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Within the Realm of Possibility: Magic and Mediation in Native American and Chicano/A Literature.

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ABSTRACT

Bloodlines create an overlap in Native American and Chicano/a history, but this dissertation studies these ethnic groups together for reasons beyond this. Native Americans and Chicanos/as share more than blood; overlaps occur in language, religion, and United States geography. Psychic geography for each group also presents a kinship, for in the search for a redemptive personal identity (to stand against the forcible near-extinction of Native Americans and the cultural dismissal of Chicanos/as by their “native” land) each cultural group recognizes its difference. Having very little in dominant culture upon which to build an identity, Native Americans and Chicanos/as have turned inward to create their own texts of rediscovery.

To achieve this personal rediscovery, Chicano/a and Native American writers often turn to magical realism. Through an examination of contemporary novels written by and about Native Americans and Chicanos/as, this dissertation explores the impact of magical realism on cultural mediation. Whether because of mixed ancestry or a liminal, borderlands setting, characters of the novels discussed in Chapters Two and Three face conflicting
cultures (their own culture versus the dominant culture), and, because of magical intervention, are able to emerge from their respective conflicts with a blended sense of identity, taking the best each culture has to offer to form a new perspective. The works presented in Chapter Four study what I believe to be a uniquely Chicano/a trait: nearly magical writing.

Chapter Two presents four characters and five novels as examples of the coming of age story, or bildungsroman, and the role of magical realism in this rite of passage. They are Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima, Louise Erdrich’s The Bingo Palace and Love Medicine, Linda Hogan’s Solar Storms, and Ana Castillo’s So Far From God. Chapter Three explores adult reactions to magical realism, noting the differences in Chicano/a and Native American perspectives. Under discussion are Ana Castillo’s So Far From God, Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, and Paula Gunn Allen’s The Woman Who Owned the Shadows. The final chapter addresses what I have termed nearly magical literature, using Sandra Cisneros’ Woman Hollering Creek to illustrate this idea.
CHAPTER ONE
A METHOD TO THE MAGIC: DEFINING MAGICAL REALISM AND MEDIATION

Why write about magical realism in Native American and Chicano/a literature? First of all, despite cultural similarities between the two groups, writings by Native Americans and Chicanos/as have rarely been connected. And, more importantly, Chicano/a and Native American writers create novels in which the vehicle of magic realism enhances the cultural identity of its characters. I believe that magic realism serves a distinct function for both Native American and Chicano/a writers (not to mention writers of other backgrounds): that of aiding in cultural mediation between dominant society and Chicano/a or Native American culture respectively.

In her article “Magical Realism: The Latin American Influence on Modern Chicano Writers,” Catherine Bartlett defines magical realism as “[t]he admixture of fantasy and reality, the logical development of an absurd premise to its ambiguous end and the playful devotion to language as the ultimate reality” (27). Bartlett cites the influence of magical realism as being most tangible on “the generation of Americans writing from the late 1950s through the early 1970s,” such as Thomas Pynchon and Donald Barthelme (27). The time period from the 50s through the 70s ushered in the Chicano/a movement as well (Pocho in 1959, Yo Soy Joaquín in 1967), and in her
examination of this latter group of writers, Bartlett asserts that modern Chicano/a writers take "their literary sustenance . . . not from their Anglo-American counterparts," such as Pynchon and Barthelme, "but from their Mexican and South American contemporaries" (27). Bartlett ultimately concludes that "contemporary Chicano literature reflects a solidly based understanding and incorporation of major thematic and technical devices and characteristics of the new Latin American literature," such as that found in the works of Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, and Jorge Luis Borges, "specifically the literary mode called 'magical realism'" (27).

While Bartlett's argument that the roots of contemporary Chicano/a magic realist writing lie in Latin America seems logical, Wayne Ude finds a different source for Native American magical realist writing. Ude argues in "Forging an American Style: The Romance-Novel and Magical Realism as Response to the Frontier and Wilderness Experiences" that present-day North American magic realist writing results from the American response to frontier and wilderness, which he traces back to the European Romantic movement of the late 18th century. Like Bartlett, Ude makes a convincing argument; he leads the reader from the Romantic movement to the Gothic¹ to William Faulkner before arriving at contemporary Native American magic realism. As Bartlett's analysis of magic realism brings
her to Chicano/a writers (specifically Orlando Romero, Ron Arias, and Tómas Rivera), so Ude’s own study arrives at Native American authors James Welch, N. Scott Momaday, and Leslie Marmon Silko. From Bartlett’s and Ude’s logical premises, we arrive at two different ethnic groups and their magic realist fiction.

In 1925 German art critic Franz Roh coined the term magic realism to describe a Post-Expressionist style of painting which, according to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, “returns to a renewed delight in real objects even as it integrates the formal innovations and spiritual thrust of Expressionism” (15). Zamora and Faris describe Roh’s magical realism as a coexistence between reality and the fantastic. Having found Expressionism to have “an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects,” Roh justifies his word choice in “magic realism”: “With the word ‘magic,’ as opposed to ‘mystic,’ I wish to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (16). That is, Roh, just as Zamora and Faris assert, finds magic to exist as another dimension of reality (in this mode of painting), rather than that which is beyond or above reality.

More than twenty years later, novelist Alejo Carpentier applied Roh’s term to Latin America, where Carpentier found “a uniquely American form of magical
realism” (Zamora and Faris 75). During his 1943 trip to Haiti, Carpentier discovered the ruins of the kingdom of Henri Christophe. He describes the phenomena he found there as an overlap of reality with the miraculous. Carpentier’s subsequent account of “the marvellous in the real,” the 1949 novel The Kingdom of This World, reports on “a sequence of extraordinary happenings which took place on the island of Santo Domingo” that is “based on the most rigorous documentation” (viii). The definition I use for magical realism comes primarily from the Prologue to Carpentier’s novel (The Kingdom of This World) while including aforementioned specifics from Catherine Bartlett, and a set of criteria from Wayne Ude that I will present shortly.

But what exactly does marvelous mean? In “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real,” Carpentier explains: “Dictionaries tell us that the marvelous is something that causes admiration because it is extraordinary, excellent, formidable . . . when really the only thing that should be gleaned from the dictionaries’ definitions is a reference to the extraordinary” (101). From this point, Carpentier takes care to remind the reader that extraordinary does not necessarily imply beauty; indeed, “[e]verything strange, everything amazing, everything that eludes established norms is marvelous,” including “[u]gliness, deformity,” and “all that is terrible” (“Baroque” 101,
102). Having asserted that "[a]ll that is strange is marvelous," Carpentier asks the pivotal question, "[W]hat is the difference between magical realism and the marvelous real?" ("Baroque" 102). Quickly dismissing Surrealist painting as truly "marvelously real," Carpentier instead champions his own version of this slippery concept by way of answering the above question: "[T]he marvelous real that I defend and that is our own marvelous real is encountered in its raw state, latent and omnipresent, in all that is Latin American. Here the strange is commonplace, and always was commonplace" ("Baroque" 104). Because of the unique aspect of America itself, the language used to present American reality differs from any reality that has come before: "In order to understand and interpret this new world [America], a new vocabulary was needed, not to mention—because you can't have one without the other—a new optic" (Carpentier, "Baroque" 105). Wayne Ude takes this very assertion by Carpentier, knowingly or not, and applies it to North America rather than Latin America: "[T]here was no American literary tradition available to the first European settlers" (50). According to Ude, settlers had no means, or, to use Carpentier's words, no "vocabulary" or "optic," to express the frontier or wilderness. Ude explains that American literary history began "with a search for both the techniques and conceptual framework
which might be capable of containing and presenting the full range of realities within which Americans have lived" (50). Both Carpentier and Ude concur on what motivated the creation of magic realism: there was simply no adequate way for Europeans to express the marvelous Americas.

Although Carpentier’s visit to Haiti spurred his interest in the marvelous, he was also reacting to Europe’s own category of the fantastic, which he describes as empty and formulaic. Borrowing an idea from Miguel de Unamuno to make this point, Carpentier writes: "Imaginative poverty . . . consists in learning codes by heart. And today there exist codes of the fantastic . . . to which we owe many 'children threatened by nightingales', or André Masson's 'horses devouring birds'" (Kingdom, ii-iii). Carpentier calls upon these images not as examples of the marvelous in the real, but as examples of the ridiculous. Indeed, throughout the Prologue to The Kingdom of This World the reader finds many instances of unabashed disdain for European fantastic trends, among them the knights of the Round Table and Surrealism. Carpentier dubs such writing attempts "old and fraudulent," going so far as to say, "But, determined to invoke the marvellous [sic] at any cost, the miracle workers turn into bureaucrats" who employ "timeworn formulae" (Kingdom ii). It reasonably follows then that
Carpentier's enlightening and refreshing visit to Haiti gave him the ammunition to do battle with the European formulae he found so distressing, and allowed him to relate the events of the Haitian revolution with factual zeal.

From the Haitian example Carpentier arrives with great pleasure at the larger American one. While Carpentier's Europe has relegated the fantastic to rote, the Americas possess a wealth of untapped magic: "The fantastic is to be found at every stage in the lives of men who inscribed dates on the history of the Continent and who left names still borne to this day: from those who sought the Fountain of Eternal Youth . . ."— the list continues (Kingdom vi). In America Carpentier finds the source of the truly marvelous, a marvelous that is also truly real, kept alive by ritual, and mythologized.3 Carpentier even holds that only in America could such events occur at all, for only in America does there exist such a wealth of the historically miraculous that is "impossible to situate in Europe" (Kingdom ix).

