemonic power, and finally, to inquire into the issue of the silencing of female voices in the texts chosen for analysis.

The conclusions I have arrived at are the following:

- In the three narratives there is a tendency towards inquiring, but in The House of Mango Street, the protagonist's awareness of her desires for cultural emancipation and literary liberation becomes the climactic issue of the novel. The act of writing turns to mean the same as the act of self creation.

- There is an implicit desire to subvert the power of the ruling class. This is shown through the denunciation of the state of poverty and estrangement of the Latino-community by the Anglo-American society, the unmasking of the atrocities committed by Trujillo's men and, by the exposure of issues such as economic subjugation and abuse in direct relationship with those of female gender, race and ethnicity.
- Another important topic in relation to women is the burden of living in an overemphasized man-centred society and their submission to it. Also, the reproduction of the stereotypes created by men, where women are seen as whores, seducers, vicious, and unworthy of trust.
- Despite the efforts of men to silence female voices they managed to be heard through different means: through the act of writing, where cultural and personal identity can be preserved; through authorial annoyance at powerful men's tyrannical attitude towards women; and through a demonstration of how writing can be used as an authentic woman's tool to overcome male dominance and protect women's history.

Finally, despite their dissimilar settings, contexts and idiosyncrasies the three works share the vision of relocating the female self based on an affirmation of ethnic otherness.

INTRODUCTION

My interest in the literature written by women began in the early nineties when I attended a course dictated by PhD. Mrs Kathryn Van Spanckeren at the University of La Pampa. She had been invited by the Department of Foreign Languages, at School of Human Sciences, where she developed a very interesting syllabus that encompassed a great variety of women writers representing different centuries and countries. On that opportunity I felt pleasantly surprised by Chicanas' literary productions, these being my first contact with a literature that was so different but at the same time so akin to my Latin American background. The influence of this sort of novels produced my commitment into a research project that started in the year 1995, and dealt with "La Mujer en la Novela Chicana en las décadas de 1960-1970" being completed three years later. Immediately after, I commenced another project "Estudios sobre la cultura chicana. La conformación discursiva de la identidad chicana en textos literarios contemporáneos" developed during the years 1997 - 2001, because, having developed a like for their culture and literature, I still felt the need to continue reading and analysing Chicano authors. Not entirely satisfied with what I had accomplished, I continued enlarging the scope of my investigative activities -this time concerned with the problematic of women as it was reflected in contemporary literary texts written in English.

Chicano literature, written indistinctly in English or Spanish, commences to bloom in 1848, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo brings to an end the two-year war between Mexico and the United States. Due to this Treaty, Mexico gives in its Northern territories to the latter at the same time that eighty thousand Mexican residents have the option to choose between either staying in the place they inhabited or moving through the new national frontiers. Mexicans opt to remain in their homes keeping alive their customs and traditions, because cultural manifestations cannot change owing to a political decision. For this reason, it can be affirmed that only and during the second half of the nineteenth century a new distinctive Mexican-American literature begins to emerge. The following century, instead, shows the integration of that literature in a cultural and political activism program -stimulated by the Teatro Campesino- out of which its ideological-political character derives.

In Chicanos' literary manifestations very outstanding are the scarce possibilities women had of publishing compared to their male counterparts. In fact, according to Eliana Rivero, -whose words are reproduced by Francisco Lomelí- "Chicana authors have suffered undue hardships in the area of publication due to their status as a socio-sexual class quite apart from […] a male-oriented society" (Herrera-Sobek, 1985, p. 31). She also posits that Chicanas feel they are subjected to a double marginality, and due to this, the topic of discrimination on the grounds of race also forms part of their concerns. Chicanas assume that white women are their enemies since their aims and wishes are not coincident. To this vision Francisco Lomelí adheres adding that Chicanas are "a marginal group within a marginal group" (idem, p.10).

Besides, literature written by Chicanas is viewed from diverse perspectives. There are those who stress Chicanas' meagre historical background while others emphasize their recent composition as a variegated whole. Actually, only few Hispanic women distinguish themselves in prose before the mid 1970s, and it is not until 1975 approximately that Isabella Ríos and Berta Ornelas set out new ground by concentrating on the story rather than on style, while other Chicana writers begin focusing on their particular feminist experiences through the arts (Lomelí, pp. 33-34). These new women writers have expanded what Bruce-Novoa terms "Chicano literary space" (1990, pp.114-124). They are the ones who have created women characters distinct from those of male authors by portraying females in ordinary and demystified roles, emphasizing verisimilitude (Lomelí, p. 35).

From my own conclusions about Chicano culture and literature written by Chicana authors it can be asserted their need to create a more egalitarian language to show a different world. And because they feel the burden of racial discrimination, in their re-invention of the world-vision they are forced to talk against their own formation and culture which they define as pre-eminently "machista" (my emphasis). And, in so doing, they perceive that as regards this issue they are very near to all the other alienated women of the American panorama. In general terms it can be assumed that the female space in Chicano literature is associated with the education of siblings, the potential for suffering, the religious fervour, superstition and sometimes with the mythic too; while the space conferred to male characters relate them to the external world of work and the travails associated with it. In works of fiction written by both male and female, the same stereotype repeats itself: women are described as obedient, silent, extremely sensitive, and sometimes irrational and schizophrenic. However, a change in attitude in younger

female characters is also observed, in a more subtle manner. In these cases, the task of forming a family and of breeding children are relegated to a second plane while the possibility of having access to superior studies as a step forward to a more independent life becomes a priority for them.

Reiteratively signalled is the hierarchical position of man in relation to his opponent woman in feminist criticism. This patriarchal order has been analysed taking into consideration different theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, a generalised and culturally known mould of conduct can be found throughout the social imaginariness that reaffirms the subordination of woman in literary representations. The scant and sometimes irrelevant space that very often is conferred to her, responds to this male-centred vision. In spite of this, through a more careful reading of texts it is possible to detect woman's capacity to make use of those linguistic silences as protective and defiant female's weapons with the purpose of preserving her individuality and integrity. Hence, it can be assumed that both the negation of woman's voice –the representation of the power of the word and the masculine logos- and the reproduction of the female stereotype conceived by men as it comes out in texts written by women -abounding in derogative connotations- have the double function of, on the one hand, showing the way women have been manipulated by men, and on the other hand, of contrarily emphasizing the preponderant roles woman has within these discourses. I consider this technique a pertinent generic resource used by women to demonstrate their resistance to hegemonic power, and also to control and dominate women's discourse in the different narrative situations in order to revert the well established binarism master-slave, man-woman.

From these presuppositions about Chicano culture, I have developed the concern for the topic of representation conferred to women belonging to other minority ethnic groups, in contemporary female fiction written in English. Therefore, in the present work, by means of a critical analysis based on postcolonial and feminist theories, I intend to show firstly, the topic of patriarchy in three representative novels The House on Mango Street, The Farming of Bones and Wide Sargasso Sea written by Sandra Cisneros [(1)], Edwidge Danticat [(2)], and Jean Rhys [(3)] respectively, and secondly, the way it affects the most important female characters. Likewise, and considering their

[1] See appendix 1, p. 62.
[2] See appendix 1, pp. 62-63.
[3] See appendix 1, pp. 63-64.

respective contexts too, my purpose is to show women's positioning in relation to hegemonic power, and finally, to inquire into the issue of the silencing of female voices in the texts chosen for analysis.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The emergence of modernity is concurrent with the emergence of Euro-centrism and the European dominance of the world effected through imperial annexation. Modernity arose when European nations began to carry out their expansionistic policy spreading their dominance to a non-European world, and commenced to impose their rule through exploration, cartography, and settlement. Consequently, when we refer to "modernity" there are implied modes of social organization that evolved in Europe since about the sixteenth century and extended their influence throughout the world in the wake of European discoveries and colonization. The consequence of this mostly economic foreign policy resulted in a feeling of superiority over those pre-modern societies and cultures that were trapped in the past. The Europeans felt it was their right and obligation to introduce the presupposed primitive and uncivilized peoples into modernity, what they did through subjugation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1999, pp. 143-145). The colonizers justified their oftentimes-cruel treatment of the colonized invoking religious mandates; for many white Westerners' point of view, the peoples of Africa, the Americas, and Asia were "heathens" who possessed heathen ways and who, for this reason, had to be "Christianized." Regarding the role of literature, this was central to the cultural enterprise of the Empire since it helped to control the natives under the "advertising" slogan of disseminating and imparting liberal education.

It is important to make a distinction between the terms "colonial" and "postcolonial." Whenever we refer to the term "colonial", we have to bear in mind, in the first place, that it relates to a political condition of dependency either accepted or enforced; and secondly, that such condition applies to the literary attitude and material production in subservient societies that reaffirm these conditions. Such submissive behaviour is visualised as the result of associating worth, political influence, and social preference within the acceptable norms of the controlling culture (New, 1993, p. 102). Out of this conception derives the application of the terms "colonial" and "colonialism", "whereby the language of political empires is applied to real or perceived power relations […] between the sexes, among races and classes, and between centres of political and economic influence and their 'marginalized' peripheries"(p.102). European discourse often constructs the colonies as the desired, valuable future, and place of unlimited opportunities, but, along with this positive or healthy attitude, there exists the

opposite one of controlling the colonies' economic and political issues; therefore, access to power is what mostly distinguishes the "colonial" [4] and the "colonized" [5] from any other condition.

"Colonial literatures" (my emphasis) illustrate the ambiguity of showing signs of resistance to the *status quo* while accepting the conventional discourse of future greatness; contradictoriness thus becoming a social condition for both the colonist and the colonized positions. This paradoxical situation -following New's words [6]- "does not coincide neatly with dates of political independence. Colonial attitudes sometimes persist long after a national status is acquired (or reacquired); in a like manner, independence movements frequently develop before colonial status is abandoned" (p. 103). As it is observed, Colonial experience is wide-ranging, so any report about the emergence of a "national" –or a "post-colonial"- literature has to acknowledge the fact that neither vernacular writing nor received literary language alone can adequately characterize this body of literature, and that resistance does not always result directly in social action or in taking expected literary forms (p.119). However, the literature that comes out as part of a cultural nationalist project is a literature created in opposition to the narratives and images which deprive the colonized of their dignity and autonomy. According to C. L. Innes "this opposition is addressed not just to the colonizing power, nor even primarily to it, but to the people of the emerging nation, and seeks to engage them in their own project of self-definition" (1996, p.121) [7]. On this account, we can agree with the assigned meaning of the term "postcolonial" as referring to the time after independence, suggesting a concern with the national culture as a whole, and with its relationship with the metropolitan centre after the departure of imperial power.

According to Ashcroft et al. (1989), three stages characterize postcolonial literature. We might consider the first one as the least relevant because their writers continue privileging the centre over the native, even though they show a concern for the customs, language, and settings of the "new" colonized society. During the second stage, the desire to subvert the duality centre-periphery becomes the most important

[4] I follow New's definition of the term "colonial" (subject). It applies to 'the European temporarily resident in the new society, generally contemptuous of the life and customs observed, who remains tied to and is somehow identified with an administrative appointment abroad' (1998, p. 105).
[5] According to New, the 'colonized' are 'the persons, generally non-European, who suffer arrogation of authority' (In New National and Post-Colonial Literatures, ed. by Bruce King, 1998, p. 105).
[6] I follow W.H. New's thoughts in "Colonial Literatures" in New National and Post-Colonial Literatures. Edited by Bruce King. . 1998.
[7] In "Forging the Conscience of Their Race." Nationalist Writers, in King, Bruce's (ed.) New National and Post-Colonial Literatures. 1996.

issue. Nevertheless, as in the previous case, we cannot think the resultant literature as being entirely independent. The writers use the conqueror's language and writing through the strategies known as "abrogation" [8] and "appropriation." [9] The cultural hegemonic power is kept through canonical assumptions and attitudes, which identify colonial texts as isolated national offshoots of English literature belonging to the margin, having a subordinate position. Finally, within the third stage, the centre develops the strategy of claiming formerly considered ex-centric or "marginal" works, whose force and worth is ostensibly great, accepting them as British -such judgement being based on Eurocentric standards (p.7). In conjunction with this, the colonized set their claims to a separate and distinctive cultural identity. However, Edward Said's concept of "mimicry" -a desire not only to resemble and be accepted by the centre, but also "to be adopted and absorbed" by it (p. 4) - is simlly produced on the part of these post-colonial literatures. This previously described situation illustrates once more the contradictory nature of the relationship colonizer-colonized or centre-periphery.

With Regard to "post-colonial literary theory", this emerges from the "inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing" (p.11) where genres, styles, presuppositions related to the universal features of languages, epistemologies, and value systems begin to be questioned by its practices. Certainly, the expansion of the Empire that pushes the colonial world to the margins of experience engenders an alienating process that turns against itself. Therefore, the "marginal" world is put into a position from which all experience could be viewed as "uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious" (p.12), and where marginality becomes an unprecedented source of creative energy.

One characteristic of imperial oppression is the control over language due to the perpetration of a hierarchical structure of power. Objective reality can be created by language, many postmodernists state, so all reality is a social construct. For these writers, all language is discourse and the discourse used in literary analysis aids to shape and form the text in question. Taking into consideration this perspective, no single or primary objective reality exists, but many. Consequently, in rejecting a universal,

[8] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin define this term as "the rejection by post-colonial writers of 'correct' or 'standard' English". It also implies that the use of the colonialist's language does not imprison the colonized within the colonizer's conceptual paradigms since language, as a tool, can offer a means of conceptual transformation and liberation (Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, 1999, p. 5).

[9] The word describes the processes of English adaptation itself, that "all language use is a "variant" of one kind or another (and in that sense "marginal" to some illusory standard'). From Ashcroft, Bill et al, Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, 1999, p. 5.

objective reality, these critics assert that it is perspectival, and that each individual creates his or her own subjective understanding of the nature of reality itself. Furthermore, they assert the possibility of agreeing on public and social concerns, such as dominant values, ethics –the sense of right and wrong- and the common good, owed to the existence of a dominant cultural group in every society that determines the ideology of that culture or, using the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's term, its hegemony[10]. Accordingly, in a given culture all people have, consciously and unconsciously, to conform to the prescribed hegemony. Hence, when ideas, thinking or personal backgrounds do not conform, the traditional answer provided by the dominant class is *silence* (Bressler, 2003, p. 198).

Of the various writers who have dared to speak out for many cultures, challenging the dominant ones and their pronouncements, we can mention Tony Morrison, Gabriel García Marquez, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon, among others. These thinkers have refused to be silenced, declaring –instead- different perspectives and life's views, and becoming defiant when necessary. In addition, African American's, Australian's, Native American's, Mexican American's, Latin American's, and Women's voices manage to be heard, believing they can act on cultural change.

The theorist Charles Bressler labelled three different groups of dissenting voices as Postcolonialism, African American Criticism, and Gender studies. He posits that even though each group has its personal concerns, all of them state the importance of their individual and public histories, the blending of their past and present, and the worth of their origins. They wish to articulate their feelings, concerns, and assumptions about the nature of reality in their particular way of life and lore, without being treated as marginal or minor subjects. Often called subaltern [(11)] "these writers provide new

[10] I take this word as defined by Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin in Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, (1999, pp. 116-117). According to this definition, "hegemony" – word coined and popularized in the 1930s by Antonio Gramsci- essentially means the power of the ruling class when trying to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all and for this reason can be taken for granted. "Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions" (p. 116).