Carpentier explains:

And the point is that, because of its virginal landscape, its formation, its ontology, the Faustian presence of both Indian and Negro,4 the Revelation represented by its recent discovery, and the fertile inbreeding it has fostered, America is far from having drained its well of mythologies. (Kingdom viii)
America provides what Europe has been missing in the fantastic: the real. European attempts at the marvelous have failed to meet reality, relying instead on an imagination that, with time, has become overworked.

Zamora and Faris summarize Carpentier's premise:

[T]he fantastic inheres in the natural and human realities of time and place, where improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures exist by virtue of Latin America's varied history, geography, demography, and politics—not by manifesto. (75)

Therefore, America's many active, miraculous occurrences engage the question that Carpentier asks, "But what is the history of America if not a chronicle of the marvellous in the real?" (Kingdom ix).

The Prologue provides a final, defining note about magical realism in The Kingdom of This World, foreshadowed by the epigraph of the Prologue itself, taken from Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda: "What must be understood concerning this matter of being transformed into wolves is that there is an illness that the doctors call wolf madness" (Carpentier i). The point being made is explained by Carpentier later in the Prologue, where he defines the truly marvelous by defining those who witness marvelous events. In such cases the former depends wholly on the latter: to witness is a matter of vision, and vision is a matter of faith. As Carpentier remarks,

First of all, the sense of the marvellous [sic] presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in saints will not be cured by the miracles of
saints. . . . Certain statements . . . about men being transformed into wolves are entirely trustworthy, because in Cervantes' time it was believed that people could be afflicted with wolf madness. (Kingdom iv)

The marvelous event results from the vision of the faithful, who see things as non-believers cannot. That is,

the marvellous [sic] becomes unequivocally marvellous [sic] when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (a miracle), a privileged revelation of reality. . . perceived with peculiar intensity due to an exaltation of the spirit which elevates it to a kind of "limit state." (Carpentier, Kingdom iv)

The physical aspect of a "limit state" is a brief moment of epiphanic vision produced by actual events, or a long-term awakening to a reality that one had not known before. In either case, the "limit state" belongs to the believer, as does the ability to witness the miraculous. Here again Carpentier asserts the uniquely American aspect of this vision-through-faith, using the account of Haitian slave Mackandal as his example: "I was in a land where thousands of men, anxious for freedom, believed in Mackandal's lycanthropic powers to the extent that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution" ("On the Marvelous" 86-87). And, as with his description of European fantastic writing, Carpentier does not soften his derision for those who neither believe in nor see the marvelous because they are afraid "to conceive of a valid mysticism or abandon their petty habits in
order to gamble their souls on the fearful card of faith" (Kingdom v).

To recap, Carpentier's magical realism contains the following shaping factors: the truth of the events, the privileging of the American, and the necessity of faith. For the purposes of this discussion I will also include Wayne Ude's six common elements of magical realism, as he defines them in terms of Faulkner's Go Down, Moses. First of all, "traditional reality" is replaced by a "multidimensional metaphysical as well as physical reality"; for example, "a young deer in the woods" is transformed "into a sort of Platonic Ideal Deer" (Ude 56). Next, "the mythical or legendary as well as the historic past becomes an actual presence in contemporary life"; Ude cites the mixture of Southern white, Native American and Black legends as "immediately present in [Faulkner's] characters' lives" (56). Third, the writer "seeks to fabricate poetic recreations... rather than mere imitations of reality" (Ude 56). A fourth element of magical realism is the "distort[i]on of time, space, and identity as those elements are understood in conventional realism" (Ude 56-57). Fifth, the writer's "version of human psychology"... represents the later and more complex development of... the psychological romance of Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne" (Ude 57). And last,
“mystical or magical elements” are mixed “with the everyday details of commonplace reality in an attempt to generate in the reader a firm belief in the validity and genuineness—the reality—of [the writer’s] fictions” (Ude 57). The writer employs all of these elements together, and with the same style, in creating magical realism; there is not “one style for ‘magic’ and another for ‘reality,’ and thus the style itself asks us to take all elements of the work equally seriously” (Ude 57). That is, the style itself asks the reader to believe all (or nothing).

Through the vehicle of magical realism, characters to be discussed in this dissertation will mediate between their own and dominant cultures. In Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction, James Ruppert defines mediation as “an artistic and conceptual standpoint, constantly flexible, which uses the epistemological frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other” (3). Ruppert came to his concept of mediation when the criticism around him failed to effectively describe the Native American writers he knew:

While the criticism I read in the 1970s continually mentioned the agony of Native peoples existing between two worlds, the writers I knew did not seem to me to be people lost between two worlds, nor any more agonized than most people, but rather they were
able to call up the richness of a mixed heritage and see things in ways new to both traditions. (vii-viii)

Many characters in Native American fiction reflect this very richness, and Ruppert discusses the characters in Native American novels, such as *House Made of Dawn* and *Love Medicine*, by way of example. Seeing the great potential for literary and critical growth essential to this cross-pollination of cultures, Ruppert arrived at the concept of mediation. The idea of ever-changing, mutual sharing is reflected in much Native American literature, for many characters in these novels seek identity, at least in part, within non-reservation United States culture (Western culture). That is, Native American characters are doing the same thing as Native American writers. Ruppert describes this sharing with an eye to unbuilding and rebuilding:

> They [Native Americans] may dismantle European American stereotypes, create cultural criticism of the dominant society, and make manifest the crimes of the past, but their mediational goals direct them more toward Native concerns such as nurturing survival, continuance, and continual reemergence of cultural identity. (3-4)

Mediation applies to Chicano/a literature and its characters in a similar manner; Chicanos/as must contend with the identity of the borderlands, that is, belonging to many cultures in part, but wholly to none. It comes as no surprise that characters of mixed ethnicity not only appear frequently in Native American and Chicano/a writing, but also aid in defining their cultures and
literary styles by their ability to “cross” from one culture to another with physical ease (and, at times, with the intervention of magic), defining themselves within whichever culture they choose. The dilemma of lacking a single ethnicity creates a cross-cultural identity or built-in mediation which I plan to compare and contrast in Native American and Chicano/a characters in the process of discovering how magic realism facilitates finding personal and cultural identity for each.

The Native American and Chicano/a characters and novels I will discuss here have been chosen because magical realism assists the characters in their mediation between cultures, and, to some extent, in their personal search for meaning that is inherent to such mediation. For Native American characters such as Tayo of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, the search for meaning is often one of rediscovery, rather than one of breaking new ground. Linda Hogan illustrates this point: “we are all sacred beings and do not have to search out new ways of ‘getting there.’ In fact, that is one of the dangers of a searching spirituality. Where is there to get?” (*Stories We Hold* xii). Like Hogan, the other Native American writers in this analysis, including Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Hogan herself, stress the necessity of returning to an understanding of the earth and orality, finding the sacred in ancestral
stories and teachings as a means of harnessing the magic that fulfills the Native individual’s spiritual needs. Hogan applies this view specifically to Native American women writers:

We can look to the myths, Psyche’s journey, and the ancient stories of women. . . . we see that in each story, women are helped by the inner voices, the spirit world, the voices of earth. Magical help is passed down by a feminine wisdom, and the task is to listen, to unravel information, to separate one thing from another, and to Be. (Stories We Hold xiii)

By employing such “magical help,” Native American characters exhibit the effects of magic realism on the mediated Native identity. Although Native Americans are not invariably of Mexican or European descent, all North American mestizo/as or Chicano/as are, in part, Native American. In spite of this, Chicana author Ana Castillo describes the prejudice Chicano/as face in the United States: “by U.S. standards and according to some North American Native Americans, I [a Chicana] cannot make official claims to being india [Native American]” (Massacre 21). Castillo describes herself and her people: “As for mestizo/as, we were identified as a mongrel race, a mixture of the dispensable Amerindian race and the lowly Spaniard” (Massacre 22). In “We Would Like You to Know,” a poem from her celebrated collection, My Father Was a Toltec, Castillo addresses the same concern:

We would like you to know
we are not all brown.
Genetic history has made
some of us blue eyed as any
German immigrant
and as black as a descendant
of an African slave.
We never claimed to be
a homogeneous race. (82, 27-35)

In response to these feelings, Castillo adopts the term
Mexic Amerindian, rather than Chicano/a, “to assert both
our indigenous blood and the source, at least in part, of
our spirituality”; that spirituality is, in part, the same
Native American sense of “magical help” mentioned above.
(Massacre 10). I find Mexic Amerindian as well as
Castillo’s definition of it both accurate and, thus far in
the history of the Americas, non-inflammatory. This
dissertation will use Chicano/a and Mexic Amerindian
interchangeably, in an effort to better describe the
people, writers, and characters which will be discussed and
to raise consciousness about ways to discuss their lives
and writings.

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“native” land) each cultural group recognizes its
difference. Having very little in dominant culture upon which to build an identity, Native Americans and Mexic Amerindians have turned inward to create their own texts of rediscovery. To achieve this personal rediscovery, Mexic Amerindian and Native American writers often turn to magic realism. Indeed, the aim of this analysis is to discern how magic realism helps Chicano/a and Native American writers to handle mediation and cultural identity through their work.

Chapter Two examines the depiction of youthful Chicano/a and Native American characters who use magic and their trust in it to find their way in life. Since the first pangs of the need to assimilate, or cross, are in coming of age as a child discovers personal identity, this specific focus on young characters marks an apt starting point for my discussion of magical realism in fiction. An analysis of the ethnic bildungsroman, Chapter Two will pursue the differences ethnicity imposes on the bildungsroman genre, as well as those differences imposed by magic realism. Having reached an age where personal identity becomes important, protagonists of the bildungsroman separate from family and familial influences in order to establish a self apart from these nuclear relationships. For the Native American or Chicano/a protagonist, coming of age involves not only fitting into a
peer group, but also being able to function within, if not fit into, the society of dominant culture. That is, the ethnic youth must create a blended, or mediated, identity, one that arises from a give and take between his or her own culture and dominant culture, to create an acceptable sense of self.

A large component of the cultural conflict the ethnic protagonist must confront involves her or his relationship with the magical. The Native American and Mexic Amerindian characters discussed here come from cultures wherein the magical is sacred; entering dominant culture forces these characters to function in a culture that, by and large, ignores or dismisses the magical or spiritual elements of life. These cultures must mediate between their own and dominant cultures in order to retain the sacred or magical in their worldview.

I will make the first textual application of mediation and cultural identity with Antonio Márez of Rudolfo Anaya’s novel Bless Me, Ultima, who faces choosing between the happy coexistence of his mother’s Catholicism and the magical world of his mentor Ultima, and the non-mediated Christian reality of his church and school. Antonio endures ridicule for his involvement with the supernatural powers of the curandera Ultima, but he finally discovers a
mediated path between cultures that allows him to thrive both at home and away from it— even without Ultima.

Moving from the child Antonio, two teen-aged characters also exemplify mediated identity. One such example that I will explore is Louise Erdrich’s portrayal of Lipsha Morrissey, a young male character from the Love Medicine series (five novels in all). Lipsha is a youth with supernatural, but unpredictable, healing powers. Often magic, or “luck” as outsiders call it, turns others against Lipsha, adding to the obstacles he must overcome in his search for a meaningful existence. Unlike the young Antonio whose primary conflict lies in recognizing magic and reconciling it to his belief system, Lipsha’s conflict lies in perfecting and best using his powers while existing in dominant culture. Although Lipsha distrusts his healing powers because of the repercussions they bring, he learns to mediate his understanding of this personal magic. As the protagonist of The Bingo Palace and the common thread tying the entire Love Medicine series together, Lipsha must effect his bildungsroman without falling headlong into dominant culture where his supernatural powers are not valued. Indeed, Erdrich views the portrayal of this specific cultural conflict as a main responsibility of the Native American writer. Critic Tom Berninghausen summarizes this idea: “Erdrich has argued that the
responsibility of contemporary Native American writers is to represent their culture, to represent it especially in context of the destruction of traditional culture" (191). Reading and studying Erdrich’s writing, then, leads to a better understanding of the dual nature of the ethnic existence.

The third example of the ethnic version of coming of age is Angel Iron of Linda Hogan’s second novel, Solar Storms. Angel grapples with adulthood, finding ways to combine dominant culture with the magic she learns through rediscovering her family. Unlike Antonio Márez of Bless Me, Ultima, who gains insight from each of the views he encounters, ultimately allowing him to reach a multicultural, integrated understanding, Angel immerses herself in the Native American culture she has lost since early childhood. Having spent most of her life in foster homes and among non-Natives, Angel begins the search for her lost Native American identity in 1972 at the age of seventeen. As with Linda Hogan’s first and third novels, Mean Spirit and Power, Solar Storms presents a dichotomy between Native American and dominant cultures. A predominant theme through all of Hogan’s fiction is the relationship between humans and their natural environment. Solar Storms is no different in this respect; the novel follows Angel’s journey into environmental activism on
behalf of diverted waterways and the ecosystems that depend on the water for their existence.

The final section of Chapter Two studies a young character whose coming of age involves humor as well as magic. La Loca of Ana Castillo's 1993 novel *So Far From God* gives poignant insight into the supernatural world through her maturing process, beginning with the novel's opening pages. Loca's resurrection from the dead opens Castillo's parodic novel, firmly connecting the child with magic as well as determining her life's path. All of the characters discussed in Chapter Two reach maturity over the course of the novels they inhabit. But unlike Antonio, Lipsha, and Angel, Loca comes into maturity and understanding of her powers because of the attention her childhood death brings her. For this reason, Loca's *bildungsroman* the process of her coming of age story literally begins at her own (re)birth.

In Chapter Three the discussion shifts from that of youthful identity crises to adult characters' difficulties with finding a mediated identity. Distinct differences between contemporary Chicano/a and Native American fiction arise when adult characters are considered, and Chapter Three defines these differences and accounts for them in a meaningful way. When confronted with the cultural
conflicts inherent to living between cultures, adult characters usually react in one of the following ways: 1) the character attempts to retreat within his or her heritage and ethnicity; 2) the character rejects or attempts to erase his or her heritage and ethnicity; or 3) the character attempts to mediate his or her views and reconcile his or her heritage and ethnicity with the outside world. Chapter Three focuses specifically on the last option, using characters from three novels to make this point. I will analyze Mexic Amerindian characters from Ana Castillo’s 1993 novel, So Far From God, finding that, despite magical intervention, they are ultimately unable to effectively mediate between their own and dominant cultures. Representing the perspective of Native American adult characters, the protagonists of Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony and Paula Gunn Allen’s The Woman Who Owned the Shadows emerge from cultural illness to lead a healthy, mediated existence because of their trust in the magical. My discussion of these three novels emphasizes the particular difficulties and differences between Mexic Amerindian and Native American cultures, finding examples of cultural beliefs and customs within these texts.

Having discussed Loca of So Far From God in Chapter Two, her sisters and mother—Esperanza, Caridad, Fe, and Sofi—will be studied in Chapter Three. And, while Loca
uses magic in the process of growing up and arriving at personal identity to mediate between cultures, her mother and sisters face specifically Chicano/a limitations; their problems of homeland, culture, and even magic prevent them from making a magical mediation. My argument here hinges on what I believe to be a condition unique to the Mexic Amerindian situation: the contemporary Chicano/a lacks faith in magic as a force of change beyond childhood and/or coming of age. This adult perspective results in an inability to experience magic as a mediating tool, and a limited (in terms of magic) existence for the characters sharing this view. This idea is one of the essential differences between adult Native American and Chicano/a characters discussed in Chapter Three.

In contrast to the characters of So Far From God who do not effectively mediate between cultures, Tayo, Leslie Marmon Silko's protagonist in Ceremony, begins a healing journey to mediation through magical realism from Silko's first words of the novel. A story of Tayo's struggle for identity between cultures as a result of his mixed ethnicity, Ceremony presents a microcosm of the universe, which appeals to readers for the very reason that its implications are universally meaningful. Tayo's process of healing both the earth and himself involves a return to
sacred ceremony, which necessarily requires an acceptance of and belief in magical intervention.

Finding Tayo’s female counterpart in Ephanie of Paula Gunn Allen’s 1983 novel, The Woman Who Owned the Shadows, my analysis of the third novel in this chapter provides another Native American adult example of mediation through magical realism. Structurally similar to Ceremony, The Woman Who Owned the Shadows alternates between tales from Native American mythology and the present-day story of Ephanie’s efforts to reside comfortably between cultures as an Indian of mixed descent, or “breed.” My discussion of this novel follows Ephanie’s chronological progression from cultural alienation to mediation, demonstrating the positive and mediating effects of magical realism on her character.

Chapter Four considers what I have termed nearly magical literature, fiction full of the potential for the marvelous in the real— because of its language and events— in which there is no magical realism. Following from the idea in Chapter Three that adult Mexic Amerindian characters cannot employ magic to mediate between cultures as their Native American counterparts can, Chapter Four discusses the Chicano/a text “One Holy Night” from Sandra Cisneros’ Woman Hollering Creek. Cisneros’ 1984 novel, The House on Mango Street, uses the image of “a balloon tied to
an anchor," to describe the protagonist’s lack of opportunities for individuality, growth, and creative expression (Mango Street 9). This metaphor perfectly describes the limitations on the use of magical realism in “One Holy Night”; the possibility of magical realism is held in check by the brutal weight of reality.

**Notes**

1 Alejo Carpentier, the “father” of magical realist Latin American fiction, would abhor Ude’s reference to Gothicism, even as a stepping stone to contemporary magical realism: Carpentier cites “the horrifying machinery of the English Gothic novel” as an example of misuse of the marvelous (“On the Marvelous” 85).

2 Zamora and Faris note the influence of Roh’s idea of magical realism on Carpentier: “Perhaps the northern European origins of Roh’s formulation and its dissemination in Latin America by the Spanish Revista de Occidente served to spur Carpentier to his aggressively American discussion of the mode” (75).

3 Carpentier specifically notes the account of the slave Mackandal: “The American Mackandal . . . leaves an entire mythology, preserved by an entire people and accompanied by magic hymns still sung today during voodoo ceremonies” (“On the Marvelous” 87-88).

4 Carpentier’s racist tone occasionally intrudes into his commentary.

5 Citing E. Dale Carter, Catherine Bartlett also holds that magic realism “deforms ordinary conceptions of space and time” (28).

6 Ude remarks that Faulkner’s take on human psychology “now seems Jungian and archetypal to us (as is the case with most Magical Realist fiction)” (57).