[11] According to Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin, this term means "of inferior rank" and has been used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those classes in society "who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes" (1999, p. 215). The word has been adjusted to post-colonial studies from the work of the *Subaltern Studies* group of historians, who tried to promote a systematic discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. They mean the general condition of "subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, case, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha, 1982: vii quoted by Ashcroft et al, 1999, p. 216).

ways to see and understand the cultural forces at work in society, in literature, and in ourselves" (p. 199).

Disentangling Postcolonialism and Some Related Terms

A direct contact with an expanding Western culture, with its international politics, with rapidly transformed communications, a worldwide economy, and with local cultures after WWII produced the development of the Age of Postcolonialism, period in which former colonies acquired new political and economic importance. Thereafter, local cultures suffered the process of modernization and their ideal became the desire to achieve, a national, political, cultural, and economic liberation. Thus, the new national literatures, national multicultural literatures -formed by groups and movements within and across national boundaries- and International English literature became parts of a developing urban global culture, which included a keen consciousness of difference, in part, to assert identity (King, 1996, p. 3).

These new national literatures began with the first European explorations overseas, where the conquerors, travellers, and pioneers were some of the early European writers. In parallel with the literature produced by European expansionism, there was also a non-European literature which dealt, firstly, with the topic of cultural contact, and then, with those issues about the colonized, administrators, and settlers. As time passed, the distinctions between colonized and settlers became less sharply delineated and new local societies and nations began to emerge with their own elites, classes, regions, immigrants, minorities, and other characteristics. Therefore, the West Indies, for example, where few of the original natives survived, exemplified the creation of a new Creole society from a diversity of cultures and peoples, while South Africa became an example of the settlement of continuing injustice and conflicting claims (pp. 4-5).

In Ashcroft's et al. conception, one group which traverses several of the literatures from postcolonial societies is "Black writing". This classification takes into account the idea of race as one important feature of economic and political discrimination, and brings together writers in the African Diaspora whatever their nationality –US Blacks, Afro-Caribbeans, and writers from African nations (p. 20). Postcolonial theorists find that beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics, each of these literatures is the product of the experience of colonization.

Sometimes alluded to as "Third World Literature" by Marxist critics, postcolonial literature also investigates what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them strengthens, believing itself superior to the other. Moreover, the 'post colonial' issue implies besides "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (p. 2).

Seldom welcomed, and in many cases ignored, the new literature was considered unworthy or uninteresting, except by local intellectuals. To be a serious and an acknowledged writer implied going away from the colonies, as is the case of such West Indian writers as Claude McKay, Jean Rhys, V.S. Naipaul, who became expatriates, while some others never really settled and their lives were characterized by continual movement between their homes and abroad.

Cultural decolonization of former colonies (like Canada and Australia, for example) as well as the collapse of the European empires and the granting of independence occurred after the Second World War. In those former British Dominions, people saw British culture as superior and still thought of England as their "home".

However, the situation of India, Africa, and the West Indies was the model where a political struggle was for self-rule and independence, and major writers were concerned with problems of bi-culturalism, analyzing what their newly independent nations were doing with their freedom. Another relevant topic was how one could reconcile cosmopolitan awareness and standards of judgement with the need to see the world through local eyes, and how local folk culture could be integrated with modern art -a never-settled conflict remaining central to most national literatures and the various post-colonial movements that followed (King, pp. 3-6).

In The Empire Writes Back, Ashcroft et al. (pp. 24-25), for example, signal that a major feature of postcolonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement [12], relevant issues from which the topic of a national identity is engendered, and a

[12] I take these concepts from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) where it is demonstrated "the complex interaction of language, history and environment in the experience of colonized peoples and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation". It is explained how the experience of colonization disrupted the basic modes of its representation by separating the term 'place' from that of 'space'. Colonization imposed a feeling of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies. This dislocation is between the environment and the imported language used to describe the former; so, place becomes an issue within language itself; it is "a contested site of the link between language and identity". In postcolonial writing, it is a "continual reminder of colonial ambivalence, of the separation yet continual mixing of the colonizer and colonized" (pp. 177-178). The concept of place acquires different meanings in different societies and also its specific political and literary effects in the range of displacement, e.g. in some aboriginal societies "it could be a tangible location of one's own dreaming" (p. 179), instead of a measurable space or a visual construct.

conception that is also shared by Bruce King. The above mentioned theorists mention Bhabha as being interested in the interstices in and between cultures, signalling the strategic importance of that culture which has to be negotiated in a sort of hybridisation process: a process by which two cultures retain their distinct characteristics and yet form something new.

The need for a national language, history, and culture is another issue that became the concern of movements such as feminism, ethnic separatism, and gay rights. According to King, "Nationalism assumed that the people were one and shared similar interests, but this was mostly a way of uniting diversity. In practice many groups were ignored, had other interests, or continued to be repressed" (1996, p. 7).

The vitality and originality was crucial for these literatures to gain the attention of the public, especially during the mid-twentieth century when modernism blended with nationalist concerns. Then, during the following phase, post-colonialism coincided with post-modernism, and European post-modernism was seen as the outcome of post-imperial cultural relativism. However, non-European post-modernism is thought to be the effect of bringing many local traditional cultures together in a modern state and global economy. In many works of literature, the mixing of genres, the blend of fiction and autobiography, the self-reflexivity, and the re-examination of their earlier work and its influences might be regarded as a significant post-colonial variant of post-modern tendencies. In addition, literary traditions are being revised through re-examined memories and the construction of new mythologies, and presently, local literatures have adopted new models, characteristics, history, and affiliations grounded in national regional life (pp. 8-9).

As a matter of fact, the new literatures participate in artistic, cultural and political movements that are always changing, and which produce new states of consciousness at different times and places; consequently, each West Indian writer will be different due to his/her particular experiences. As a result, attempts to diagram the complexities of such cross-pollinations are doomed to failure, not only because the historical circumstances keep changing, but also, because of the paradoxical nature of colonialism and post-colonialism (idem, pp.10-11).

Bruce King sees the United States as an agent of change, as the new liberator and the new imperialist. He posits:

> The role of the United States during and after the Second World War meant that liberal free-trade capitalism would replace imperial preferences, and colonies would become independent nations often dependent on American aid, trade, and cultural influences. Thus began a period of rapid Americanization, including American literary models that at first seemed liberating and modernizing but soon was felt to be neo-colonialist. Much of what is thought of as post-colonial has some connection to American influences on education, art, opportunities, and social attitudes (p. 11).

There is a propensity by critics and writers to view the new literatures in terms of a simple opposition between the language and culture of the colonizer, and resistance by some native language and culture; but as it has been explained previously, this is not to be taken as a simple relationship. It shows how the arts circulate crossing and re-crossing boundaries creating new forms of culture of varied influences; e.g. we can appreciate how Africa influences American and European music and also, how Africanized Western music has influenced modern African music too. Similarly, the continual movement of writers within the Commonwealth means that ideas, models, and literary techniques rapidly become transnational and transcultural (pp. 12-13).

If we assume that there is no sharp division between the new national literatures in English and their overseas branches in the United States or England equally can we agree on the lack of differentiation between the new national literatures in English and in local languages. Some authors write in more than one language and others do it only in one. In fact, many cultural languages co-exist and frequently change roles in the writer's creative imagination. Therefore, the writers' combination of artistic and mental structures becomes important in the new literatures.

In this historical process the study of post-colonial theory replaces the study of post-colonial literature. Post-colonial studies defy the new literatures because they view them as implicated in and complicit with either imperialism or social injustice. Quoting Bruce King, "in recent theory the new nations are regarded sceptically as neo-colonialist" (p. 17) –viewed as dominant and oppressive- while they should be considered as post-colonial –expression that means to be included in the period beginning with national independence (p. 17).

Post colonialism's theoretical and social concerns commenced in the 1950s. In the following decade Frantz Fanon and other philosophers and critics began publishing texts which became the starting point of postcolonial writings. In the late 1980s, the terms post-colonial and postcolonialism first appeared in scholarly journals, in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffins' text The Empire Writes Back: Theory and

Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (1989) and again, in 1990, in Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin's Past the Last Post. Theorising Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism. By the early and mid-1990s, these terms became firmly established in scholarly writing (Bressler, 2003, pp. 200-201).

As just mentioned, although many critics and theorists contributed to postcolonial theory, Edward W. Said's Orientalism (1978) is the key text in the establishment of postcolonial theory. He states that nineteenth's century Europeans try to justify their territorial conquests by propagating a manufactured belief called "Orientalism", that is the creation of non-European stereotypes suggesting that the so-called Orientals are indolent, thoughtless, sexually immoral, unreliable, and demented. Nevertheless, what Europeans were revealing was their unconscious desire for power, wealth, and domination, careless of the nature of the colonized subjects. His theory deals with the West's view of the Other, or how European's views have influenced Third World writers. Bruce King, commenting on Said's book explains that the text becomes the model for critics determined to show that even "well-intended Europeans writing about non-Western culture share the guilt of imperialism" (1996, p.18) because even their very glance must be shaped by cultural imperialism" (p.18). Said's theory presupposes that all writing, whether an administrative document or a novel, is an ideological construction of prejudices and desires from which it is necessary to tease out the hidden politics, conception that is later shared by Frederic Jameson in The Political Unconscious (1981).

As it can be appreciated, the term postcolonial has modified its meaning: from the study of new national literatures, it has shifted to a deconstruction of the nation, where different social groups within it constitute distinctive cultures. If the concept of national literatures ignores diversity of cultures and identities within a state's boundaries, postcolonialism often homogenizes the non-Western into a Third World Other (a way to ignore the particularities of Third World culture), or becomes a metaphor for any cultural study of any subject in any language.

To sum up, the basic problem with nationalism, postcolonialism, and other conceptual terms is that attempts to define difference usually result in essentialism, a stereotype, or an idealization. However, postcoloniality recognizes that nations are mental, social, and political constructions that change according to circumstances, in the same way the notions of national identity do change (pp. 20-24).

The Importance of Feminist Theory

In order to understand feminism better, first it is convenient to trace the historical development of Feminist Criticism, which sometimes is used synonymously with Gender Studies. In accordance with this literary posture, the source of prejudice against women has been installed in Western culture since very long ago. Feminists say that gender discrimination may have begun when the blame for the fall of humanity is put –according to the biblical narrative- on Eve rather than on Adam. Similarly, well-known is the ancient Greeks' encouragement of such gender discrimination when Aristotle, the leading philosopher and teacher, asserts that "The male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled" (Bressler, 2003, p. 145). Other religious philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine also proclaim that owing to women's imperfection and their weak and sensual nature they try to seduce men, impeding them from developing their spiritual capacities (p. 145).

The origin of patriarchy in the religious field can be traced in the sacred books of *Genesis* and *Koran* where the existence of only one principle of creation, shown at the human as well as at the divine level, is revealed, and also the fact that only one God created the world by himself. The divinity -implicitly or explicitly masculine- exemplifies creativity and potency and is the principle that animates the universe. When God conceives the first man –Adam- he confers him the gift of continuing creation through his seed without any reference to the feminine principle. Furthermore, the *Genesis* is the register of an exclusively masculine genealogical succession that establishes very carefully who engenders whom (Tuber, 1997, p.37).

The masculine role in procreation shows the power of God when He creates the world and, for this reason, it can be affirmed that the monotheist doctrines constitute the most complete expression of the popular monogenetic theory of reproduction. Monogenesis and monotheism are two aspects of the same symbolic system (Idem, p. 38). Due to the structural and symbolic alliance between God and men, the latter share His power so that His pre-eminence seems to be something natural. To sum up, in the patriarchal order, the symbolic and systematic articulation between the ideas about conception and the conception of the divinity leads inevitably to the glorification of the father. All in all, patriarchy does not only designate one form of family founded on masculine relationship and paternal power, but also all the social structure based on the power of the father (pp. 37-52).

Analyzing patriarchy from angles other than the religious one, it is observed how, throughout history, many anthropologists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists and men of letters have studied this issue; and among the diverse people devoted to this topic we must not forget the name of the Swiss Johan Jakob Bachofen (1815-1887), who develops his work around the original religion and the rights of the mother. In his work, he takes us back to the period in which -before any known patriarchal civilizations- there existed a world organized around the figure of the mother. In that "moon-like stage," he manages to formulate a theory of social evolution. He is a master of archetypal psychology before the word "archetypes" is coined calling them "fundamental thoughts" or *Grundgedank.* Bachofen exerts a great influence on later anthropologists, especially on Joseph Campbell, who also attacks patriarchy when presenting, in an ironic way, the fanaticism centred on the father figure within the universal context of religions and world's mythology. Bachofen's influence is seen in Morgan, Malinowski, Mead, and others; in Nietzsche, in Engels, and in the feminist movement too. Nevertheless, and in spite of his great influence in the field, afterwards anthropology becomes less and less interested in comparative studies, its scholars trying to shed light, instead, on the cultural characteristics within the significant context of the concrete society in which they appear (pp. 32-34).

From a psychological perspective, relevant is to remember the work of Jung who, in his Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (1974), defines the archetype as a formal way of representation, and among those analysed archetypes, he mentions the mother as having an unpredictable variety of aspects. Thus, among its essential traits he mentions fertility, mothering, wisdom and spirituality, her protective kindness, her support and food, but also secrecy, the occult, the gloom, what devours, seduces and poisons, and what provokes fear and can not be evaded. Concisely, Jung expresses the difference between the living mother and the terrible mother (pp. 74-77).

As regards the topic of "silentness", Edwin Ardener, in his book Perceiving Women, (1975, p. 21-3), is one of the first researchers to recognize the importance of androcentrism in the development of explanatory models in social anthropology. He suggests the theory of "silenced groups", according to which socially dominant groups generate and control the prevailing ways of expression. The voice of the silenced groups is muffled in front of the dominant structures, and so they are forced to turn to the modes of expression of the dominant ideologies. Within these groups, the anthropologist includes women.

Tracing the Historical Development of Feminism

As Charles Bressler well expressed, century after century, men's voices described, defined and circumscribed women's social and cultural roles and their personal significance (2003, p.145). Therefore, observing the situation from the historical development of feminist criticism, in the late 1700s, a faint voice arises in opposition to patriarchal and defaming opinions against women, managing to draw the attention of the reading audience. Believing that women along with men should have a voice in the public sphere, Mary Wollstonecraft writes A Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792, and contributes to a feminist anthology called The Female Reader. She argues that sentimental novels encourage women to see themselves as helpless and silly; so, she maintains, they must stand up for their right and not allow their male-dominated society to define what it means to be a woman, rejecting men's assumption that they are inferior to men. She said:

> […] avoiding any direct comparison of the two sexes collectively, […] I shall only insist that men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale (pp. 156-157) [(13)].

It is not until the early and mid 1900s, however, that feminist criticism begins to grow. Two of the most distinguished feminist writers of the twentieth century are Virginia Woolf –author of A Room of One's Own, 1929- and Simone de Beauvoir – well known by her book The Second Sex, published in 1949. During those years, women gain the right to vote and become prominent activists in the social issues of the day, such as health care, education, politics, and literature, but equality with men in these fields is not accomplished yet (Bressler, p. 145). Then, the politics of gender enters a new phase in the late 1960s, and since that time feminist criticism has been developed, debated, institutionalised and diversified as never before.