7 Hogan’s implied audience is Native, but the use of mixed-blood characters, or “breeds,” in her fiction attests to the idea that non-Natives can also discover their sacredness.
Like Hogan, Carpentier also writes to a special implied audience: believers are more privy to the novel’s meaning than are non-believers.
CHAPTER TWO
MAGICALLY COMING OF AGE: YOUTHFUL MEDIATIONS IN ANAYA, ERDRICH, HOGAN, AND CASTILLO

As a youth emerges from the safety of family and childhood, the need to fit in occurs in coming of age. For the ethnic youth, here specifically the Native American or the Mexic Amerindian,¹ coming of age involves more than fitting into a peer group, but also functioning in, if not fully fitting into, society at large. In this broader, societal aspect, fitting in for the ethnic youth entails mediation: taking from and giving to the dominant surrounding culture in such a way that ethnic, personal, and societal identities emerge in a harmonious, acceptable blend. In keeping with the aim of this dissertation, the characters and novels explored in this chapter necessarily use and experience the magical as a means to discover and reconcile this blended identity.

The coming of age story in fiction, also called the apprenticeship novel or bildungsroman, follows a generally accepted formula, “recount[ing] the youth and young adulthood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and ‘the art of living’” (Holman 33).² While the “mode [of the bildungsroman] was begun by K.P. Moritz’s Anton Reiser (1785-90) and Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship
(1795-96)," its prevalence in American literature could well be recounted by most high school graduates in the United States, who have likely read Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Thomas Wolfe’s *Look Homeward, Angel*, William Faulkner’s *The Reivers*, J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, and Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* to name but a few in this tradition (Abrams, Glossary 132). Surely the ethnic *bildungsroman* explores a unique version of the coming of age experience, wherein the protagonist must not only handle the pressures involved with personal discovery, but also those inherent to cultural conflict. If for no other reason than this, ethnic coming of age novels merit further examination. For, youthful Native American and Chicano/a characters, coming from a culture in which the magical is sacred, must confront a dominant culture that largely ignores the magical or spiritual elements of life. Therefore, this chapter explores how youthful characters begin to discover personal identity between conflicting cultures, using the genre of magical realism to find their way to maturity.

My analysis begins with Antonio Marez of Rudolfo Anaya’s award-winning novel³ *Bless Me, Ultima*, whose childhood idealism is called into question. Antonio exemplifies how a young Chicano might incorporate elements of magic into a religious context that fits his individual
needs. Next, Lipsha Morrissey of Louise Erdrich’s novels The Bingo Palace and Love Medicine, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, along with Angel Iron of Linda Hogan’s second novel Solar Storms, demonstrate young people’s grappling with adulthood and finding ways to combine magic with dominant culture. Lipsha and Angel differ from Antonio in two ways: they embody a Native American perspective, and they possess magical abilities of their own that must be honed as well as controlled. Antonio, Lipsha, and Angel each function as the protagonist of their own respective novels. The final character and novel this chapter will examine is La Loca of Ana Castillo’s 1993 novel, So Far From God; Loca uses magic with adult fluency, her comfort with magic often emerging in defiant, even humorous episodes. Unlike the previous three characters, Loca is not the sole protagonist of her novel. Instead, she shares the spotlight with her mother and three sisters (each of whom is discussed to some extent in later chapters of this dissertation) in Castillo’s humorous, fast-paced novel exploring Chicano/a expectations of and uses for magical realism. Magic in everyday life. I have, however, chosen to discuss Loca’s coming of age in this chapter, for she castillo does effect her own version of the bildungsroman.
The novels mentioned above adapt the traditional *bildungsroman* to fit their special cultural circumstances, including cultural prejudices. Native American critic Paula Gunn Allen asserts that since *Brothers Three*, a novel by Cherokee breed John Milton Oskison, "the prejudice experienced by breeds... has pervaded Native American novels throughout the twentieth century" ("Whose Dream" 96). In addition to this prejudice, full-blood Natives and breeds have typically been stereotyped. For instance, non-Natives writing about Native Americans have primarily opted for the theme of "the plight of the noble Indian who is the hapless victim of civilized forces beyond his ability to control" (Allen, "Whose Dream" 96). And, as Allen comments, Indian characters who tried "to adapt [to] white ways in any sense were doomed to death," a belief Allen finds "common among both Indians and whites" of that time ("Whose Dream" 96). So, it comes as no surprise that early work by Native American writers also relied on this theme "because it was the one most acceptable to potential publishers" (Allen, "Whose Dream" 97). Since the early twentieth century, Native writers have come into a clearer understanding of their own voice, finding ways to "characterize and define" both "tribal and urban life" of Native Americans in their own way (Allen, "Whose Dream" 98). The magical realism employed in the
Native American novels discussed here surely attests to this shift in voice.

Allen succinctly describes the shape of present-day Native American fiction:

American Indian novelists use cultural conflict as a major theme, but their work shows an increasing tendency to bind that theme to its analogs in whatever tribal oral tradition they write out of. So although the protagonists in Native American novels are in some sense bicultural and must deal with the effects of colonization and an attendant sense of loss of self, each is also a participant in a ritual tradition, and it is ritual tradition that gives their individual lives shape and significance. ("Whose Dream" 98)

Linda Palmer concurs with Allen on this point: “Survival in the face of encounters with the dominant society is naturally a recurring theme in Native American fiction” (98). And, like Allen’s idea that this theme is part of a greater ritual tradition, Palmer’s own argument in “Healing Ceremonies: Native American Stories of Cultural Survival” is that cultural survival comes “through love of place, the natural world, and ‘our children’ and, perhaps especially, through the stories that tell the people who they are, where they are, and why they are here— the stories that sustain the culture through generations” (97).

In contrast, Mexic Amerindians portrayed in fiction have rarely been characterized as the “noble savage” as Native Americans have been. However, they, too, have
nonetheless fallen victim to the tastes of publishers as well as ethnic stereotypes. In this respect, both Allen's and Palmer's comments apply to Chicanos/as as well as Native Americans. One need look no further than Westerns—both novels and films—to find the American of Mexican heritage (i.e., Mexic Amerindian or Chicano/a) residing in the United States working as a bilingual guide, migrant worker, gopher, or housemaid. Chicanos/as have typically occupied roles of subservience in fiction, magnifying their status as an annexed, conquered people, similar to Native Americans. Indeed, Mexic Amerindians are dogged by descriptions attached to ethnic minorities in general. They have been characterized as dirty, shiftless, lazy, drunken, even ignorant—not unlike the hurtful adjectives incorrectly applied to Native Americans and African Americans. It follows logically, then, that Mexic Amerindian novelists have created literature similar in cultural theme to that of Native Americans. Taken one step further, the above passage from Paula Gunn Allen can, in large part, be applied to Chicano/a literature. That is, Chicano/a literature employs "cultural conflict as a major theme"; its characters "are in some sense bicultural and must deal with the effects of colonization and an attendant sense of loss of self"; and "ritual tradition" provides "shape and significance" in the lives of its
characters (Allen, "Whose Dream" 98). Certainly ethnic stereotyping of Native Americans and Chicanos/as has been similar, not to mention just as prevalent as the stereotyping of any other ethnic minority in the United States, such as African Americans or Asian Americans.

So, as Native American and Mexic Amerindian writers give voice to the bicultural influences of living between worlds, while trying to maintain personal identity, their fictional characters follow suit. The characters discussed in this chapter are all "breeds," and they must contend with the difficult identity their ethnic status entails. As a result, their stories, and searches reflect these hurdles, using magical realism to overcome them.

Like Paula Gunn Allen’s criticism, John M. Reilly’s formula for ethnic plot structure can encompass both the Native American and Mexic Amerindian viewpoints. Reilly finds that “[e]thnic motivation functioning in literature yields” the following structure:

(A) A character is established in the context of an American ethnic group. (B) That character conflicts with the facts of social organization as they are embodied in established patterns of power and discriminatory relationships. There is, then, a movement either to (C) destruction of the character, or (D) character growth that transcends in some manner the historical-material facts of social organization....One striking variation not immediately evident in the scheme, however, is the combination of (C) character destruction and (D) growth of consciousness. This is, of course, the pattern of Native Son. (“Criticism” 5)
Reilly and Allen concur on several points. Specifically, both hold that ethnic characters, because of their cultural differences, conflict with the dominant culture. One result of this conflict, according to part (C) of Reilly's formula, is that it can lead to character destruction. Likewise, Allen asserts that the Native American character in fiction meets destruction in one of two ways: as the noble savage "who is the hapless victim of civilized forces beyond his ability to control," or because an attempt "to adapt [to] white ways . . . doomed [him or her] to death" ("Whose Dream" 96). Reilly's formula logically applies to any ethnic novel, and Allen's ideas apply logically to other ethnic groups, for our purposes Chicanos/as. Keeping Reilly's and Allen's critical interpretations in mind, this chapter will analyze the influence of magical realism in accomplishing (D), character growth, as a means of avoiding the destruction of (C), as well as the Native Son format, or combination of (C) and (D), where applicable.

Anaya's Antonio

Rudolfo Anaya's pivotal 1972 novel, Bless Me, Ultima, offers a poignant view of coming of age for a young Chicano, Antonio Marez. Set in New Mexico during World War II, the novel begins with Antonio's initial
recognition of magic as a part of his idyllic childhood and progresses to his mediating use of magic as a part of a newfound individual identity. *Bless Me, Ultima* operates according to the tenets presented above by both Allen and Reilly. That is, Antonio's personal, ethnic values--a reverence for the magical among them--conflict with the values of dominant society. Analysis of Antonio's discovery of the magical demonstrates how magical realism enhances Antonio's coming of age, in spite of the opposition he feels from dominant culture. Through his experiences with the magical, Antonio discovers a bond to his ethnic heritage that enables him to mediate between his own and dominant cultures.

As he discovers the many sides of reality around him, Antonio experiences Carpentier's very definition of magic realism, "the marvellous in the real" (viii). Antonio discerns these conflicting views of reality from various sources: the curandera and family friend who helped his mother deliver him, Ultima; childhood friends; the Catholic church, and even his own dream visions. The first perspective the reader shares with Antonio is his view of nature, which Antonio equates with his own happy childhood, as well as with the security he experiences with Ultima, who has come to live with Antonio's family.
when the novel opens. Describing the day of Ultima’s arrival in town, Antonio recalls:

When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood. She took my hand, and the silent, magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sun-baked llano . . . (Anaya, Bless Me 1)

Indeed, Antonio associates “the summer [he] was almost seven” with the heightened awareness of nature and magic that Ultima’s presence gives him (1). From the outset Antonio identifies the magical with his positive view of nature, which is enhanced by, if not a result of, the presence of Ultima in his life. Antonio’s keen perception of nature continues throughout the novel, allowing him to witness the “soul,” or “presence of the river” (14). As Antonio and Ultima spend time together, Ultima’s intervention brings natural mysteries into focus for Antonio:

I learned from her that there was a beauty in the time of day and in the time of night, and that there was peace in the river and in the hills. She taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. (14)

Before Ultima’s arrival Antonio fears “the soul of the river,” but with her mentoring friendship, he learns “that [his] spirit shared in the spirit of all things” (14). The comfort he feels as a result of this sharing later
allows Antonio to effectively mediate between cultures by using what he feels is a magical connection between himself and nature, creating a personally livable vision of the connection of everyday reality and of magic realism.

As a result of his perception of nature, Antonio experiences a magic only visible to those who will see it: the magic of the golden carp. The privilege of seeing the carp, like the fairy tale of Peter Pan, is only afforded those with the belief that they will see. In Bless Me, Ultima, those privileged are not only children, but a few, special adults, such as Ultima and a local Native American man, known throughout the novel as Jason’s Indian. This side of reality holds great conflict for Antonio; he has difficulty reconciling the Christian tenets he has been taught to the pagan worship of a glorious, godlike fish. In “The Silence of the Llano: Notes from the Author,” Anaya describes a parallel conflict from his own youth, when he “roamed the river valley with [his] childhood friends, moving back and forth between the civilized world of [his] Catholic heritage and the pagan truths which seemed so evident in the world of raw, primal nature” (49). Anaya uses his personal experience to explore the idea of Antonio’s childhood innocence, “for it was the innocent child in the novel Bless Me, Ultima who peered...
directly into the dark waters of the river and saw the primal (and, therefore, innocent) archetypes of the collective memory" ("Silence" 49). Antonio’s innocence is obvious from his inner monologue while listening to the legend of the golden carp: he “shiver[s], not because it was cold but because the roots of everything I had ever believed in seemed shaken. If the golden carp was a god, who was the man on the cross? The Virgin? Was my mother praying to the wrong God?” (75). As Antonio prepares to make his first holy communion in the Catholic church, the golden carp haunts his conscience in a way that he is afraid to share with adults. The carp is visible only to special people, just as Antonio’s personal worries cannot be understood by everyone. Dominant culture brings guilt into Antonio’s life, making him feel ashamed for experiencing the magical. But, Anaya remarks, this experience is problematic as well as illuminating:

The child is capable of becoming aware of and accepting the illumination of truth and beauty. The archetype, as a perfect symbol which communicates a truth, is obvious to the child. But the child can also see the ghosts of the past. . . . and this awareness can produce both fear and illumination. ("Silence" 49)

As Anaya’s own creation, the child Antonio wrestles with the positive and negative aspects of his privileged vision. Surely this conflict exemplifies Reilly’s aforementioned idea that character destruction can foment
character growth. While Antonio’s destruction is not as final as the Bigger Thomas/Native Son example that Reilly employs, Antonio’s beliefs are certainly crumbling in order to make room for new character development. The “fear and illumination” (Anaya, “Silence” 49) that Anaya creates for Antonio uses the pattern Reilly describes to characterize Native Son, translated into Chicano/a terms.

The pagan versus Christian conflict underlies the novel and suggests the equally difficult problem of mediating between cultures. Having to choose one religion (or learn to mediate between several— or none) lies at the heart of Antonio’s struggle for identity. In his youthful fear of a vengeful God, Antonio wonders,

“... why couldn’t there be a god who would never punish his people, a god who would be forgiving all of the time? Perhaps the Virgin Mary was such a god? She had forgiven the people who killed her son. She always forgave. Perhaps the best god would be like a woman, because only women really knew how to forgive.” (130)

The church, associated in part with the dominant, outside culture of town, maintains its fearful hold on Antonio late into the novel: “It was frightening to think of missing mass on Sunday, then dying, and for that one mortal sin to go to hell forever” (191). But Antonio’s fear of eternal damnation is tempered, even mediated, by positive religious associations. For example, Antonio’s mother wants him to become a priest, following in the
tradition of her own family, the Lunas. In addition, Antonio reveres the altar his mother keeps while sharing her Catholic beliefs. And, at times the church seems almost a mother to Antonio: “I turned more and more to praying before the altar of the Virgin, because when I talked to Her I felt as if she listened, like my mother listened” (180). So, the church Antonio fears also comforts him. His belief in the Virgin holds magic as strong as that of the golden carp; choosing the right magic lies at the center of Antonio’s personal conflict, causing him both “fear and illumination”.

The existence of the golden carp not only calls Antonio’s religion into question, but relates to his perception of nature, connecting the two. When traditional doctors fail to cure Antonio’s sick uncle Lucas but Ultima’s healing powers succeed, Antonio wonders, “Why had the power of God failed to cure my uncle?” (99). Ultima’s healing curanderismo upsets Antonio’s faith in a Christian God. Later, Antonio’s faith in God is again shaken when he and a friend go to see the majestic carp, whose non-Christian status connects the fish, in Antonio’s mind, with Ultima. Seeing the carp fills Antonio with wonder: “I knew I had witnessed a miraculous thing, the appearance of a pagan god, a thing as miraculous as the curing of my uncle Lucas” (105).
Even though Antonio recognizes the power of Ultima and of the carp as truly miraculous, guilt engulfs him for his seeming betrayal of the Catholic faith. That is, Antonio’s religion conflicts with both his feelings for nature (as exemplified by the carp) and Ultima:

And I thought, the power of God failed where Ultima’s worked; and then a sudden illumination of beauty and understanding flashed through my mind. This is what I expected God to do at my first holy communion! If God was witness to my beholding of the golden carp then I had sinned! (105)

For Antonio the beauty of the fish merges with Ultima’s healing powers in the same way that Ultima’s presence enhances Antonio’s perception of nature. Both Ultima and nature (including the carp) conflict with Antonio’s Catholicism because of their ability to enlighten through the magical. Even as Antonio makes the joyous connection between the carp and Ultima, the flash of brilliance is over, replaced by the guilt of betraying his Christianity for magical understanding. Catholicism and its rules frighten the seven-year-old in a way that nature does not; the beauty of nature, unlike complicated religion, lies within Antonio’s understanding.

Antonio discerns conflicting aspects of reality from friends and religion, but also from his own dream visions. In a particularly telling dream Antonio witnesses the death and destruction of all that he holds dear: his
family, Ultima, his home and village, and the carp. In Antonio’s dream vision, his brothers vocalize the conflict that Antonio faces between religions, but also the dangers of no faith at all: “Oh, help us, our sweet brother, help us. We followed neither the laws of God or of your pagan god, and we paid no heed to the magic of Ultima” (166). The dream reflects Antonio’s waking conflict between seemingly irreconcilable religious beliefs. And, to heighten the tension of the dream, Antonio loses his brothers to the indecision that paralyzes him, too. But Antonio fears making the wrong choice as much as making no choice at all. Relief comes when the vision concludes with the golden carp’s restoring the people, leaving Antonio with a sense of peace: “He [the golden carp] had been witness to everything that happened, and he decided that everyone should survive, but in new [mediated] form. He opened his huge mouth and swallowed everything, everything there was, good and evil” (168). Only by allowing reconciliation between good and evil can Antonio face his waking life, and deal with the tragedy that seems to have befallen his lost brothers. For Antonio, effective reconciliation must entail acceptance of magic, including pagan carp worship as well as Ultima’s powers.

Having learned the conflicting sides of reality around him and the place that magic holds among them,
Antonio proceeds to mediate these aspects in a personally meaningful way. Antonio learns to differentiate between good and evil pagan practices, to contend with public misunderstanding of Ultima, to handle cultural ridicule, and to reconcile the conflict between Indian and vaquero\textsuperscript{10} interests. Regarding the first of these, Antonio is torn between good and evil magical influences, such as the golden carp versus the black magic of the local witches, the Trementina sisters. Antonio has yet to fully comprehend the responsibility that each brand of the magical entails. Regarding the laws of nature—a nature that Antonio has only recently come to appreciate in its universally shared spirit—Ultima, because of her intentions to protect Antonio and the natural world, emerges on the side of good. The Trementina sisters, on the other hand, twist and exploit nature to serve their own, selfish ends. Despite their clearly different intentions, Ultima's healing magic at times comes dangerously close to the rituals of the Trementinas, and Antonio even has a nightmare that Ultima is one of them. This problem is heightened by the fact that the townspeople, especially Antonio's own classmates, misunderstand Ultima and her healing, forcing Antonio to defend himself and Ultima against schoolyard taunts and charges of witchery. One day Antonio's classmates hurl
accusations: “’Hey, Tony, is it true what they say? Is there a bruja at your house?’” (102). The characters of Bless Me, Ultima do not always understand the magic around them, and their misunderstanding only intensifies Antonio’s inner struggle for peace as he works to define the magical for himself.