In the 1970s, three revolutionary books appeared within a few months from each other: Germaine Greer's The Female Eunuch, Kate Millett's Sexual Politics, and Patriarchal Attitudes by Eva Figes, all of which become bestsellers. The texts are polemical and the three share the fact that when they discuss literature they refuse to

[13] From A vindication of the Rights of Woman, chapter II, in The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women by Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar.

isolate it from the culture of which it forms part. In addition, they encourage the definition of a feminist reading as a new, self-conscious phase. In spite of this, these literary productions cannot be considered as properly belonging to the field of literary criticism in the conventional sense of that term. Figes, for instance, sees how male domination has increased from the Middle Ages onwards, reaching its highest point in the Victorian period, and signals that it was during this latter period when women "were most enthusiastically idealised and most thoroughly subordinated" (Belsey and Moore, p. 3). She particularly ponders on the production of the English Brontë sisters and of George Eliot asserting that the confined range of possibilities allotted to women in the nineteenth century had tied them up. The other female writer, Germaine Greer, analyses Shakespeare's plays in which she discovers a new depiction of love and marriage unusual for the sixteenth century, "when romantic love becomes the basis of marriage as partnership" (p. 4) and the nucleus of family life emerges as the core of a developing consumerism. Finally, Millet's book represents a more complex feminist criticism when daring to denounce Lawrence's idealisation of the phallus as part of a generalised analysis of sexual power relations (pp.2-3). Furthermore, she is one of the first feminists to challenge the social ideological characteristics of both the male and the female, maintaining that a female is born and a woman is created. What she means is that one's sex is determined at birth, while gender is a social construct created by cultural ideals and norms (Bressler, p. 147).

Contemporary literary criticism defies the assumption that literature is a repository of timeless truths dealing with an "eternal", unchanging human nature. Instead, from there comes the realization that these truths are not objective but biased interpretations of the world, some of which present women in debasing ways. History also provides us with evidence of the transformation of things and for this reason becomes important to feminism. What feminist critics discover is that some cultures are more patriarchal than others. Hence the work of some feminist writers -who have engaged in tracing male domination- derives from this conception, as for example Kate Millett, who searches the development of women's resistance to patriarchy during the period of their deepest oppression (Belsey and Moore, p.3).

From another angle, Kate Millet argues that women must revolt against the power of male dominance. Pretty well-known are the qualifications attributed to girls (passive, meek, and humble) as opposed to boys (aggressive, self-assertive, and domineering). These cultural constructs and expectations are transmitted through songs,

literature, advertising, and other media. To conform to these prescribed sex roles dictated by society is what she calls "sexual politics" [(14)]. So, she says, in order to challenge male power, women have to create female social conventions for themselves by establishing and articulating female discourse, literary studies, and feminist theory (Moi, 1999, pp. 38-44).

Feminist cultural history emphasises the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interests of men. In the 1970s the "he-man" language is evident, and Germaine Greer draws attention to the wide range of abusive terms applicable only to women while Eva Figes exploits the ambiguity of "man". But in the 1980s, Dale Spender publishes Man Made Language where she draws explicit attention to the patriarchal implications of the supposedly gender-neutral term. The human race, it implies, is male, and if women are included, it is on condition that, linguistically at least, they are neither seen nor heard.

By this time a good deal of work has been done on language from a feminist point of view, and feminists realize that it is only women who are likely to chatter, gossip, whine, nag or bitch. On the other hand, only men can be virile and potent without existing female equivalents for these terms of praise. Moreover, men are supposed to be aggressive but women who protest about it are inclined to be strident. It becomes apparent that "in each case the word for women has negative meanings or connotations, while the male term consistently implies authority" (Belsey and Moore, p. 4). These binary oppositions, according to Dale Spender, are "fundamental premises in an order based on the supremacy of one group over another" (ibid). It is a common theme of feminists of the early seventies that the patriarchy they denounce is reinforced by psychoanalysis. They maintain that Freud is an arch-misogynist, and that the role of the psychoanalytic institution is to reinstate -within the patriarchal order- women whose symptoms show evidence of rebellion against it.

One of the issues which feminists placed on their political agenda during the 1970s is language. But after Spender's influential Man Made Language it was no longer possible to treat language as gender-neutral. French feminist theory has also addressed and developed questions raised implicitly by Spender's book, and perhaps the most widely discussed inquiry by these theorists is the possibility of a specifically "feminine"

[14] In Bressler, p. 147.

discourse. Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous have identified a difference between men and women in their use of and abuse by language. Extending the Lacanian psychoanalytic concept of a symbolic phallocentric order of language, from which women are excluded on account of their lack of a penis, Irigaray and Cixous have suggested that one of the ways in which women are able to challenge the effects of a patriarchal symbolic order is by writing a language of their own. In both theories, language is closely bound to sexuality. Irigaray reworks Lacanian theory of desire in language by arguing that female desire and sexuality are constituted not by a lack, in relation to the male symbolic order, but by their total otherness to male sexuality. Moreover, she seeks to demonstrate that female desire, inscribed in writing, is a force capable of rupturing the patriarchal symbolic order (Belsey and Moore, pp. 1-15).

Nowadays there is not one critical theory of writing dominating feminist criticism, although physical geography plays a great part in determining the major interests of various voices of theoretical approach. Therefore, we can distinguish three somewhat different, geographical strains of feminism: American, British, and French. The second one –British approach - is basically Marxist and stresses oppression. In contrast, the American and the French both stress repression, the former doing so through textuality, and the latter through the legacy of psychoanalysis. All groups, however, attempt to rescue women from being considered "the Other" (Bressler, p. 150). And this last term is the key word that makes us link Feminism with Postcolonial Studies since both are theoretical approaches that, though externally different, are nevertheless closely concerned with the ways and extent to which representation and language are crucial to identity formation, and to the construction of subjectivity. Finally, for these two theoretical groups, language has been a vehicle to subvert patriarchal and imperial power.

THE SEARCH FOR A CHICANA'S SPACE THROUGH LITERARY DISCOURSE.

Mexican American literature takes shape in the context of a hybrid (Spanish, Mexican, Indian, and eventually, Anglo) frontier environment marked by episodes of intensifying cultural conflict. Across the Southwest, Chicanos maintained Mexican traditions as long as they could; only in response to irresistible Anglo influences did they develop a distinctive culture and literature. We can date the second half of the 19th century [(15)] as the period in which a particularly Mexican American literature begins to emerge, following a line of development common among frontier cultures and responding to economic and cultural subjugation by Americans with both cultural resistance and assimilation. Historical and personal narratives predominate, many of them apologetic in tone. Afterwards, during the years between the start of the Mexican revolution and the coming of World War II, Mexican American literature continues along established lines of development, such as historical and personal narratives, short fiction, poetry, and folklore. In the 1960s, works of art are expected to be instruments of political and cultural change; writers are not just artists but social activists and apostles of ethnic awareness. Mexican American literary activity expands rapidly and although diverse, the authors associated with it share certain assumptions and goals: they want to create a body of work free of stereotypes while remaining faithful to their Mexican folk and belletristic traditions; they want to find forms and techniques compatible with the social, political, and cultural needs of their people; and they desire, like their predecessors, to confront the language issue and the question of voice. By the mid-1970s, Quinto Sol, Chicano's editorial house, helps to determine the literary agenda for years to come.

The seventies are considered a period of great proliferation of Chicano critical studies, and the year 1973 becomes a landmark when a special issue devoted to "Chicanas en la Literatura y el Arte" appears in El Grito, commencing what Rita Sánchez calls the "breaking out of the silence", and consequently a stage of inner reflection [(16)] (p. 29). At this time, a woman's worldview and her feminine experiences, her social interactions and her concerns begin to be projected into Chicano literature. However, this boom is not meaningful enough to make a strong impact and to bring this

[15] In the year 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended nearly two years of warfare between Mexico and the United States. With this treaty, Mexicans -living in the disputed territories- automatically became Americans.

[16] In Lomelí, Francisco (1985), "Chicana Novelists in the Process of Creating Fictive Voices" in Beyond Stereotypes ed. by María Herrera-Sobeck.

literature into some degree of world prominence. Even in the 1980s critical attention still lags far behind in proportion to the number of publications that have become known. In fact, Chicano literature seems to keep some form of marginality in traditional literary circles and the American mainstream and, if we consider the literature written by their women writers, the picture becomes amplified. Chicano publishing houses ignore such efforts and avoid taking the necessary risks with their works, which they consider less rigorous, immature, and without expertise in comparison with those produced by men. As a result, if there has been scarce female fiction and its respective criticism, it is because Chicana writers feel the discouragement of having to bear not only the psychological impact of writing in an unsupportive environment, but also the pressures of a society that works, essentially, according to male interests, and views women as a quite different socio-sexual class. As a consequence, and as Eliana Rivero manifests in 1980, most of these writers, artists, or critics have only existed in the "destierro espiritual –spiritual exile- with respect to their professional mates […]" (p. 5).

Towards the end of the decade, Renato Rosaldo, another Chicano literary critic highlights Chicanas' protagonist roles expressing that young women writers are the ones who have caused an important shift in literature when they challenge "that idealised patriarchal cultural regimes that appeared autonomous, homogeneous, and unchanging" (1989, p.161). Also, that in order to achieve their own space, Chicano women writers have to combat the qualifications attached to them: extreme aggressiveness and behaviours "not akin to their feminine nature, when they achieve creative prowess" (p.161). For all these labels, it is not surprising then, that they consider themselves a minority group, whose opportunities have been restricted and their development diminished, due to their living in a men-oriented Latino community that threatens their fully exercising of moral and mental independence.

The House on Mango Street, a novel written by the Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros and published in 1984, is formed by forty-four stories interrelated by theme and character development. The work belongs to the tradition of female *bildungsroman,* what explains the introduction of topics connected with family life, childhood in the *barrio*, sexual awareness and abuse, woman's constraints, ethnic discrimination and vocation, all of which are presented as part of the tests and grieves the protagonist encounters in the process of becoming a woman and a writer. In addition, the development of these topics throughout the text can be considered as representative instances of the way men conceive women or, more precisely, stereotype them.

Esperanza Cordero, the female first-person narrator, is the central consciousness of the book and the one who recollects brief experiences from her life -giving voice to the ordinary insights of a young Chicano woman- as well as focuses on the formation of a collective subject. Hence, there is both a display of the corporeal, emotional, and cultural development of the protagonist as well as of her community. Finally, it is interesting to observe the linkage between protagonist and narrator to author, and protagonist to reader.

As expressed above, in the text there are episodes related to Esperanza's sexual wakefulness and abuse that can be considered as meaningful elements that unravel her past and reconcile it with the present. Thus, the story called "The Monkey Garden" (pp. 96-97) deals with the dispute between the narrator's friend Sally and a group of boys over the possession of her keys. The discussion turns into a sort of sexual game, when they ask her a kiss if she wants the keys back. At the beginning, Esperanza does not completely understand what is happening there, in the car, and thinking Sally is in danger she runs quickly looking for help. Unsuccessfully, she returns and tries courageously to rescue her from the boys, but she is ordered to go home while all of them begin to laugh. "They all looked at me as if *I* was the one that was crazy and made me feel ashamed" (p. 97). Their reaction makes her understand her friend's preference for male's company, sex being the determining factor of Sally's choice, at the same time that it represents Esperanza first sexual awareness and awakening into the adult world. Moreover, considering this episode from a feminist perspective, the masculine reaction of underestimating the girl as if she were "mad" and making her feel "ashamed" is man's typical reaction when feeling that their "world" (my emphasis) or sphere is being threatened by female intrusion. It is noticeable the protagonist's inability to talk to the boys: "something inside me wanted to throw a stick. Something wanted to say no when I watched Sally going into the garden with Tito's buddies all grinning" (p. 96) she thinks. Furthermore, when running to Tito's mother for help, she is not paid attention to. At her house she feels that her speech is empty of meaning and of power, and this falling of words into a vacuum indicates the suffocation of a young female's voice.

In another vignette, "The Family of Little Feet" (pp. 39-42), Lucy, Rachael and Esperanza are wearing high-heel shoes that a family has given them. They are very happy walking home pretending to be little women, without realizing they are calling attention from the men in the street. "The men can't take their eyes off us" (p. 40) we

read, or: “Ladies, lead me to heaven” (p. 41), words uttered when one boy shouts at them. The statement, well remembered by Esperanza, has the purpose of signalling the disparity existing between woman’s and man’s spheres of interest as well as their different intentions. At the end of their trip, the girls meet a drunken man who after calling Rachel “pretty” wants to buy her a kiss for a dollar. A similar situation occurs in “The First Job” (pp. 53-55), where again there is a gap between the ingenuousness of a young girl and the lasciviousness of an elderly man who, because of his age, deceives Esperanza asking for an innocent birthday kiss. Then, when she is about to put her lips on his cheek “[…] he grabs her face with both hands and kisses her hard on the mouth and doesn't let go” (p.55). The last two stories, especially, provide a striking contrast between the girls' naivety and their unawareness of the sexual perils they are exposed to and the libidinousness of men. These vignettes are also instances of the narrator’s conscious recognition of the structures of power in a Latino community, since they show how the protagonist is forced to face maturity, a maturity that is formed out of the unquestioned and silent acceptance of male abuse.

Finally, the vignette “Red Clowns” (pp. 99-100) describes the most traumatic happening in Esperanza’s life. This is related to the moment in which she was raped. When her friend Sally goes out with a big boy, she is left waiting by a poster with the picture of red clowns on it. A man comes and expressing his ‘love-lust’ (my emphasis) subdues her. Esperanza recollects the moment: “Sally, you lied. It wasn't what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn't want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it's supposed to be […] why did you lie to me?” The idealisation of love, so much proclaimed in the movies and in the storybooks she has read, provides a tearing discrepancy to the brutal reality of the experience lived, while the red clowns of the advertisement –a mocking symbol for her lost innocence- seem to laugh at her. The common basic elements that join this vignette with the preceding stories are the innocence of the protagonist in front of the events lived, her series of realizations of sexual life, and a generalised representation of men as sex-driven along with their indifference towards women’s feelings. At the same time, the words the protagonist utters asking for help demonstrate the futility of the action because they can never reach the addressee. Therefore, the scene can be associated with women’s state of defencelessness and marginalization in a male-centred society, where even their words cannot fulfil their purpose since nobody will receive the message, and where the only possible equation is between words and silence.

One important factor in identity construction is the acquisition of a name, a topic presented in the novel through the protagonist's reflection about her own, and which has strong feminist undertones since it describes Esperanza Cordero's feelings and position in her Chicano community. In "My Name" (p. 10) she says: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish, it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting". Esperanza inherits her great-grandmother's name because both were born in the year of the horse –a very powerful zodiac symbol- according to the Chinese horoscope, such circumstance carrying a negative connotation –bad luck- because the Chinese as well as the Mexicans dislike strong women. In the novel, name and surname are charged with significant and opposing undertones. Esperanza does not perceive that her name means not just to wait with longing, or with earnest desire, but also with a feeling of expectation, trust, and confidence. Contrarily, her surname, Cordero, in Spanish can be associated with the sacrificial goat, with the Lamb of Christian religion, with Christ, Who offered Himself to save humanity from sin. Of these two words -Cordero and Esperanza- the first one is associated with Christian resignation, acceptance, and offering while the second is linked with the idea that there could be a reversal of the situation. The former can also be related to her grandmother's destiny who had originally been a very strong and wild woman and who had refused to get married until Esperanza's great-grandfather "threw a sack over her head and carried her off", as if she were "a fancy chandelier", a possession, not a human being. Since then, she "looked out the window her whole life", longing, missing the freedom she had once possessed. Esperanza, knowing of her relative's previous situation does not want that same fate for herself, occupying that "place by the window" (p. 11), submitting to her husband's will and waiting in vain for a better future to come. In this episode the well defined patriarchal attitude of the community is highlighted as much as it is rejected by the protagonist.