Further conflict arises between Antonio and the white teachers and schoolchildren. Having only learned English upon coming to town for school, Antonio is publicly ridiculed for his cultural difference: “[Miss Maestas] took me to the front of the room and spoke to the other boys and girls. She pointed at me but I did not understand her. Then the other boys and girls laughed and pointed at me. I did not feel so good” (54). As Antonio surmounts this obstacle, he again faces ridicule for the food he brings for lunch. The “hot beans and some good, green chile wrapped in tortillas,” cause the same response: “When the other children saw my lunch they laughed and pointed again” (54). Disoriented and ridiculed, Antonio describes his actions: “I sneaked around the back of the school building, and standing against the wall I tried to eat” (54). The sadness he feels overwhelms him and matures him at once: “I felt for the first time what the grown-ups call, la tristesa de la vida” (55). These emotions are again Anaya’s “fear and
illumination". Relief from this failed attempt at crossing only comes when Antonio befriends "a few others who were like us, different in language and custom," and, as a result, "part of our loneliness was gone" (55). Finding a makeshift home, or sense of safety, on both sides of Antonio's existence is crucial to his mediation.\(^{12}\)

A final obstacle to Antonio's mediation between cultures arises from his knowledge of the conflict between the vaqueros and the Indians they conquered to take Indian lands. Antonio recalls hearing stories of how the vaqueros lived on the llano: "They became horsemen, caballeros, men whose daily life was wrapped up in the ritual of horsemanship. They were the first cowboys in a wild and desolate land which they took from the Indians" (119). The conquering of Indians arises again when Ultima and Antonio go to rid a house of unfriendly spirits. In times past, the Mexican vaquero Telléz hanged three Comanche Indians who had raided his flocks, and in so doing created spirits that could not rest: "They left the bodies strung on a tree; they did not bury them according to their custom. Consequently, the three souls were left to wander on that ranch" (216). Although he is descended from the vaqueros through his father's side of the family, Antonio's mention of the Indians as the original in-
habitants of his home(land) subtly lets the reader know that this too troubles the young protagonist. In his attempts to reconcile all the facets of his conflicting reality, Antonio learns mediation at a very young age, and gains wisdom and release through the magical. Without the magical that he experiences through Ultima and the pagan carp, Antonio would have never answered the many questions about his faith and identity to his satisfaction. Magical realism enables Antonio to face a version of reality which he finds true and worth living. Antonio’s reality can hold both good and evil magic, as well as his personal responsibility to be true to the universal laws of nature. Antonio’s mature reality allows him to face loss and recognize love.

Through the tempering that occurs as Antonio reconciles these many conflicts comes vision; he acknowledges the mediation necessary for harmony between conflicting sides. Examples of mediation occur throughout the novel, foreshadowing Antonio’s emergence into adulthood and into a mediated version of dominant culture. For instance, Ultima, the Chicana curandera, takes her knowledge of herbs and healing from Native Americans, reminding the reader of the many aspects of Chicano/a ethnic heritage: “She spoke to me of the common herbs and medicines we shared with the Indians of the Rio del Norte”
Religions, like methods of healing, are also combined throughout the novel: Antonio’s family takes in Ultima, welcoming her often “misunderstood” ways while simultaneously saying a prayer to the Virgin Mary (3-4). Antonio even dreams, soon after the arrival of Ultima and the owl who follows her, representative of her soul, that “The Virgin smiled at the goodness of the owl” (12). Harmonious combinations, indeed, mediations, are exactly what Antonio searches for throughout the novel. They constitute the journey toward knowledge that is his bildungsroman. Finally, Ultima’s blessing of Antonio and his mother carries a cross-cultural sanctity of its own: “. . . Ultima blessed us both. She blessed without using the name of the Trinity like my mother, and yet her blessing was as holy” (234). These shared aspects of medicine and worship help Antonio discover an even greater commonality: a pantheistic sense of soul. Antonio’s dreams and ideas lead him to recognize a universal soul among living things that enables him to find harmony, even in Ultima’s death. Magical realism makes Antonio’s mediation possible, allowing the character destruction Reilly describes to result ultimately in newness, in character growth through rebirth into maturity. Although loss is inherent to Antonio’s mediation and coming of age (he experiences four deaths over the course of the novel),

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he ultimately learns how to handle loss, having arrived at a mature relationship with the magical.

**Lipsha’s Love Medicine**

While magic unfolds itself before the young Antonio through nature and *curanderismo*, for Lipsha Morrissey of Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* series (*Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, *The Bingo Palace*, *Tales of Burning Love*), magic is a given. Lipsha gets magic firsthand by having healing powers, or “the touch”: “I know the tricks of mind and body inside out without ever having trained for it, because I got the touch. It’s a thing you got to be born with. I got secrets in my hands that nobody ever knew to ask” (*Erdrich, Love Medicine* 230-31). Critic Karla Sanders comments on Lipsha’s power: “Lipsha’s sense of who he is, his sense of personal value and power, comes from his magical, medicinal hands” (150). Erdrich’s trademark humor, readily apparent in Lipsha’s offhanded narration, results in a most compelling coming of age tale for Lipsha. However, unlike the young Antonio whose conflict lies in recognizing magic and reconciling it to his own belief system, Lipsha’s conflict lies in perfecting and best using his powers while existing in dominant culture. Critic Tom Berninghausen notes the importance of setting, of place, to Native American writing: “The sense of place, the ways by which
individuals and groups relate to particular landscapes as sacred, is a distinctive feature of Native American literature and culture” (190). Finding a comfortable “place” for himself and his powers is paramount for Lipsha’s own character development and coming of age. Like Antonio, Lipsha will have to see some things he holds dear destroyed so that he can emerge a magically mediated adult character.

For both Antonio and Lipsha, this mature mediation requires a space, or place, between cultures, not unlike the space their own ethnicity describes: a mixture or breed. Berninghausen holds that Louise Erdrich’s fiction is itself “mixed-blood” in nature:

Erdrich writes what we might call ‘mixed-blood narrative’ in that, like mixed-blood culture, her texts occupy, in terms of subject matter and formal qualities, the margin between purely traditional Native American modes of representation and those modes common in European American culture. (191)

If the reader allows this point of Erdrich’s writing, then he or she must also allow that Erdrich’s writing creates a Native American version of the borderlands typically associated with Chicano/a culture, which is, in fact, a plausible term for the in-between space occupied by many ethnic minorities.

Time and again throughout the Love Medicine series, Lipsha loses sight of the traditional component of his
mixed blood (evident in his inherited gift of “the touch”) and the physical and mental place this tradition requires for his personal tranquility. Lipsha must effect his bildungsroman without falling headlong into dominant culture where his supernatural powers are not valued. Indeed, Erdrich views the portrayal of this specific cultural conflict as a main responsibility of the Native American writer. Berninghausen summarizes this idea: “Erdrich has argued that the responsibility of contemporary Native American writers is to represent their culture, to represent it especially in context of the destruction of traditional culture” (191). Karla Sanders concurs as well as elaborating on this point:

Love Medicine . . . uncovers the resulting ambivalence experienced by her [Erdrich’s] characters as they attempt to reconcile their Native American heritage with the expectations of the dominant white culture in the modern and postmodern United States. The ambivalence created in this attempted reconciliation underscores the difficulty faced by Erdrich’s characters in reaching a balance between the spheres of past and present, personal and communal, private and public. (129)

Reading and studying Erdrich’s writing, then, is not only important for a better understanding of the duality of ethnic culture, but also a means of conveying the urgency of saving a rapidly disappearing culture.

Until Lipsha first falls in love with Shawnee Ray Toose in The Bingo Palace, his attempts to control his
magic touch are fueled by the pain of being orphaned as a baby or by his need to please others. Only when Lipsha falls in love with Shawnee and becomes motivated on a personal level does he at last realize a motivation within himself to succeed. Romantic love, then, acts as a catalyst to Lipsha’s drive to come of age, effectively spurring him on to arrive at an adulthood mediated by magical realism. Before this can happen, however, Lipsha uses trial and error to comprehend his own magic and the opportunities it holds.

Lipsha begins to understand his magic with the discovery of his parentage. In finding out that his mother is the recently deceased June Kashpaw and his father is the renowned Indian outlaw Gerry Nanapush, Lipsha learns that Lulu Lamartine, a somewhat comic tribal matriarch, is his blood grandmother. With this knowledge, Lipsha uncovers a history of supernatural ability in his family, passed on to him. Lipsha inherits the touch directly from his father. As Lipsha studies Gerry’s handling of playing cards, he discerns that Gerry’s fingers “had a life all unto themselves that was spent in knowledge of the cards, and I knew just what gave them that knowledge. He had a form of the touch” (LM 354). But Lipsha’s father is more than just handy at cards;
there is no jail that can hold him. Lipsha muses about his escaped-convict father:

I knew my dad would get away. He could fly. He could strip and flee and change into shapes of swift release. Owls and bees, two-toned Ramblers, buzzards, cottontails, and motes of dust. These forms was interchangeable with his. (LM 361)

Add intuition to shape-shifting and luck at cards, and Gerry Nanapush’s powers become clear. That is, he even knows, upon meeting Lipsha for the first time, that something is amiss for his son. Upon learning that Lipsha is running from the army police after a drunken enlistment episode, Gerry blurts, “That’s your problem! I knew you had a problem!” (LM 365). Obviously, Lipsha comes by his powers honestly; he not only inherits “the touch,” but also his father’s unstudied humor.

While Lipsha’s grandmother Lulu’s supernatural vision comes late in life, it is nonetheless another magical power in Lipsha’s ancestry. After Lulu undergoes eye surgery, “She saw too clear for comfort” (LM 334). Lulu’s abilities are keen enough that, when she combines forces with Marie Kashpaw, another tribal matriarch, they “kno[w] everybody’s life, as if they had hotlines to everybody’s private thoughts” (LM 334). And Lipsha’s mother June adds to his abilities from beyond the grave, appearing to him on several occasions, even giving him a stack of winning bingo tickets (BP 56). With Gerry, Lulu,
and June to help him, Lipsha has more magic than a young man can handle.

Despite his distinguished magical ancestry, inconsistency characterizes Lipsha’s early efforts to use his powers. He is as consumed by understanding his supernatural abilities as he is by getting results. In the chapter from which Love Medicine takes its title, “Love Medicine (1982),” the grandmother Lipsha has always known, Marie Kashpaw, asks for his services in making a love medicine that will reinstate her husband Nector’s love for her. Having entered his “‘second childhood,’” Nector\textsuperscript{16} recalls his youthful affection for Lulu Lamartine, Lipsha’s blood grandmother and the character known for her seduction of most of the town’s men (LM 231). As a result, Lulu and Marie spend their time at the Senior Citizens’ home vying for Nector’s absent-minded attention in episodes that are alternately heart-rending and side-splitting.

In his search for the love medicine that will bring Marie and Nector together again, Lipsha is struck by the love they have for each other. Lipsha is still a child when it comes to romantic love, and the example of his grandparents affects Lipsha’s understanding of love and his healing touch, as well as foreshadowing his transformation into an adult:
For one whole day I felt this odd feeling that cramped my hands. When you have the touch, that's where longing gets you. I never loved like that. It made me feel all inspired to see them fight, and I wanted to go out and find a woman who I would love until one of us died or went crazy. (LM 234)

However, having no prior romantic experience, Lipsha doubts that he is capable of a love like Marie and Nector's: "I doubt that I got staying power" (LM 234). He searches for the right love medicine because his grandmother asks him, and because he loves Marie and Nector-- not because he understands the urgency of romantic love firsthand. Lipsha's motivations to use his magic are well-intentioned yet childish, and his lack of confidence in his own, unrealized romantic prowess make for messy love medicine.

Indeed, it is precisely because Lipsha doesn't know how to reconcile conflicting cultural viewpoints that problems for him arise. Karla Sanders finds this conflict characteristic throughout Love Medicine, wherein Erdrich "presents characters searching for a healthy balance between seemingly diametrically opposed cultures" (129). When the love medicine Marie solicits from Lipsha to win back Nector brings about Nector's untimely death, Lipsha feels certain that his corruption of Chippewa medicine is responsible, for he has bought frozen turkeys instead of using the powerful hearts of Canada geese for his cure.
Because he cannot shoot the geese, he explains, he turned to the local grocery store, allowing dominant culture to invade sacred Chippewa medicine practices: “I told myself love medicine was simple. I told myself the old superstitions was just that—strange beliefs” (LM 245). That is, he has interpreted Chippewa medicine from the viewpoint of the dominant culture rather than looking at the dominant culture from a Chippewa point of view. Lipsha defends his use of false medicine by equating his failure with faults anyone might find in the culture around them, namely an unfulfilling religion and an uncaring government: “Higher Power makes promises we all know they can’t back up, but anybody ever go and slap an old malpractice suit on God? Or the U.S. government?” (LM 245). As a result, Lipsha explains, “I finally convinced myself that the real actual power to the love medicine was not the goose heart itself but the faith in the cure” (LM 246). Although having faith in the cure may indeed be integral to effective medicine, it isn’t enough to make Lipsha feel good about the frozen medicine he chooses when the local Red Owl store is more convenient than hunting. Sanders concurs: “When the love medicine he works on Grandma and Grandpa Kashpaw [Marie and Nector] backfires, he loses [his] sense of self-empowerment and must find his own way back to health” (150). Because dominant culture
offers an easy alternative to the hefty task of making love medicine, Lipsha must face the consequences of his failed magic. This difficult lesson begins the breakdown of character necessary to Lipsha’s ultimate character growth according to the Reilly formula, but the process of humbling destruction has just begun.

Another example of the conflict between Lipsha’s magic and dominant culture arises in The Bingo Palace; the ghost of Lipsha’s mother, June, gives Lipsha winning bingo tickets, enabling him to win the grand prize at Lyman Lamartine’s bingo parlor, a fully loaded van. To Lipsha, the van seems like a solution to his lack of status, to being dubbed “the biggest waste on the reservation” for his failure to succeed in either the traditional world of the reservation or dominant culture (LM 230). But before he can even win the van, Lipsha realizes that the free prize comes at a price. To impress Shawnee Ray Toose, the first (and only) love interest Lipsha has in the Love Medicine series, Lipsha feels he must win the van. But to support his now voracious bingo habit, he must charge for his services, for laying on “the touch.” Lipsha explains:

To get my van, I have to shake hands with greed. I get unprincipled. As I might have already said, my one talent in this life is a healing power I get passed down through the Pillager branch of my background. It’s in my hands... I put on the touch... I have a power in myself that flows out, resistless. I have a richness in my dreams and
waking thoughts. But I do not realize I will have to give up my healing source once I start charging for my service. (BP 64)

The loss of his power is a price steep enough to make Lipsha start paying attention to the conflicting values between the reservation and dominant culture. Lipsha puts this quite succinctly: “Because of the van, I’ll have to get stupid first, then wise” (BP 62). Sanders explores the value of the magical underlying this episode:

In Christianity, a belief in magic moves out of the natural realm and into the supernatural realm where magic and certain kinds of spiritual connections become “miracles” confined to a particular place and time. . . . This temporal division is at odds with the Native beliefs which show that magic or even miracles are possible through belief and knowledge. (133)

The cultures that Lipsha exists between are clearly at odds, especially in what Sanders calls their “differing valuations of magic” (133). While the Christianity of dominant culture relegates the magical to an inaccessible realm, Native culture places the magical precisely where Alejo Carpentier found it: in the real. In this regard, the Native American use of magic in fiction stands as a clear example of Carpentier’s definition of magic realism. Sanders reinforces this point (which also applies nicely to Bless Me, Ultima):

The fictional world of a Magic Realist novel requires a reader to accept the magic as a viable, real part of this reality, so discounting that magic violates the textual world that has been created. . . . A
dismissal of the text's belief in magic does the narrative a disservice. (151)

Lipsha suffers for his attempt at combining a sacred, communal power with attempts as materialistic, personal gain. Sanders explains this in the broad context of Erdrich's fiction, but certainly this explanation applies to Lipsha's example:

By connecting magic's or medicine's positive or negative use to society, the Ojibwa [later Chippewa] developed a religion tied to the community. Erdrich's fiction picks up this connection by showing magic to be powerful when the shaman or healer works for others--family, community--but it becomes ineffectual or weak when employed for the individual or when that familial/communal connection is broken. (133)

Just as when he breached the communal connection of traditional love medicine by using frozen turkey hearts to win Nector's affection back to Marie, Lipsha again breaks the connection in his attempts to win the van. But winning the van--and thereby losing the touch--is only the first of many mistakes Lipsha makes trying to impress Shawnee Ray with the possessions valued by dominant culture, but not by Shawnee Ray and the Natives of the reservation.

As Lipsha comes to see the disastrous effects of overvaluing possessions and undervaluing love (and love medicine), he begins to change. Lipsha discovers an identity much better than "the biggest waste on the
reservation” and matures into his magic as he reclams his past and makes amends with it. Tom Berninghausen builds on an idea from William Bevis in explaining the implications of Lipsha’s realization as it relates to the body of Native American fiction: “[The] quest for a transpersonal identity rooted in a sense of society, history, and place speaks directly to the dynamics of dispossession, displacement, and repossession of the land in Erdrich’s tetralogy [what I have called a quintology]” (193). Berninghausen rightly contends that the return home in its differing aspects allows the Native American character to recreate a reality:

The attempt to repossess what has been lost involves reconstruction of all three aspects of a tribal transpersonal sense of identity—coming home in a social sense, being at home in the tribe’s history, and returning to the particular landscape that is home. (193)

The idea of “homing” is itself crucial here, for as Bevis would argue, “‘In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call ‘regressing’ to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good’” (qtd. in Berninghausen 192). Tom Berninghausen remarks that homing is the Native American version of the bildungsroman. That is, whereas “male-authored classic American fiction[,] consistently treats
the subject of moving on,” Native American fiction explores coming of age by homing in (Berninghausen 192). Berninghausen summarizes this twist on the bildungsroman concisely: “The impulse to move on, to west, in European American culture meets its opposite in contemporary Native American novels” (192).