Denise A. Segura refers to the concept of triple domination to which Chicanas are subjected, conceiving it as "the interplay between class, race, and gender" (1990, p. 61). She expresses that this "triple oppression has a cumulative effect", placing women of colour in a subordinate social and economic position in relation to men of colour and the majority white population. Gender abusiveness is visualized in the novel in "What Sally Said" (pp. 92-3) and in "Linoleum Roses" (pp.101-102). They deal with Sally's life when, being very young, she begins to be sexually active, and because of this behaviour she is talked about by the boys of the community and beaten brutally by her

father, once he sees her speaking with a boy (p. 93). In order to escape her father's abuses, she gets married to a man who also wants her to be under his control by neither allowing her talking on the telephone nor looking out the window: "[…] he doesn't like her friends, so nobody gets to visit her unless he is working". Moreover, "She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission" (p. 102), forced to look at all the things they own, the walls and ceiling. There is a contrast between Sally's submissive and passive attitude and Esperanza's inner rebelliousness, because the latter does not want to become one more window-sitter. A difference that makes of the protagonist a representative symbol of the new ethnic woman who will try to redefine the stereotyped male-assigned role, freeing herself from oppression. Furthermore, in order to emphasise the narrator's dissimilar female reaction, the writer tells another story: "Beautiful and Cruel" (pp. 88-89) that describes the way Esperanza is going to achieve her personal and gender individuation. We read:

> I am an ugly daughter. I' m the one nobody comes for.
> My mother says when I get older my dusty hair will settle and my blouse will learn to stay clean, but I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain (p. 88).
> […] I have begun my own quiet war. I am the one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate (p. 89).

Differently to what is expected from a woman raised in a male-ruled Chicano society, the protagonist prefers to be ugly rather than beautiful because prettiness –in that environment- is associated with a fast entrance into the category of a female as marketable in the marriage trade, a circumstance that as we have seen previously, she is reluctant to accept willingly. Instead, Esperanza is seeking freedom not fettered by the imposed gender division of her Chicano male culture.

Other Chauvinistic attitudes proper to the protagonist's Chicano community are described when she expresses that "the boys and the girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours" ("Boys and Girls", p. 8). Women's sphere is the house, and only there can they interact socially with men, but outside this realm "they [the boys] can't be seen talking to girls" (p. 8). And this is the reason why "Carlos and Kiki [Esperanza's brothers] are each other's best friend […] not ours" (p. 8), the protagonist complains. An appropriate example of how women are deprived of using their voice in front of men, demonstrating once more, how they are cornered into silence, and forced to accept men's rules as regards what the latter understand by gender

roles. As a young girl, living in a male-centred Hispanic community, she knows that one responsibility attached to her is to be in charge of her younger sister, Nenny, and also to avoid contact with other boys for fear of becoming like them. Esperanza's simultaneous feelings of subjugation and restraint are manifested in this case through a metaphor: "I am a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor" (p. 9). In the narrative, the circumscription of masculine and feminine roles is presented as an essential constituent of Chicano culture. Citing Denise Segura again, and comparing Chicanas' options with those of white men's and women's as well as with minority men's prospects, the former's limited alternatives are clearly perceived, such inferior status being "reproduced concurrently in the home and in all other arenas" (1990, p. 48).

There are not many vignettes devoted entirely to men's stories in the novel but since they are presented we come to know about all of them through the oblique vision of the protagonist –male's role being backgrounded. On many occasions, when women's qualities are emphasised, Esperanza's father is described as a contrastive figure to any other female character. "My Papa's hair is like a broom all up in the air" [...] "But my mother's hair", is like "little rosettes, like little candy circles all curly and pretty" [...] and "sweet to put your nose into when she is holding you" (p. 6). There, she feels safe. This last assumption is very meaningful. Within the rules of Chicano community, the man of the house has to be the strongest supportive figure. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be the case in this episode.

Benjamín Sáenz posits that the politics of identity cannot be separated from those injustices related to colour and class -an acknowledgement that we live in a racist and prejudiced society (1997, pp. 68-96). From this outlook the search for a better house becomes for Esperanza the realisation of social inequities due to class differences as well as a way to discover her inner self. The very first vignette of the novel makes reference to this pursuit. It is called "The House on Mango Street" (p. 3-5) and it deals with the protagonist's desire to have a house other than the one she presently lives in and of which she feels ashamed. The first person narrator also describes the environment as if pointing to the production and reproduction of appalling inequalities. Her parents have told her that their house would have "real stairs" and "a basement with three washrooms", and "when we took a bath we wouldn't have to tell everybody", so she explains (p. 4). In addition, she discloses the reader that "This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed" (p. 4). Ironically, the long-dreamt house

they finally manage to buy is located in a poor neighbourhood, where minorities like Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Chicanos live. The building is an old one with the paint peeling, and their residence is small, ugly and deteriorated, with only one shared-bathroom and with bricks crumbling in places; besides, it has a swollen front door that makes it hard to get in. The back is a small garage for the car they do not own yet and it has an ordinary hallway staircase. Esperanza feels the embarrassment produced by the shocking severing existing between the envisioned house and the real one. She is also aware of the shortcomings of their situation. "I know how these things go" (p. 5), she ponders when her parents express that her house would be a temporary settlement, acknowledging the impossibility of living in a better place, her ugly family-house being transformed into the symbolic representation of the unfairness of income distribution in the United States. It is a society her father can neither escape from nor improve.

The narrator's "sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language" [17] within the Anglo culture is acknowledged and suffered by Esperanza at different moments. Hence, she rationalizes that "[...] people like us keep moving in" (p. 13), or explains later that at school "they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth" while in Spanish "it is made out of softer something, like silver […]" (p.11); or explicates that her father has to eat "hamandeggs for three months"(p. 77) when he came to the United States, because that was the only word he knew; likewise illuminating the situation of any poor minority groups in an affluent society. In addition, in "Those Who Don't" (p. 29) a case of double marginality is mentioned when the narrative voice expresses that "the people who don't know any better come into our neighbourhood scared" (p. 29) thinking Chicanos are dangerous. This episode also reveals the ties that unite her people living in an environment where everybody knows each other and feels safe because they are "all brown all around". Nevertheless, they are the ones who feel afraid if they drive into "a neighbourhood of another color"; then, […] their "knees go shakity-shake" (p. 29) and so they have to roll up their car windows tight. Finally, in "Bums in the Attic" (p. 86) Cisneros uses a language of opposition again to mark class differences in the text. Esperanza remarks her tiredness at looking at what they cannot have –in reference to a house. She wishes to possess a house on a hill similar to the one where her father works. She says that the people who live there "forget those of us who live too much on earth".

[17] See Ashcroft et al. (1999) p. 178.

They are so satisfied with living on hills that they never look down at all. The consciousness of race, class and gender difference sets up an implicit cultural hierarchy, wherein almost inevitably the Chicano people -male and female alike- suffer in contrast with the white inhabitants of the community.

The house is also the mirror of Esperanza's alienated self and the representation of the recognised female desire to possess a place [18] of her own where she could be free. There are other stories closely related to this topic: "Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water" (p. 62), "A House of My Own" (p. 108), and "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes" (p. 109). In the first one, Esperanza goes to see a witch, Elenita, to know about her future and especially because she wants to know about the possibility of having a place of her own. The answer she receives is not understood at that moment, because the fortune teller visualises not a building, a house made of bricks, but "a home in the heart" (p. 64), it is "a house made of heart", and Esperanza says, "only I do not get it" (p. 64). As previously stated, at that moment Esperanza is neither conscious of the symbolic meaning of the witch's words nor of the fact that her future profession and the house are interconnected.

In the following story, "A House of My Own" (p. 108) –the penultimate in the book, consisting of only seven lines- the protagonist's wish is uttered. She wants a quiet house, "not a man's house", only a space of her own, "clean as paper before the poem", where that interrelatedness between her personal and artistic female aspirations could be forged and carried out. In the last episode cited -the last in the novel- the character has ended up her process of transformation when she discovers that the dwelling is her own special space of creation and where she could break the cycle of female domesticity. At this stage it is difficult to sever the topic of the house from the one of her artistic vocation, since both are intermingled. In the above mentioned last story "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes" Esperanza says:

> I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. […] I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong. […] what I remember most is Mango Street […] the house I belong but do not belong to. I put down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free. One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. […] They will not know I have gone away

[18] In this situation and according to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, the application of the term "place" has to be related to the protagonist's emotional conception which has a particular significance to her own life (1999, p. 179).

> to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out (pp. 109-110).

Her home becomes emblematic of the emergence of a mental place where her remembrances are and where her roots are, Esperanza realising that though her memories might be painful she cannot escape from them. Also, at this stage she is resolved to be the representing voice of her own female ethnic group whose sounds have been smothered either by race, class, culture, or gender determinants, or have not been uttered as loudly and powerfully enough as to be heard.

As a way of conclusion, Albina Quintana's words are wordy of mention: "Unless women begin to tell their own stories, they will continue to be what all Chicanos have been called, the bastard children of the universe" (p. 217), to which statement Annie O. Eysturoy (pp. 89-90) has added: "Language is a way of becoming, a way of imagining herself beyond the confinements of the *status quo*". Applying these ideas to Sandra Cisneros' novel, we observe how she has managed to find the way to redefine Chicanas' role -through the character of Esperanza- making the dramatised first person consciousness able to understand the structures of power present in her Latino as well as in the "Anglo" (my emphasis) communities, and later, to succeed in overcoming them the moment she grows physically and spiritually. The previous stages to her accomplishment of a personal and an artistic identity are marked by a series of incidents and recollections, as when she wishes to baptize herself under a new name, a name more like the real one, or when she let Minerva –a friend of hers- read her poems, or when she asserted that once she was going to have her own house without forgetting who she is or where she came from (p. 84); or later, when she remembers her mother's words saying that because she was ashamed of her clothes she could not be someone in life, in spite of her having brains (p. 91). In short, she accepts her condition as a Chicana woman writer within the Anglo society when at the end of the novel she can feel neither embarrassment nor a sense of inferiority. Accordingly, and through writing –a female tool of self expression- the young woman recreates her own personal story, overcomes gender constraints, learns the power of words, and defeats silence, achieving gender and social liberation. Finally, it can be assumed that patriarchal culture has traditionally relegated women to powerless positions (in the text this being exemplified through minor female characters' roles) having to confront the problem that the misrepresentation of the masculine vision brings about. Also, they have to face the issue

of seeking definition within the constraints of that male-centred society and framework. Nevertheless -in the case of the narrator- the artistic process of writing becomes her distinctive medium through which to express usable models for change. Thus, Esperanza Cordero makes her transformation possible when she acknowledges her aunt's Lupe advice: "You must keep writing. It will keep you free" (p. 61).

WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE FARMING OF BONES BY EDWIDGE DANTICAT

The Farming of Bones is the third book of fiction written by the Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat, in which she recollects a historical event occurred in 1937 in her neighbouring country, the Dominican Republic. She describes the massacre of thousands of Haitians expelled by dictator Trujillo, whose genocidal policy makes them surrender their homes, friends, betrothed, health and hopes -and in many cases their own lives- in their attempt to escape back to their own country. This bloody episode is the contextual frame within which Amabelle Désir, a maidservant to a wealthy Dominican family, becomes the narrator of her personal story. In due course, it is told how she and her lover, Sebastien Onius -who works in the cane fields-, are held in subservient positions in the above mentioned country, till finally a military assault against the foreigners abruptly forces them to leave the place.

Danticat's story brings to light the injustices that the Haitian residents in the Dominican Republic had to suffer in the first decades of the twentieth century; the Dominican/Haitian massacre being the historical crucial event alluded to in the text. On that occasion dictator Rafael Trujillo, inspired by Adolph Hitler, decided that he needed to "whiten" [19] his country. That brought about the murder of approximately thirty thousand civilians whose skin was slightly darker than that of the Dominicans´. Historical documents expressed that the dictator, in order to justify his racial prejudice, spread an intense campaign of "Dominicanization" in which his behaviour was understood as a kind of paternalist act. He intended to "save" (my emphasis) his people from the Haitian migrants, who, according to his point of view, were nothing but an obstacle for the broken economy of his country, believing that this destabilization was the consequence of the impossibility of selling sugar canes at a fair price. Therefore, the Dominicans felt they could not afford the coming of needy people to their own impoverished island. For this reason, and in order to carry out his enterprise, president Trujillo tried to dismantle Haitian migration, by deporting the men of the neighbouring

[19] Dominicans are mostly Creole -meaning an intermixing of European and African races, especially of Spanish descent. On the other hand, Haitians have been driven from Africa through the slave trade carried out by the French in order to make them work in the coffee and sugar plantations of Central America; due to their place of origin Haitians have a darker skin. In the year 1804 rebellious slaves expelled the French from their country and founded Haiti, the first black republic in the world.

country and by controlling the borders, though Haitians continued coming [(20)]. Owing to this, on October 2nd 1937, the tyrant took up the decision of ordering his men to stop any dark-skinned person with the purpose of making him pronounce aloud the word "parsley" in Spanish. Haitians, whose Creole [(21)] uses a wide, flat "r" could not pronounce the trilled "r", in the Spanish word "perejil". Consequently, they were easily detected and murdered.

Following Tyson's view, colonized peoples are defined as "any population that has been subjected to the political domination of another population" (1999, p. 364), a situation that perfectly matches the one described in Danticat's novel, where the Haitians are subjected to the arbitrary economic policy of the Dominican Republic. The narrative tells us about the experience of those peoples whose history was characterized by extreme political, social, and psychological oppression. In parallel with these issues, the text also portrays the detrimental effects caused on these dark-coloured inhabitants who had no other choice but to be in the Haitian diaspora once again. Having in mind these issues, the novel can be analyzed taking into account parameters related to postcolonial literatures, bearing in mind that postcolonial criticism implies a double purpose: to try to understand the operations of colonialist as well as anti colonialist ideologies, since postcolonial critics consider important the ideological forces that press the colonized to internalize the colonizer's values as much as to promote the resistance of colonized peoples against their oppressors (Tyson, p. 365). Ashcroft et al. (1989) share with Bhabha (1984) the implicit idea in the concept of "mimicry", by which it is understood the "ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized", when colonial "discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values". The result, however, is a "blurred" reproduction of the colonizer "that can be quite threatening" (1999, p. 139).

In addition to questioning postcolonial abuse, the novel deals with the story of two women that feel intimately attached to each other since childhood, but because they belong to dissimilar social classes, have different nationalities, and suffer the authoritarian vision of a male's centred society, they can not share, as true friends, the

[20] Trujillo, notwithstanding, cannot stop Haitian migration that is produced towards those huge American plantations in the Dominican Republic. Haitians are hired because they mean an extremely cheap hand working for the Americans.

[21] I am referring to the language used by a person who is born in the West Indies or Spanish America but whose ascendancy is European, in this case French, and who speaks a language that is a mixture of French and Spanish.

world that surrounds them; a world that forces them to live extremely contrasting experiences. Therefore, theoretical postulates related to Postcolonialism and Feminism can well be applied in this text since they demand and vindicate their own literature and identity through an awareness of difference.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin,

> Feminism is of crucial interest to post-colonial discourse for two major reasons. Firstly, both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate. Hence the experiences of women in patriarchy and those of colonized subjects can be paralleled in a number of respects, and both feminist and post-colonial politics oppose such dominance. Secondly, there have been vigorous debates in a number of colonized societies over whether gender or colonial oppression is the more important political factor in women's lives (1999, p.101).

However, and in spite of the spreading and omnipresent presence of men throughout the novel, two female characters perform outstanding roles too, Amabelle Désir having the leading one. The other character is Señora Valencia -the owner of the house where Amabelle lives in the Dominican Republic. Although at first reading the latter seems to be a secondary, man-obedient, and voice-lacking character, afterwards she discloses herself as able to develop a self-confident and very determined attitude in life, hidden aspects that connote a strong personality. Furthermore, in opposition to the other character, she personifies the voice of those women that, though silent and submissive to the patriarchal order, offer a kind of resistance that makes them tough.

Among the scholars interested in patriarchy, the psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo (1993) sees it as the "only root of industrial mentality, capitalism, exploitation, anxiety, alienation, incapacity for peace, and despoil of the land, among other evils that we are suffering" (p. 31). Patriarchy, for him, is the persistency of a bond of authority-dependence in the interior of each human being and thus of society; this man-ruled society becomes a tyranny of the paternal over the maternal and the filial views of life. Also, some feminist writers, one of which is Kate Millet, use the term "patriarchy" to describe the cause of women's subjugation. In her opinion patriarchy subordinates the female to the male estimating the first term as inferior to the second one. She also maintains that there is no pure feminist or female space from which women can speak. All ideas, including feminist ones, are in this sense "contaminated" by patriarchal ideology (1969).

In The Farming of Bones (1998) the recurrent mention of President Trujillo makes him a living presence. He exerts a pervading influence on the inhabitants of the island as an inflexible, all-powerful "patriarch" (my emphasis), able to purify the land of "tainted blood" (my emphasis) through terror and violence. When Señora Valencia's twins are born her father writes the time and place of the birth, noting that it is the "thirtieth of August, the year 1937, the ninety third year of independence, in the seventh year of the Era of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, Supreme Commander-in-Chief, President of the Republic" (p. 17). Therefore, male hegemony is established in the text, and this truth is reinforced when authoritatively the boy's father names his son after the president' -the mother agreeing merely with a "coy nod". The large portrait of the Generalissimo that hangs in the parlor, which Señora Valencia has painted "at her husband's request", is also meaningful (p. 42). The painting -an improved version based on a public photograph- shows him in his full military regalia, with epaulets and medals denoting his rank. In addition, the inclusion of this incident in the text is a clear sign of the powerful influence this man exercises over the country and also his mastery over the lives of the people that inhabit the home.

Taking into account the tyranny of paternal rule and related to it, Henrietta L. Moore devotes one of the chapters in her book Antropología y Feminismo (1999, pp. 27-39) to deal with the situation of women in all societies, basing her studies on the analysis of gender relationships. In this text, she specifically quotes and explains Sherry Ortner's [(22)] (1974) essay where the latter affirms the recognition and establishment in all cultures of the difference between the human society and the natural world, and the obvious dominance and superiority that culture exerts over nature. However -Ortner adds- despite the fact that feminine subordination is universal, this condition cannot be interconnected to any biological difference between man and woman, but has to be understood within a system of values culturally defined (p.71-72).

[22] See Sherry Ortner's essay "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" (pp. 67-78).

Analogically, and according to the author, we symbolically identify women with nature and men with culture. Furthermore, because the latter aspires to control and rule the former, it is likewise 'natural' for women to experiment the same restraint. Women subjugation forms the true foundation of feminist criticism, regardless the fact that feminist critics have questioned these assumptions.

One of the established assumptions is that women are nearer nature owing to their physiology and their specific breeding function; for this reason, their needs for creativity are naturally satisfied in the act of giving birth. In contrast, men, prone to artificial creation, are compelled into using cultural means -technology, symbols- with the purpose of perpetuating culture. Responding to the stereotype, in the novel there is an explicit mention to birthing when the protagonist, Amabelle, helps her Señora to bring her children to life, a boy and a girl, but it is only the girl, though described as "smaller than her twin, less than half his size" (p. 11), the one that survives. Her description as the weaker of the two, with a deep-bronzed skin resembling an Indian princess, and ignored by her father, is not casual. Danticat makes of these detailed traits the representation of the state of fragility, oblivion, and discrimination, denoting women's subjection. The girl is doubly segregated, firstly, due to her female condition, and secondly, to her coloured skin. In spite of this, the writer subtly and ironically remarks woman's physical as well as spiritual capacity to endure.

Another postulate, which is well rooted in Western culture and that Ortner (pp. 67-88) mentions, refers to women's roles as closer to nature. The critic explains how procreation has limited women to specific social functions, the confinement to the domestic-family-child-caring circle being the most significant one. In addition, this entrustment of women to the household sphere locates their principal activities to intra-family and inter-family relationships, whereas men's occupations are visible in public life.

The domestic and social responsibilities allotted to women are delimited very early in the novel. Amabelle Désir and Señora Valencia are the perfect stereotypes of compliant women under patriarchal rule. The first of the two is haunted by the shadows of her past, a past that gives her back the image of her parents drowning. Amabelle's recurrent death-dream stigmatises her with the deceit of not living a real life, so much so, that throughout the entire narrative she will be like a ghost, or a shadow of her inner self, unable to behave as an independent woman. As for her relationship with Sebastien Onius, the man of her life, she remembers, "I'm afraid to fold in two and disappear […] I am afraid I cease to exist when he's not there. […] When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me" (p. 2). In these death-loaded lines, the writer seems to emphasize the representation of female stereotype, as a creature without a voice that lives under the shadow of a man, and consequently the character's impossibility to

develop a self-ruled personality. Moreover, these words uttered in the first stages of the narrative preannounce Amabelle's conduct; she will always accept and obey her master's and other people's suggestions rather than fulfil her own desires. Sebastien's words corroborate this: "You become this uniform they make for you […]" (p. 2) implying the fact that she carries out "assigned" (my emphasis) tasks instead of being the agent of her own actions. She herself recognizes her incapacity for not having a life that would be entirely hers. A life she has been wishing "looking out of the corner of her eye for a sign telling her it were time to change it" (p. 79). Again, the representation of the silence within female discourse is what prevails.

On another occasion Amabelle thinks, "When I was a child, I used to spend hours playing with my shadow" […] "Playing with my shadow made me, an only child, feel less alone" (pp. 3-4). The explanation to her lonesomeness is given later. Being very young when her parents died, she is taken to Señora Valencia's household, where she begins to serve the family -though she is not a servant. Sharing the same bedroom with Valencia -when her father has gone to sleep- they play with their shadows feigning a sort of happiness they do not feel (p. 6). In the text, to make the characters entertain themselves with their own shadows connotes they are playing with the mute and distorted representation of themselves, and also suggests the image the mirror gives a person back. The reflected image is always dark and diffuse, indicating, metaphorically, the way these women see themselves: as non-living "entities" (my emphasis) that cannot talk. Thus, and since both characters participate of this sort of game, this 'drama' (my emphasis) becomes the enactment of the woman's ancient consciousness to which a weighty sense of suffering and of dumbness is ascribed. In addition, their playing together and the familiarity with which they used to address each other denote a kind of women's communal understanding of one another. Nevertheless, class-barriers imposed on them due to their belonging to different social backgrounds "silence" (my emphasis) a frankly opened friendship, and compel them to perform the never forgotten old roles of master and servant.

In reference to Valencia, Señor Pico Duarte asks her in marriage after a very short period of visiting her parlour. Her father consents to it on condition that his daughter stays in her own comfortable house. He wants to prevent her from living near the barracks, the place her future husband is often located because of his military obligations. It is noticeable how Señora Valencia's father and husband, in a similar overprotective behaviour, exclude her from the world of affairs, under the assumption of

being concerned with "her welfare" (my emphasis). This patriarchal attitude can be connected with Nancy Fraser's [23] words (1988) when she expresses that the separation of the official economic sphere from the domestic one and child-rearing practices from the rest of social labour contributes to women's subordination.

Afterwards, when Señora Valencia is in her labor pains, Amabelle has to help her because the doctor is not at home. Papi -Valencia's father- has no other choice except to trust his only child's life to Amabelle's "inept hands" [24] (p. 6). Amabelle states "I had to calm her […] as she (Señora Valencia) had always counted on me to do, as her father had always counted on me to do" (p.7). Then, after the moment of delivery, Amabelle tells her Señora that the child will belong to her forever and she replies, "Like I belonged to my mother" (p.7) words that announce the eternal existing bond between mother and child, and also of the live affinity and attachment among women. This episode is suitable to reaffirm the activity of helping in the act of delivery as undoubtedly related to women's realm, a prerogative that the men of the house are unwilling to share. Empathy, solidarity, and an adherence to the patriarchal order are at the basis of their relationship, to which in Amabelle's case, a sense of inferiority and of being nobody is added, due to her having experienced racial and social discrimination based on her skin colour and lower social position.

Correspondingly, Amabelle's feelings of underestimation can be compared to Valencia's feelings in relation to her husband. She tells Amabelle that Señor Pico dreams of advancing in the army and becoming president of his country; this being the reason of her fear that when he "procures everything he wants, he might not want [her] anymore" (p. 27). Her dependency upon "male strength" (my emphasis) uncovers once more, men's creation of the female stereotype.

In a similar manner, and maybe out of fear for not pleasing her master enough, Amabelle demonstrates an obedient and dependent attitude. She remembers the moment Señor Pico Duarte runs into the house to find his wife and newborn children. When he enters the "floor thundered under his boots" and the housemaids are ready to follow him just in case he may need their help, but trying not to be seen, because, she thinks "working for others, you learn to be present and invisible at the same time" (p. 34). Her

[23] In "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender" in Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, (1988). (Eds.) Feminism as Critique, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2nd printing.

[24] Amabelle's words in reference to herself.

behaviour is the faithful description of what Shoshana Felman [25] posits as the consequence of an oppressive and male-centred culture. She declares "for a woman to be healthy she must 'adjust' to and accept the behavioural norms for her sex even though these kinds of behaviour are generally regarded as less socially desirable" (p. 133).

With the death of a sugarcane-worker, Joël [26], the relentless killing of the *wayfarers*, or sugar-cane cutters starts on the island. Dominican soldiers and landowners evicted Haitian sugar-cane workers, servants, and their families, chasing them across the border into Haiti. Through the car incident -where Joêl dies- we are shown how class division works in the text. The driver [27], Señor Pico, coming back from the barracks was driving very fast that day because his siblings were going to be born. Then, when he approached the ravines he saw three men walking ahead. Señor Pico shouted at the men and blew the klaxon. So, two of them ran off while the other one didn't seem to hear the horn and consequently the automobile struck him. "The man yelled when he was hit, but when the driver and the two men came out to look, he was gone" (pp. 37-38). When Papi reports the piece of news to Amabelle, it seems a matter of fact information, without demonstrating any sign of regret for the dead man. He said:

> I think we killed a man tonight […]. My son-in-law did not want to stay and search, and I did not force him to do it. It was already dark. I didn't make myself or Luis go down into the ravine to look for the man, to see if we could save his life. You will tell me, Amabelle, if you hear of this man, if you hear that he lived or died. You will ask your friends and then report to me" (p. 44).

Later, it is expressed that the owner of the field where the bracero worked is not going to pay for the burial, another sign of the indifference of the ruling class for those poor and unprotected human beings.

In relation to Joël's male co-workers, they state feelings of anger and revenge while women's attitude -in spite of having known him- is of mere acceptance of the fact. Therefore, Mimi -Sebastien's sister- manifests that since the person who has died is not one of them -referring to Dominicans- "there's nothing we can do" and, Amabelle's answer is "We must leave it to Kongo, -Joël's father- […] it is his son who

[25] Felman, Shoshana. "Women and madness: the critical phallacy" in Diacritic, (1975) 5, pp. 2-10.
[26] The character is one of the men that worked at Don Carlos' mill and one of Sebastien's close friends.
[27] In the text we are said how "an automobile hit Joël and sent him into the ravine" (p 47) while he was walking along with Yves and Sebastien.

died. He will know best what to do" (p. 66). It is uncertain whether her answer comes out of fear or of restraint, though it is evident that she has been used to exercising self-control since she was a child. In any case, it is possible to match this utterance with a former dialogue she has had with Sebastien, where she reminds him that her master has rifles and that they are "on his property" (p. 51). Her words sound as a warning to him not to interfere with her master's life. In this episode, the concept of mimicry works in the text when Amabelle puts herself in the position of an obedient woman who does not want to meddle with man's sphere thus performing the well-known convention of a woman's role. Besides, and most important, it seems as if she aligns with the dominator in order to be assimilated and adopted by him. In both circumstances, a similar conduct is displayed. Amabelle presents herself as cautious, abstaining from releasing any expression of anger or disagreement that might suggest subversion. Accustomed as she is to male authoritative assertions, nothing but acquiescence can come from her. This sort of behaviour could be framed within what Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin consider identity destruction that may have been perpetrated through "cultural denigration", what means "the oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model" (1989, p. 9).

Another situation in which the protagonist shows a docile behaviour is produced the moment she receives the order from Dr. Javier (p. 140) to leave the house, because he has heard that on the Generalissimo's orders, soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians (p. 140). For Amabelle everything is very strange since she remains ignorant of what is happening around the island lately, and is not prepared to face the crude reality that her stable world is being shuttered. Therefore, she begins to doubt even whether her Señora could help her or not. "Would she be brave enough to stand between me and her husband if she had to?" is her problem (p. 141). According to Toril Moi's (1999) re-reading of Hélène Cixous, there is death in this kind of thought. For in the relationship between husband and wife, for one of the terms to acquire meaning, it must destroy the other (1986: 84). Paradoxically, at this moment, Amabelle is equating her Señora's passivity with defeat under patriarchy. In this event, Amabelle's reasoning typifies what Cixous (1989) calls "death-dealing binary thought". The critic, in her attempt to fix woman's place in the patriarchal value system, forms a column by two's of antithetic terms which are heavily interwoven in that system -where the "feminine" side is always seen as the negative powerless instance (1989, pp. 101-102). She also posits that Western philosophy and literary thought is caught up in his endless series of

hierarchical binary oppositions which always come back to the fundamental couple of male/female with its unavoidable judgement of positive/negative given respectively to the first and second terms of the cited binarism. Accordingly, when Cixous explains that there is "death" in this kind of thought, she means that to acquire significance -in the representation of the conflict for signifying supremacy- one of the binary terms must succumb, but under the influence of a male-centred society we know the result: man is always the winner (Moi, pp. 124-5).

An essential aspect to consider is the last dialogue Amabelle has with Sebastien. The latter expresses, "You never believed those people could injure you […] Even after they killed Joël, you thought they could never harm you", and she, before replying, recognizes that she has been living inside her dreams and that when the present itself seems to be very frightful, she has always decided "not to see it" (p. 143). These words reaffirm the protagonist's estrangement from the socio-political affairs. Instead, she prefers to live in a "silent world of dreams" (my emphasis) because the external one, that of reality, is ominous and threatening to her. This conversation can be compared with another one held between Señora Valencia and Doctor Javier's sister, Beatriz, where the former shows her desire to know "what draws Javier to the border", thinking that perhaps it is the same thing that has kept her husband there (p.148). Similarly, like in the previous circumstances, the emphasis put on women's incompetence to understand men's actions is noteworthy, since the stereotype claims the fulfilment of the division between public and private spheres for men and women respectively.

The separation between the two protagonist female characters is rather abrupt and without announcement; Amabelle is driven back to her own country amid trials of survival and endurance. She manages to return thanks to the help received by various persons; nevertheless, the experiences lived will not make her grow and mature. Differently to what is expected, she will be like a leaf in the wind. According to Bressler (2003), this feeling of homelessness or abandonment by both cultures, as well as the feeling of being caught by the two, has been described by Homi Bhabha as "unhomeliness", and by some other theorists as "double consciousness", what causes the colonized to become a psychological refugee (p. 203).

Hence, once in her country, Amabelle is unable to reunite with Sebastien, who had been killed when he tried to cross the border, and not knowing what to do, she is suggested to sew for other people to support herself. This meaningful job can again be

symbolically connected with Amabelle's desire to heal with stitches each of the many physical and psychological wounds received.

However, unfit to forge new affective ties, to fall in love again, to have hopes, and to build a new future, she finally returns to the Dominican Republic. Inwardly barren and incomplete, always tied up to her gloomy memories, she performs her only free act: that of facing what is left of her past life and affections. This meeting can be related with what Homi Bhabha (1990) posits in Nations and Narration. There, he supports the idea of nation as inseparable from its narration and the act of narration as the place where identity and individuality are forged. He also manifests that the margins of the nation displace the centre and that the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis. These concepts can be applied to the novel when the protagonist -inhabitant of the periphery- breaking into the margins of the Dominican Republic, comes back to the country that has expelled her in order to complete her own personal story.

Therefore, Amabelle goes to the encounter of Señora Valencia at her house in the Dominican Republic. The meeting reveals itself as important because it establishes the characters' different attitudes during those difficult years. It is there that she sees for herself that her Señora Valencia is still married, though husband and wife are living their own lives "the way things had always been" (p. 289) –implying the lack of communication and common interests between husband and wife. Señor Pico, who now has an official post in the government, no longer lives in the barracks or in the countryside having moved to Santo Domingo. Instead, Valencia continues living in Alegria, though not in the same house she used to. She manifests the impossibility of leaving both country and husband, since to do so would mean to assume that she is "against him" (p. 298). Her former outward submissive attitude is repeated. In the text, her husband's position of power is not even mentioned, but felt and silently recognized as such. In spite of this, Sra Valencia states her stance during the massacre, what demonstrates that even from the "shadows" (my emphasis) she could offer resistance.

> During El Corte, though I was bleeding and nearly died, I hid many of your people," she whispered. […] "I hid a baby who is now a student at the medical school …I hid Sylvie and two families…I hid some of Doña Sabine's people […] I did what I could in my situation." […] "I hid them because I couldn't hide you, Amabelle. I thought you'd been killed, so everything I did, I did in your name (p. 299).

Finally, it can be said that both women have lived under patriarchal rule, and both have willingly accepted what was expected from them. Nevertheless, while Amabelle was unable to trust in her Señora's inner disposition to help her at the time of the military raid of 1937, believing she was perhaps too naive and too self-conscious of class divisions, we discover in Valencia's attitude a surprising and unexpected strength. We observe that Valencia has bore suffering and survived, that although she has remained faithfully devoted to her husband and country, she did not deceive herself as regards her true convictions. Thus, her opposition to that violent male-centred organized society is a step forward into undoing women's cultural repressions, a move taken the moment she decides to hide and help the people she knew. In this sense -according to the postulates of feminism- women find it difficult to turn their experiences meaningful, to have a voice of their own, and to get rid of the stereotype. The character, nonetheless, manages to do it silently, in an unnoticed way, challenging tyrannous rulers: her husband and president, without expecting recognition or even hoping to be thanked for what she has done.

And, in relation to Amabelle, at the beginning of the narrative she fortuitously becomes an instrument of life -although she does not think of herself as a midwife (p. 19). Unfortunately, she cannot perform a midwifery job in Haiti because Doctor Javier, who has offered her work there, has become mad after the slaughter -another instance of the consequences of enslavement of men and women by a more powerful country. Therefore, forced to a loveless and sterile existence, Amabelle's position is identical to any postcolonial subject who has suffered an identity crisis produced through displacement. This means that through what Ashcroft et al. call "dislocation" (1999, p. 73) -the consequence of forced migration- the erosion and the split of the self is produced. This result can also occur through the alienation of people by the imposition of the colonial language. In the novel, this is achieved when the Haitians are stopped by the Dominicans to make them pronounce the word "perejil" correctly- a situation that also hides the true purpose of the action that is to discriminate and eliminate the former owing to racial and class prejudices. On the other hand, and due to the protagonist's inability to narrate her own story to the authorities, to perpetuate life through birthing, to fall in love again, and to her incapacity of living with her painful memories wanting nevertheless to keep them alive, she decides to submerge herself into the Massacre River.

To conclude, the roles assumed by these two women in the course of the narrative represent different female attitudes in front of hegemonic control and of a patriarchal society. It is demonstrated how at the beginning of the novel Señora Valencia has been externally acculturated into the role-stereotyping system that the Dominican society has provided for. Then, at the end of the narrative her attitude changes and she is able to overcome the part of an always-obedient wife, in order to develop a real consciousness-raising that allows her to adopt a challenging behaviour towards her adverse environment, giving shelter to families when trying to escape from the tyrant military forces.

Contrarily, Amabelle represents the ambiguous impact of those life experiences of women that, in the first place, accept submissively the oppressor's impositions without any sort of questioning and blend into the alien Dominican society consenting to its rules and culture. In the second place, and opposite to what might be expected of her, after an extenuating physical and psychological suffering, the character does not seem to either react or get the remains of what has been left of her emotional faculties back. Instead, she continues being attached to her muted past of shadows, ghosts, and deaths. Thus, in the silent stream of "blood", as if in a baptismal ceremony within a river water current -where thousands have made of it their graves- she slides, letting herself be caressed by the river flow, uniting death and life in a healing and regenerating process, in order to some day be able to participate in and be restored to the cycle of life again.

IS RHYS' ANTOINETTE REALLY A MARIONETTE?

It took Jean Rhys twenty one years to write Wide Sargasso Sea. The novel, published in 1966, has as its setting the West Indies of the 1840s, being inspired by a minor character of an English classic, Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. During an interview, Rhys manifested that when she read the English novel as a child, she thought that she would like to give Bertha – Rochester's mad Jamaican wife- a life, and according to Spivak, that was what she did (1989, p.183). Shifting the focus from Jane to Bertha, Rhys challenges a selection of accepted Victorian England truths, culture, and its Eurocentric attitude towards Third-World Countries. Wide Sargasso Sea lends itself to a variety of critical and increasingly fashionable interpretations. This novel rewrites the English feminist novel dealing with the topic of economic subjugation and abuse in terms of gender, at the same time that it presents issues of race, ethnicity [(28)], slavery, and those concerning geographical descriptions as matters of differentiation, leading the reader inevitably to interpret them within the postulates of postcolonial studies.

When in 1985 Gayatri Spivak wrote her essay "Can the subaltern speak?" she referred to those oppressed subjects of "inferior rank". She followed the work of a group of intellectuals who studied the subordination in South Asian society "in terms of class, case, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Gandhi, p. 1). In this manner, "'Subaltern Studies' defines itself as an attempt to allow the 'people' finally to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and, in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed" (p. 2). Therefore, the notion of subaltern is a very complex one, related to any academic activity dealing with historically determined associations of dominance and subordination. Although in her essay Spivak arrives at the conclusion that "the subaltern cannot speak" (1988, p. 308), the postulates of Postcolonial studies give an answer to her question [(29)] This theory is best conveyed

[28] The concept of "ethnicity" is taken from Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin who in Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies (1999, p. 80) define this term following Schermenhorn's words: (the term) "has been used increasingly since the 1960s to account for human variation in terms of culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry, rather than the discredited generalizations of "race" with its assumption of a humanity divided into fixed, genetically determined biological types. Ethnicity refers to the fusion of many traits that belong to the nature of any ethnic group: a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, behaviours, experiences, consciousness of kind, memories and loyalties" (1974, p. 2).

[29] Postcolonial Studies come to represent "a meeting point and battleground for a variety of disciplines and theories" (p. 3) which very often are mutually antagonistic. Gandhi, Leela, (1998) Postcolonial Theory. New York: Columbia University Press.

through the notion of "postcoloniality" because the term appeals to an original situation of oppression and of troubled relationships between coloniser and colonised, as well as to the undeniable attraction of colonial power. Consequently, its derivative term postcolonialism alludes to "a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past" (p. 4). Leela Gandhi expresses of this past:

> […] It is not simply a reservoir of 'raw' political experiences and practices to be theorised from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity, characterised by a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonised subjects (p. 5).

Applying these ideas to Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea it is possible to observe them interacting in the text. Thus, the purpose of this work is to analyse those previously mentioned subject matters as well as the social forces at work within the environments in which they are placed in relation to the most important characters of the novel, and in all cases viewing the situation from a female perspective. All in all, Wide Sargasso Sea can be seen as an anti-Establishment novel, in the sense that it shows with an unvarnished realism women's situation under patriarchal and Eurocentric rule, and where the protagonist is reduced to a ghost. However, her state of madness and alienation also signals a mechanism of self preservation against a hostile world, as well as the female writer's unusual narrative strategy to present her own woman's viewpoint.

It can be agreed with Mary Lou Emery (p. 63) -when referring to Rhys's early novels- that Rhys' characters lack homes and homelands. Though Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) does not belong to this first group of works of fiction, the situation of the protagonist is that of a homeless. In this novel Antoinette is a white Creole who lives in 19th century Jamaica and Dominica islands, and then, uprooted from her environment, taken to England. The experience of moving to another place is not a rewarding one, since to her previous feeling of unrequited love there can be added those of loneliness, dispossession, and homelessness; also, of belonging nowhere.

The most contrasting geographical settings –specifically the Caribbean and England- are signalled in the novel when Antoinette arrives in the European country. There, she crudely experiments a clash of cultures and an intensification of an abusive treatment. On the other hand, Edward, the English male protagonist suffers his own

displacement when living in Dominica and Jamaica. His dislike and rejection for an environment he is not used to makes him manifest remorsefully: "I would give my eyes never to have seen this abominable place"(p. 161). Worthy of mention is how this cultural geographical confrontation affects the lives of the protagonists, especially Antoinette's, who, when carried to the First-World country, is unable to decide about her own life and act consequently. In a state of "semi-consciousness" –or "madness" according to Edward-, not properly in control of herself, she is treated as if she were a man's property -her husband's possession- who egotistically decides to settle her in England, the place he really belongs to and likes to reside. This episode helps highlight the implicit hierarchy of male dominance, in which Edward acts as a transmission-agent of imperial power. But, in order to understand why Antoinette has suffered physical and psychological alienation, it will be convenient to comment on the previous circumstances surrounding her life that have engendered that state and have made of her a "displaced" and "marginal" (my emphasis) human being.

As stated above, the mad woman in the attic –Bertha- of Charlotte Brontë's novel has her correlate in Rhys' fiction in the character of Antoinette, who, at the beginning of the story, is a very young woman living in Coulibri Estate, the place where her parents and forefathers have been "detestable slave-owners since generations" (WSS, p. 95). In Jane Eyre (1934), the Mason family from Jamaica consists of husband and wife and three children, including Bertha. The black population of Jamaica is not directly mentioned, though indirectly "present" in some of the descriptions given by Jane of Bertha's "thick and dark hair […]" and "discoloured face" (pp. 282-3), suggesting the possibility of a "tainted" blood. In addition, Brontë uses the term 'Creole' to refer to Bertha's mother, who was both a mad and alcoholic woman (p.291). Though much of the hypotext remains unmodified, Rhys introduces several changes in her own story. She keeps the basic family structure of two parents and three children, but this new family is a combination of two earlier family units, with the result that Antoinette is not a Mason by blood. Richard, her brother in the English novel, becomes her stepbrother, and her father in Jane Eyre becomes her stepfather in Wide Sargasso Sea. The dead father, Cosway, Antoinette's mother's first husband, is therefore introduced into the Caribbean's novel, and with him another group of possible relatives, Daniel and Alexander Cosway, presumably half-brothers to Antoinette. There is also Alexander's son Sandi, a kind of half-nephew whom Antoinette calls cousin, and with whom she is presumed to have had a love affair. Significantly, the ideal family structure

in the hypertext is broken to give in to a series of "half" relationships among its different members, as if the topic to be highlighted were their lack of "purity". This family tree can be associated to the topic of miscegenation since we must not forget that although Antoinette is "white" she is a Creole too. Besides, this change in the family conformation allows the writer to intensify Antoinette's sense of loneliness and bereft of her father, as well as the separation from her mother who lost her own sanity due to the disturbances of the 1844s by the emancipated negroes [30], that caused the burning of her family house, Coulibri, and the death of her idiot son Pierre. The protagonist remembers:

> Aunt Cora told me that my mother was ill and had gone to the country. This did not seem strange to me for she was part of Coulibri, and if Coulibri had been destroyed and gone out of my life, it seemed natural that she should go too (p.133).

Antoinette also keeps in mind that "she must forget and pray for [her mother] as though she were dead, though she is living" (p. 55). Adds later that "she was so lonely that she grew away from other people. That happens. It happened to me too […]" (p.130). In fact, the young girl is like an orphan since the moment she cannot find the support she needs either in her step-father or in her mother, especially because the latter proves to be a very weak woman, powerless to cope with the losses previously enunciated, and reduced to an animal-like state inflicted by her intense suffering: "She shut herself away, laughing and talking to nobody as many can bear witness. […] We all wait to hear the woman jump over a precipice 'fini batt'e' as we say here which mean 'finish to fight' " (p. 97), comments another character. As a result of her behaviour she is separated from the house and the family, and in her seclusion she refuses to see her daughter. Therefore, the young woman is left by herself once again. Mr. Mason, Antoinette's stepfather, who is supposed to have the responsibility of educating her, cannot cope with this situation either, and the girl remembers that she seldom sees him. "He seemed to dislike Jamaica, Spanish Town in particular, and was often away for months" (p. 55). Afterwards, he is afraid or rather suspicious of a possible improper relationship between Antoinette and her half-cast cousin Sandi, so he

[30] According to Peter Hulme "the events to which the novel 'refers' were the 1844 census riots –in Dominica- in which a series of disturbances ensued after he rumour took hold that the census was prelude to the reintroduction of slavery. Threats were made to whites, a few stones were thrown, a few houses ransacked-but none burned down […] As a result of this furore the intermittent rioting of these three days in June 1844 became known as the 'guerre nègre' and is recalled as one of the salient incidents in 19thc West Indian history." (p. 81)

decides to take the young lady to a convent until she becomes of age to be offered –as a trophy- in marriage. Till this moment, there are various elements that have forged Antoinette's multiple marginality: the absented parents and the lack of true friends, the dispossession of affections and love, the imposed seclusion in a "cold" convent and the deprivation of the cosiness of a home, and finally, the compelled mobility to other places to live. In addition to these, there are other ways of exclusion that the protagonist and her mother have to endure, and that –as previously mentioned- are associated with the topics of race, ethnicity, and class. Firstly, her mother, being a "Martinique girl" and the second wife of Antoinette's father, was never approved by the Jamaican ladies, who thought she was "too young for him" (p.17). Secondly, Antoinette's childhood was a lonesome one because they [her mother and she] never received visitors. The explanation that her mother gave her is that, "the road from Spanish town to Coulibri Estate […] was very bad and that road repairing was now a thing of the past" (p. 17). Later, it is made known that the garden that used to be "large and beautiful as the garden in the Bible […] had gone wild", and that "All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery -why should *anybody* work*?*" (p. 19) The remembrance of a past of richness and slavery makes explicit the fact that they belong to a social class that no longer exists, but that is repudiated by the "coloured" natives. There is another example that tells of Antoinette's family's former situation, and that is connected with Christophine, a Martinique woman who lived with them. This girl had been given "as a wedding present" to Antoinette's mother by her husband (p. 21). Nevertheless, with the death of the father and the independence and liberation of the black inhabitants of the island, the Creole family and its "privileged" condition of wealth and power declines, and Antoinette remembers her mother's words: "Now we are marooned […] "now what will become of us?". The male members of the family are condemned by their shameful behaviour, and Antoinette becomes the last defenceless representative of a former past of exploitation, abuse, and racial discrimination to be blamed for. Her loneliness increases because she is a white Creole who lives between two cultures, wanting to know and live in England –the place she was talked about so much and for which she experiences a sort of magical attraction-, but at the same time loving the Islands and being attached to former environments and their exuberant settings and atmospheres. Actually, Antoinette belongs to nowhere, since she is rejected by both surroundings and their people as well. Edward, Antoinette's husband, feels this way when he thinks: "She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes.

Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either". His feelings of racial and ethnic superiority and discrimination over her class, as well as his cultural Eurocentric attitude regarding less developed West Indies countries are foregrounded through his words. Furthermore, Antoinette is called "white cockroach" by Amélie, a black woman who helps with the household chores (p. 100) pointing at her "tainted", inferior-class origin. The female protagonist afterwards recollects: "That's what they call all of us who were here before their own people in Africa sold them to the slave traders. And I've heard English women call us white niggers. So […] I often wonder who I am and why was I ever born at all" (p. 102). According to Elizabeth Nunez-Harrell, her status as a white Creole woman is that of "an outcast, a sort of freak rejected by both Europe and England -whose blood she shares- and by the black West Indian people, whose culture and home have been hers for two generations or more" (pp. 1-2).

The relationship between Edward Rochester and Antoinette is another instance that helps increase the female protagonist's sense of insecurity, marginality, and Third-World female subjugation. The marriage between the two major characters in the novel resulted in a complete failure mostly owed to at least three different reasons: Edward's narrow-mindedness that did not allow him to receive the openness of heart and passionate feelings that Antoinette displays; his inability to trust in his wife's faithfulness and love; and finally, his own sense of feeling out of place, surrounded by black people whose colour, feelings, and culture he rejects, and with whom he is unable and unwilling to share and understand anything. Moreover, the West Indies wild and exuberant location is a force strongly depicted in the novel, performing the role of an uncontrolled but also responsive character. The description of this environment adds to the truncated and consequently failed relationship between Antoinette and her husband, implying also the impossibility of the two social worlds –of which both characters are their faithful representatives- to come to terms with each other. In the novel this is exemplified in a variety of ways. In part two the narrator is no longer Antoinette and the events are presented from Edward's viewpoint. This change in the narrative voice allows the reader to observe things from a different angle, and to share the intimacy of the male protagonist's thoughts. Hence, Edward's remarkable antipathy and aversion towards his newly-wed bride, her behaviour, her Jamaican background and its people's attitude in general are made visible. There are many instances in the text that support

this appreciation, among which the following ones, related to the setting and local inhabitants, are crucial:

> Most of the women were outside their doors looking at us but without smiling. Sombre people in a sombre place (p. 68).
> I understood why the porter had called it a wild place. Not only wild but menacing. Those hills would close in on you (p. 69).
> Everything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red the mountings too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger. Her pleading expression annoys me. (p. 70)
> A cool and remote place… […] It was all very brightly coloured, very strange, but it meant nothing to me. (p. 76)

Related to Antoinette, one night, during her honeymoon her husband Edward found two wreaths of frangipani on his bed and though he crowned himself with one of them, immediately afterwards he took it off. The wreath fell on the floor and he stepped on it. "The room was full of the scent of crushed flowers", he recalls. The flowers, representing West Indian vegetation, surroundings and atmosphere, though destroyed, are not be extinguished at all since their perfume cannot be dissipated. All in all, it can be possible to associate this episode with the writer's "subconscious" desire to confer the place an essence and even an identity that nobody could completely annihilate.

Regarding their "arranged" (my emphasis) marriage, we know that Rochester does not feel any powerful attachment to the girl, that she means nothing to him, and that she does not want to marry him in spite of the fact that Richard Mason tried unsuccessfully to convince her of doing so. Furthermore, Edward –who could not return back to England in the "role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl" (p. 78) - finally made her change her mind, promising Antoinette peace, happiness, and safety. Then, the accusation of infidelity –applied to both characters- is mentioned as one of the causes of their separation. In the case of Antoinette it is presented as a sort of rumour developed by her jealous half-brother Daniel Cosway [(31)]. And, as regards Edward, unfaithfulness is subtly hinted as a kind of revenge. Edward commits adultery with Amelie, a half-caste servant of the house. His behaviour is the most debasing and shocking of the two since Antoinette could not avoid but hearing the lovers. The adultery is explicitly described as taking place in a contiguous room. But Edward -not satisfied with this and becoming spiritually blind- cannot discern or believe in Antoinette's later actions when through an

[31] Daniel Cosway is Antoinette's father illegitimate son by a black woman.

"obeah", Christophine gives him a cup of "bull's blood", a love potion, to the protagonist's requirement. Antoinette believes that with this she could make him "love" her again, and indirectly be accepted into his "white" "untainted" "civilized" world. However, instead of the awaited reaction, Edward is unable to feel any sort of sympathy or understanding for his wife. He distrusts her actions and cultural tradition, and then, ignoring her completely, he inflicts upon her inner psychological violence, forcing Antoinette to find oblivion in alcohol. Jean Rhys, making use of irony as a strategy of representation, describes his point of view when he pathetically tries to be considered as a victim of his wife's vices: "Pity. Is there none for me? Tied to a lunatic for life -a drunken lying lunatic –gone her mother's way" (p. 164). In fact, contrarily to what he expected, his true nature is revealed making Christophine realize of his deceit and pronounce the following words: "It is in your mind to pretend she is mad. I know it. The doctors say what you tell them to say" (p. 160). At this point it is possible to agree with Shoshana Felman when she expresses that: "What the narcissistic economy of the Masculine universal equivalent tries to eliminate, under the label 'madness', is nothing other than feminine difference". (1989, p.14)

Throughout the novel Edward's successive rejections enlarge, going from the local landscape and wife to other social and ethnic aspects. He despises Antoinette's companions and sees as impossible the relationship existing between his wife and her childhood friend Tía. He also scorns and distrusts the Blacks –denoting his racial prejudice- and is appalled by Antoinette's intimacy with them. "Why do you hug and kiss Christophine?" (p. 53), he asks. Then, he does not accept her name and calls her "my marionette" –in spite of her protests- a proper pejorative epithet that denotes his attitude of possessor of a thing because, like a puppet, she "belongs" to him; at the same time, it reiterates and validates his sense of white supremacy and her degradation. Later, he denies her identity once more when he renames her Bertha (p. 147). At the end, Antoinette, victim of her husband's abuses, becomes a "zombie", a living dead, reduced to silence and confinement as it is expressed in the following scene:

> […] When I first came I thought it would be for a day, two days, a week perhaps. I thought that when I saw him and spoke to him I would be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. "I give you all I have freely," I would say, "and I will not trouble you again if you will let me go." But he never came (p. 179).

The text also highlights the impossibility of communication, the passing of time without any reversal of her situation, and the fact that Bertha is deprived of seeing the

external world through a window: "There is one window high up-you cannot see out of it […]" (p. 179), we read.

The intertextual work always exercises a critical function that is carried out from an ideological position that in this case is a feminist standpoint. Intertextual ideologies are disclosed when Rochester, the representative man reduces "the woman to the status of a silent and subordinate object" (Felman, 1989, p. 137), and so the patriarchal world is made visible.

The last part of the novel -Part III- takes place at Thornfield, in England, and describes moments of Antoinette's life during her confinement in the attic. The narrative is presented from the protagonist's point of view and since everything occurs in her unbalanced mind, it is difficult to accept and fix the moment of her death. The overall impression is that Rhys rejects the sequential programming of the English version. Instead, she presents three different moments overcoming the linearity of chronological time. Thus, the writer first makes Antoinette resort to prolepsis [32] and so she visualises her death in a dream; then, she has her anagnorisis [33] when she wakes up and is able to discover what she has to do. Finally, she sets forth to produce her incendiary act that in turn will bring upon her death. Regarding the complete situation we come to know that that day she gets up, takes the keys from Grace Pool -her guardian woman- and goes out of her bedroom. She perceives that someone is chasing her, laughing, while she goes downstairs, and recollects that she does not want "to see that ghost of a woman who they say haunts this place" (p. 187). Actually, it is her own reflection in a mirror that, though familiar, she is unable to recognize. The writer abounds in specific details describing each of her movements accurately. In this manner, she lights the candles whose shooting-up flames reach the curtains that later will provoke the burning of the mansion. She remembers "the lovely colour spreading so fast" (p. 187) and that it is then that she sees a wall of fire protecting her, but as it is too hot she is forced to run away from the flames. Soon after she sees how her husband tries to stop her:

> […] The man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! The wind caught my hair and it streamed out like wings. It might bear me up, I thought, if I jumped to those hard stones. But when I looked over the edge I saw the pool at Coulibri. Tía was there. She beckoned to me and when I hesitated, she laughed.

[32] "(Gk n 'a taking beforehand, anticipation') A figurative device by which a future event is presumed to have happened". In Cuddon, J.A., 1991, p. 702

[33] "(Gk 'recognition') A term used by Aristotle in *Poetics* to describe the moment of recognition (of truth) when ignorance gives way to knowledge". Idem, p. 35.

> I heard her say, You frightened? And I heard the man's voice, Bertha! Bertha! All this I saw and heard in a fraction of a second. And the sky so red. Someone screamed and I thought, -Why did I scream? I called "Tía! And jumped and woke." (pp. 189-190)

As it can be observed, Rhys' version differs from Brontë's –where the woman leapt into the void and died- taking an unexpected turn, because as the text expresses, after she jumps she awakens from her dream. On this account, we can deduce that it is in her mind where she recreates her future death. A perfectly plausible explanation of this episode is that the Caribbean writer resists the fate conferred to Brontë's character. Consequently, her narrative decision transforms Antoinette's actions into the symbolic representation of women's voices that refuse to be silenced one more time. It also demonstrates that Rhys is firmly determined to unmask the European hegemonic perception of the Latin-American world. Her character has to continue living –at least for some more minutes- to narrate the end of the story, which constitutes the reason of Antoinette's existence. She posits "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do" (p. 190). So, her task will consist of "lighten[ing]" the fire. This means that she will have to "illuminate" the occult and sometimes suppressed feminine voices of the postcolonial historical past. Her role will also be to re-interpret woman's history from the perspective of the female postcolonial narrative subject, her writing being the instrument that will "shield" such knowledge:

> There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage (p. 190).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

General Relationships

> Ethnicity is: "A group or category of persons who have a common ancestral origin and the same cultural traits, who have a sense of peoplehood and of group belonging, who are of immigrant background and have either minority or majority status within a larger society" (Isajaw).

The above written quote signals the problem of ethnic women in postcolonial or new-colonial societies. Hence, we can similarly connect the role conferred to the female characters in the novels by Sandra Cisneros' The House on Mango Street, by Edwidge Danticat's The Farming of Bones, and by Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea with this assumption because, notwithstanding the stories' dissimilar settings, contexts, and idiosyncrasies, the reader can recognize that, paradoxically, and as a consequence of having ethnic characteristics, the texts are able to generate a common effect in the female audience, that is the acknowledgment of the existence of a shared "sisterhood".

Ethnic and/or Women's Awareness

Sandra Cisneros' *bildungsroman* design in The House of Mango Street uses a first-person narration that becomes the basis for the expression of subjectivity. Narrating the protagonist's experiences in her growth from childhood to maturity often simplistically or in a naïve way -proper to a child's perspective- she conducts the reader into an "innocent" but no less critical view of society, and to the formation of a counter discourse. Subtly, through Esperanza's voice, the writer guides the reader into the existing parallelism between Chicano people's discrimination and exploitation by the dominant white society, and women's discrimination and subjugation by a traditional Hispanic patriarchal culture. The character's awareness of her desires for cultural emancipation and literary liberation becomes the climactic issue of the novel.

Of the three texts analyzed in this thesis only The House on Mango Street can be said to be properly a self-portrait, since an upsurge of the writer's ability to organize her own life through writing comes out from this design. Moreover, the structure is appropriate not only because it helps Sandra Cisneros in her way to auto-discovery, but also because it destroys the image of the female "ego" conceived from the outside. The act of writing turns to mean the same as the act of self creation. In sum, such self-

portrait written from Cisneros' personal situation at the very moment of literary production becomes a continuous revelation; it is a sort of conscience exam from within built with fragments and epiphanies. The use of vignettes interspersed throughout the novel, together with the description of short incidents –treasured memories that belong to the writer's past- confirm this point of view. The other novels, instead, follow a more conventional way of approaching a text.

In the three narratives there is a tendency towards inquiring. Not merely a tendency to narrate or to show. As if in all of them each writer wanted to discover the inner motivations of every individual action. The Farming of Bones provides the clearest example due to the fact that the protagonist, Amabelle, needs to know who she is, who she has been and how she has reached the present situation. Significantly, the making of Danticat's character a dreamer of family remembrances becomes the reason why she recurrently digs into her subconscious mind. Likewise, the last scene -the submersion into the Massacre River (that has got its name from a colonial-era Spanish slaughter of French pirate buccaneers)- becomes the enactment of the ritual of eternal return; a going back in time through the fluid movement of the mind to the warmth of her dead mother's womb, or to her roots, the river bed where the "bones" (sugar canes/dead bodies) of her grieving race and ancestry have been planted/thrown and drowned many years ago.

Finally, the process of self-consciousness carried out by the protagonist of Wide Sargasso Sea is not presented with the same clarity as in the previous cases, especially if the last chapter is taken into account. At that point in the novel, Antoinette is unable to distinguish who she is or where she lives. Nevertheless, there is a kind of indirect realization when the writer leads her "insane" character to make her perform certain deeds which in turn will produce an expected response among the female audience: Antoinette's husband has driven her into a state of alienation and madness of which she is not aware. However, obliquely, it signals Rhys' reflection, response, and blame towards a male-centred world and attitudes. A world full of intense hatred, rancour, and ethnic prejudice, that is also emblematic of any subaltern country where patriarchy is overemphasised.

Undermining Hegemonic Power

In the three novels there is an implicit desire to subvert the power of the ruling class. Thus, in The House on Mango Street, one major conflict stated is related to the

unequal distribution of wealth, and the scant opportunities offered to Chicano people in the United States. In fact, there is a denunciation of the state of poverty and estrangement the writer's Latino-community is pushed to by the Anglo-American society. Also, the feeling of inferiority impinged upon them by the white-prejudiced society is publicly condemned. On that account, the neighborhood described in the novel where the protagonist, her family and friends live offers a cruel contrast to the passer by and to the white inhabitants who have their residence on a hill. In addition, Esperanza's longing for a better place and house is underlined throughout the entire novel; and this reiteratively mentioned wish constitutes an implicit accusation of the unfairness of her family's situation.

Finally, the narrator feels a sense of dislocation when, at school, her classmates mispronounce her name, and so she states the difference between the hostile imported language and her own. Of the former she remarks the aggressiveness of its pronunciation while of the latter the smoothness and worth of its syllables. Therefore, Esperanza's comments point to racial differences between the Anglo and the Spanish cultures, and the girl's innocent words demonstrate her awareness of the situation as well as her rejection towards the powerful country's language and her desire not to be absorbed and "tamed" (my emphasis) by it.

With respect to The Farming of Bones, it recollects an event which occurred in 1937, and which signals a landmark in the history of the Dominican Republic. This is a very-well remembered date especially for thousands of Haitians who, living in this country, all of a sudden were deported to their country of origin through violent and savage means, exercised by the military forces of dictator Trujillo. Moreover, the president -not satisfied with condemning Haitians to a forced 'exile' from the adopted country- ordered the massacre of men, women, and children alike. The measure taken was not only an act of racial subjugation owed to Haitians darker skin, but also an act that emphasises social and class division between nations due to economic factors, and to Haitians' humble origin, even poorer than the Dominicans'. The state of vulnerability of the former group is described in The Farming of Bones, starting with an incident in which a sugarcane-worker, Joël is killed by Señora Valencia's husband, a military man and landowner. From then onwards the political situation frames the entire narrative providing the background of the story. Therefore, in dealing with the atrocities committed by Trujillo's men –situations probably inspired by real life- and publicizing them, the writer Danticat manages to destabilize male Dominicans' hegemonic power in

her story. In addition, the writer, ironically, uses the character of Señora Valencia to oppose men's attitude during the massacre of 1937. Her behaviour, revealed at the end of the narrative, represents high-class women's fight against male repressive forces, when she enumerates all those persons she has been able to protect and save in her own household, even though she knows she is acting against her husband's convictions.

The challenging of Victorian England's assumptions, culture, and its Eurocentric attitude towards Third-World Countries is a major topic in the novel Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys. There, she deals with issues concerning economic subjugation and abuse in terms of gender, race and ethnicity –environmental descriptions being aspects also included as matters of differentiation. The protagonist, Antoinette, a white Creole living in the Caribbean, is the focus of Edward's antipathy and rejection in spite of having married her. She is despised because of her roots, roots that he –a representative agent of imperial power- is unable to understand. In view of that, Edward scorns Jamaican people's behaviour and their environment, which he considers sombre, wild, and menacing. Furthermore, he sees his wife as a stranger on whom he exerts psychological violence. His behaviour leads to Antoinette's finding forgetfulness and relief in alcohol. Later, and in keeping with his previous attitude, Edward rejects and despises his wife's friend Tía –a woman of colour- due to racial prejudice. All these circumstances denote how the male protagonist locates the subjectivity of the colonized in the gaze of the imperial Other, this becoming the writer's denunciation.

Women's Behaviour under Patriarchal Rule

Another important issue in The House on Mango Street is the focalization of women's subjection to men within a Chicano community. There, men and women are raised differently, as if they lived in opposite worlds, and whose interaction is not considered appropriate for young women. So, in this patriarchal culture women find themselves in a powerless position having to bear men's distortion of women's values. This situation is especially represented through minor female characters, although not all women react according to what is expected. But the case of the young female protagonist is to declare her decision of not getting married, because this act implies the negation of her personal realization. Esperanza's rebelliousness is stated when she openly expresses that she wants to be ugly in order not to enter into the "marriage trade" (my emphasis); so she decides to grow up wild, leaving the table like a man, without asking permission to do so. In sum, what she longs for is freedom of decision and of

behavior in all the acts of her life, without being rejected for those aspirations, or more suitable, in spite of knowing she will be proscribed for them.

Similarly to what is described in The House on Mango Street, in Danticat's novel women have to deal with the burden of living in an overemphasized man-centred society. Both major female characters, Amabelle Désir and Señora Valencia are good examples of the representation of obedient women under patriarchal rule. Their roles are particularly differentiated from the men's in the text, and the spheres where they move and act cannot touch. Regarding Sra Valencia, her father and husband try to 'protect' her from the harshness of the world of affairs, making her live in the paternal house, instead of in the barracks, where the latter does. Apart from this, she is not consulted what name they are going to give to their son; only, she is 'asked' to paint a portrait of the president. Even more painfully is, when their twins are born, the inattention the twin daughter receives by her own father who has all his eyes reserved for his physically weak son.

Amabelle's situation is rather different since she has no relatives in the Dominican Republic -her parents had drowned at the Massacre River. Nevertheless, as she had been raised by Valencia's family, she was taught to serve the men, and to be present without being visible, with the purpose of being at hand just in case she might be needed. This situation she does not questioned at all. Amabelle's case typifies a double-oppression. First, there is a cultural oppression by the supposedly superior country, and second, by the one imposed by that male-centred society. From both environmental influences she is unable to escape. And this is the reason of her being described as playing with her own shadows when she was a child; and then, as a dead-in -life person, a phantom that has been robbed of the possibility of being a "persona" willing to feel again when she is in Haiti. The horror of the experiences lived has transformed her into this, and this becomes the drama of her life.

Regarding Wide Sargasso Sea, the text reproduces one of the commonest stereotypes created by men, through which women are seen as whores, seducers, vicious, and unworthy of trust. Antoinette and her mother are described as alcoholic and mad, but these are the vices to which they have been thrown by a society dominated by men, and that is unable to understand women's sensitivity. When Antoinette is taken to England, it is against her will, what demonstrates her husband's authoritarian attitude towards her; and the obvious hierarchy of male domineering manner.

In addition, Antoinette is deprived of her name by her husband, who dares to call her "my marionette". These words are meaningful since they connote the possession of a puppet, whose arms, legs, and head are moved by strings, which in turn are controlled by a person's/Edward's hands. This act validates his sense of white supremacy together with her degradation. Later, the woman is deprived of respect and of her identity when for a second time Edward decides to rename her Bertha. This simple deed of changing her name conceals both a Eurocentric attitude, and this man's desire of taking, changing, and annihilating what is not similar and what cannot be controlled.

Contemporary Women's Narrative Topics: The Silencing of Female Voices

In the novel The House on Mango Street the writer's voice is heard through the narrator's desire to communicate her vision through writing. The narrator's inner need is not to be spiritually suffocated and silenced as her grandmother had been. The environment in which she moves confines women to the domestic sphere and pushes them to take up a role they do not long for. This exercise of power is also imposed and suffered within a bigger hierarchical structure against which the protagonist reacts. Esperanza's way of protecting herself is achieved through abrogation of imperial language and through her determination to become a writer. Her decision becomes an act of defiance towards man's world, since writing -the site where meaning is produced- is both one of challenge and of otherness. This female tool of self expression is a mechanism that will transform and liberate herself and her race. Esperanza Cordero makes her change possible when she begins acknowledging her aunt's Lupe advice of continuing writing in order to be free. Accordingly, it is through writing –and the power of words- that Esperanza is able to reconstruct her personal story, thus overthrowing the barrier of silence. Finally, the profession chosen becomes the distinctive medium through which she will communicate working models for change, and will preserve her cultural and personal identity.

In the case of The Farming of Bones, Danticat states her authorial annoyance at powerful men's tyrannical attitude towards women, and also towards unprotected migrant people whose only fault had been to be too poor and too black for Dominicans' taste. However, the writer is not biased when describing female characters, nor is her vision blurred by her personal feelings, assuming that all women would behave alike under patriarchal rule. She offers her audience insurgent female's behaviors in the

characters of Señora Valencia and Amabelle, with different levels of intensity and in a more subtle manner than in The House on Mango Street.

Imperial power over language is observed when the Haitians are asked to pronounce the word "perejil", parsley, the Dominicans knowing of Haitians' inability to do so. But apart from this coercion that comprises men and women alike, the silence to which the female characters are driven to is connected with the life of Sra Valencia and Amabelle at Sra Valencia's household, in the Dominican Republic. Significant is the characters' entertainment of playing with their own shadows, where it is evident that the focus of the narrative in this situation is put on the impossibility of communication. Furthermore, the shadows resemble a deformed and silent mirror of themselves. But then, at the end of the novel, it is known how Sra Valencia had managed to overcome her secondary role of living at the shade of her husband; because, even from the secluded recess of her house, she was able to oppose men's tyranny, protecting and helping people to escape.

Amabelle's behaviour is different because at the end of the story she continues feeling barren and incomplete. Nevertheless, her desire to overcome silence is just manifested in her attitude of coming back to the Dominican Republic, with the purpose of completing her personal story, and in order to make up the loose threads of her life.

Finally, in the novel Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys questions male domination and counters colonial discourse very explicitly. From her own personal declarations, we learn of her indignation after the reading of Jane Eyre, motivating her own version of the character Bertha, who she dignifies with the provision of an identity not present in the English version. It can be said that Rhys takes Bertha from the dimness and silence of the canonical novel into the light and voice of a more contemporary situation, avenging the English character with the endowment of a more favorable ending.

Within the novel, Bertha's mother is gradually cornered by both the terrible circumstances as well as by the men of her life becoming an entity -drunk, mad, and lonely. Likewise, Bertha is driven mad by the hostility exercised by her husband. Unwillingly, she is taken to England, where she is confined to an attic in which she lives shut away from society, therefore in isolation. In spite of this dramatic situation, the writer twists the finale of the hypo text, making of the protagonist's world of soundlessness the place from where she will conceive her independence.

The moment of subversion comes at the end of Rhys' novel when using her female character as a demonstration of how writing turns into an authentic woman's

tool to overthrow male tyranny. Thus, her mad character Antoinette frees herself from confinement seeking freedom in death. At the very end of the novel she decides what, when, and how to do what she has to do. She will start the fire that will burn the house, a metaphor that stands for either all those unheard women's voices or for those which had soon been erased. Hence, the rewriting of the Victorian novel means more than the simple description of female themes and the representation of female abuse, it also implies the possibility of protecting women's own history by making it publicly known.

To conclude, I would like to point out that the ethnic writers discussed in this work share a common vision. Their writings, with a specific focus on ethnicity, cultural consciousness/subjectivity, and social change, highlight the complex relations of individuals entangled in the problems of race, ethnicity, class, and gender on the one hand, and the practice of writing as a female and feminist tool together with their own political and cultural views on the other. The vision shared is the forging of a different cultural consensus aiming at deconstructing the multiple forms of otherization. It is - according to Ashcroft et al. al. (1989) - '[...]a view to restructuring European realities in postcolonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based' (p.33). Lastly, the vision is an attempt at relocating the female self based on an affirmation of ethnic otherness.

APPENDIX 1: Biographical Notes

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicano, Illinois, in 1954, being the third child and only daughter in a family of six brothers. Due to the family's frequent moves between the United Sates and Mexico causing the writer's feeling homelessness and displacement.

She received her B.A. from Loyola University of Chicano in 1976 and her M.F. (Creative Writing) from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1978. This workshop marked an important turning point in her career as a writer. Although she had periodically written poems and stories while growing up, it was the frustrations she found at the Writers' Workshop that made her realize that her experiences as a Latina woman were unique and outside the realm of dominant American culture. Besides, her brothers' attempt to make her assume a traditional female role produced a feminist response in her writing, glorifying women who dreamt of economic independence and celebrating their "wicked" sexuality.

Cisneros wrote several books that were translated into over a dozen languages. Her books include a chapbook of poetry, Bad Boys (1980)*;* two full-length poetry books, My Wicked Wicked Ways (1987) and Loose Woman (1994)*;* a collection of stories, Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories (l991); a children's book, Hairs/Pelitos (1994); and two novels, The House on Mango Street (Vintage 1991) and Caramelo (2002). Sandra Cisneros received numerous awards, among them two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, that allowed her to write full time. She also won wide critical acclaim as well as popular success.

In her works she wrote about conflicts directly related to her upbringing, including divided cultural loyalties, feelings of alienation, and degradation associated with poverty. These specific cultural and social concerns came to life in The House on Mango Street (1983).

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969, and just two years later her father emigrated to the United States. Her mother followed him in 1973 while Danticat remained in Haiti where she was raised by her Aunt till the age of twelve. Then, she reunited with her parents in NYC.

At the age of twenty five she published her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and the following year *Krik? Krak!*, a collection of short stories considered a National Book Award Finalist in Fiction. The writer also published a second novel *The Farming of Bones*. Her stories have been anthologized several times and her works have been translated into more than ten languages. In 1995 she won a Pushcart Short Story Prize as well as awards from *The Caribbean Writer, Seventeen,* and *Essence* magazines. She is the first Haitian woman that writes in English and lives in the United States. Among her varied concerns in her novels there are those of migration, sexuality, gender and history. She emphasises women embracing a herstory and also, the nation and the exile as gendered-male topics.

Jean Rhys, pseudonym of Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams, was born in Dominica, West Indies in 1890. She was the daughter of a Welsh doctor and a white Creole mother of Scottish ancestry. Her Creole heritage and her own experiences as a white Creole woman deeply influenced her life and writing.

When she was seventeen her father sent her to England to live with her aunt, and there she studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London (1909). But after the death of her father she had to abandon her studies and hold different jobs –chorus girl, mannequin, artist's model. She began to write after the first of her three marriages broke up. Thus, in 1927 she published her first collection of stories, *The Left Ban*k *and Other Stories*, taking the penname Jean Rhys. Her first novel *Quartet* was published in 1928 and then followed *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* (1930), *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). These novels are said to portray the same woman at different stages of life, all unhappy and unstable but with a clear self-knowledge and sympathy to others.

From 1939 to 1957 Rhys dropped from public attention but gained international acclaim in the 1960s with the publication of her most admired novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which won the Royal Society of Literature Award and the W.H. Smith Award in 1966. In this text she returns to the theme of dominance and dependence, ruling and being ruled, through the relationship between a self-reliant European man and a defenceless woman.

She died in 1979, in Exeter, before finishing the autobiography she was working on. The incomplete text appeared posthumously under the title *Smile Please* in 1979. She is considered one of the finest British writers of the twentieth century.

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