Lipsha Morrissey clearly homes in rather than moving on. Empowered by the knowledge of the identity of his parents, Lipsha begins to reassess his own identity and reality. During an episode when he is fleeing the army police, Lipsha thinks, “Now you know, when it comes to life, I stayed innocent for many years. I stayed simple. But I could not afford to be this anymore” (LM 342). So, necessity drives Lipsha to maturity, but this maturity is now predicated on Lipsha’s new sense of self and family. He finds that, “Belonging was a matter of deciding to. Through many trials I had seen this to be true. I decided I belonged . . . I was a real kid now, or halfway real” (LM 348). Lipsha’s wiser view even allows him to contend that his mother June’s abandonment of him was not all bad: “I tell you, there was good in what she did for me, I know now. The son that she acknowledged [King] suffered more than Lipsha Morrissey did” (LM 366-67). Nevertheless, June Kashpaw and Gerry Nanapush are still the parents that
abandoned Lipsha, and, as a result, they are responsible in part for his existential summation of human existence:

You’re chosen from the nothingness, but you don’t know for what. You open the confusing ad and you think, Shall I send it in or should I just let the possibilities ripen? You don’t know shit! You are left on your own doorstep! You are set there in a basket, and one day you hear the knock and open the door and reach down and there is your life. (BP 156)

The haphazard way in which June and Gerry orphan and reclaim Lipsha leaves him not only with a new sense of belonging and self-worth, but also with a bitterness akin to Antonio’s “tristesa” and Anaya’s “fear and illumination.” The combination of these emotions signals Lipsha’s coming of age and accompanying disillusionment; he has been destroyed and rebuilt.

The most significant conflict between Native and dominant cultures arises when Lipsha attempts to make the former bring him success in the latter by going on a vision quest along with Lyman Lamartine, another Chippewa who is vying for Shawnee Ray’s affection. Through its many layers, Lipsha’s comic struggle for mediation between reservation society and the dominant culture resonates for both Native and non-Native readers. In an explanation of these overlapping dimensions of Love Medicine, James Ruppert remarks on the work demanded of the implied non-Native reader. To this end, Ruppert cites Bakhtin’s definition of “the novel’s task: a ‘coming to know one’s
own belief system in someone else’s system’” (138).
Indeed, the dual perspective Erdrich requires of the non-
Native reader is confirmed by both Kay Sands and Catherine
Rainwater. While Sands notes the “‘double-think’”
demanded of the reader, Rainwater finds the reader forced
“‘between Worlds’” (both qtd. in Ruppert 138). There is
no doubt then that the five novels of the Love Medicine
series require the non-Native reader not only to
experience marginalization, but also to cross cultural
boundaries, existing between cultures just as Lipsha (not
to mention Antonio of Bless Me, Ultima) does. Even though
much is required of the non-Native reader, Ruppert is
quick to remind all readers of the greater purpose of
layering worldviews: “[T]he novel’s [Love Medicine’s]
richness is revealed when each story, each narrative
viewpoint, is seen in contrast to the other. Since each
perspective creates a coherent and meaningful story,
implied readers are given a chance to experience
complementary meaning structures” (140). So, when
Lipsha’s vision quest is more about impressing Shawnee Ray
than coming to deep truths by convening with nature,
readers have the Native and dominant culture struggle, as
well as their complementary layers of meaning, directly at
hand.
Frustration attacks Lipsha during his vision quest, but these frustrated visions are telling: "The first day I am hungry and all my visions consist of Big Macs" (BP 196). Then, out of sheer boredom and hunger, Lipsha discovers that he can "play back all the [Jimi] Hendrix in [his] memory. . . . Movies come back. Books. I rewatch all the Godfather series" (BP 198). The food, music, and popular culture of dominant society haunt Lipsha, crossing into his attempt to regain Native vision. But these dominant culture visions, along with the animal noises of the forest, are all Lipsha has in the way of enlightenment: "I try to interpret these things as signs of something bigger, but I can't jack up their meanings" (BP 196). He simply cannot have a vision. And, without a legitimate vision, Lipsha's frustration turns to annoyance: "All of a sudden I am annoyed that I turned out as an Indian. If I were something else, maybe all French, maybe nothing, or say, a Norwegian, I'd be sitting in comfort, eating pancakes" (BP 197). If this were the case, there would be no mediation necessary for Lipsha, no need to reconcile two cultures and their values. He would have no mental hurdles to jump, just the perceived ease, luxury, and good food of a seemingly easy, "nothing" heritage. Lipsha's disappointment in his position between worlds--as an Indian who can't even have an Indian
vision—allows readers to participate in his in-between status as well as to recall the at times unwelcome feelings associated with coming of age.

When Lipsha’s quest is nearly over, his jealousy of Lyman Lamartine’s abilities and sway with Shawnee Ray takes over: “I am positive that Lyman is having by-the-book visions right and left, and that I will be completely smoked if I don’t have something deep and amazing to balance him off” (BP 200). It seems that Lipsha has fallen headlong into the dominant culture trap of competition. Fatefully, Lipsha’s “real” vision comes shortly thereafter; the “mother of all skunks” speaks to him, regarding the land around the lake, which Lyman has chosen as the site of his Bingo Palace: “This ain’t real estate” (BP 200). Lipsha’s visions, both true and false, point toward the influence of dominant culture and its destructive impact on the Native way of life.

Berninghausen details the connection between land ownership and competition. As he sets Erdrich’s novels in a historical context, Berninghausen contends that

[i]t was well understood that communal tribal land was essential to Native American identity in general and Chippewa identity in particular. Yet instilling the ethic of competitive individualism, essential for assimilation into the dominant culture, seemed to require individual private landownership. (199)

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Obviously, the skunk is warning Lipsha of precisely this ethic, competitive individualism, an ethic that “inevitably sought to root out basic features of Native American life, especially the concept of a transpersonal self defined in terms of one’s relation to ‘a society, a past, and a place’” (Berninghausen 199). Berninghausen reminds the reader that the process of creating competitive individualism became codified in 1887 with the General Allotment Act or Dawes Act, which began the process of “transforming ‘home’ into ‘real estate,’ commodifying the sacred so that it becomes property” (199). As the last link to the original Pillager family of the Chippewas, Lipsha’s response to the skunk’s warning must not only be viewed from the personal standpoint, but also in the broader context of the tribe that it will ultimately affect. Berninghausen confirms this idea: “Though Lipsha’s voice is that of an individual, and his conscious goals are more personal than communal, his path is, though unrecognized as such by him, toward cultural regeneration” (207). Lipsha’s character growth and bildungsroman have a far-reaching impact on the Native inhabitants of Erdrich’s novel series.

The Bingo Palace concludes as Lipsha watches his outlaw father enter June’s car with her ghost and drive away, an act which allows magical realism to lead Lipsha
to adult understanding (BP 258). In the final chapter of *Love Medicine*, Lipsha narrates a parallel story; he drives Gerry to safety, and thinks of his mother, June, resolving at last to “cross the water, and bring her home” (LM 367). Although I do not agree with Sanders’ idea that this passage is a symbolic fusion between spirit and object, I agree with the rest of her interpretation: “In this final line of the novel, Lipsha Morrissey speaks not of driving the car back to the Reservation, but of laying his mother to rest. Bringing June home is Lipsha’s way of helping her to heal, even after death” (153). This healing process attests to Lipsha’s maturation into adulthood, presenting the reader with his willingness to let go of parents he has never really had a chance to know. But whether June reaches home with Lipsha or with Gerry is not the question, for the experience is Lipsha’s mediation through magical realism. As Lipsha realizes that his parents “have always been inside of [him], dark and shining,” he reaches an adult understanding of mediation between life and death (BP 259). For while June’s home exists beyond death, Lipsha’s home lies in understanding that a spiritual home exists for her, a home that may take him until his own death to achieve for himself. Yet this struggle to reach his own spiritual home is one he now knows he can handle, for he has learned much about the
blurred boundaries between Native and dominant cultures. Lipsha Morrissey emerges from The Bingo Palace as a character that has been destroyed and rebuilt, complete with the “growth of consciousness” described by John M. Reilly’s formula for the ethnic novel. Knowledge of, use of, and mature fluency with magical realism is essential to Lipsha’s destruction as well as his growth.

_Hogan’s Iron Angel_

In an essay from Ethnicity and the American Short Story entitled “Healing Ceremonies: Native American Stories of Cultural Survival,” Linda Palmer cites the poem “Survival This Way” by Acoma Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz as an example of “confidence in Native Americans’ ability to survive” in a modern, changing culture (97). Palmer contends that survival, as an ongoing theme in Native American writing, is no accident: “Survival, not surprisingly, has been a central concern at least since encounters with Europeans first threatened the continuation of their [Native Americans’] cultural traditions” (97). Palmer explains the message behind Ortiz’s poem, finding instructions for survival. Her interpretation tells the reader just how survival happens:

[T]hrough love of place, the natural world, and “our children” and, perhaps especially, through the stories that tell the people who they are, where they are, and why they are here-- the stories that sustain the culture over generations. (Palmer 97)
Angel Iron, the young, mixed-blood protagonist of Linda Hogan’s second novel, *Solar Storms*, exemplifies just this formula for survival through her own Native American version of the *bildungsroman*. But, in addition to love of place, love of the natural world, and traditional stories, Angel uses magical realism to find her own place between the Native American world of her family and the surrounding dominant culture.

Unlike Antonio Márquez of *Bless Me, Ultima*, who learns from each of the views he encounters to reach a multi-cultural, integrated understanding, Angel immerses herself in the Native culture she has lost. Having spent most of her life in foster homes and among non-Natives, Angel begins the search for her lost Native American identity in 1972 at the age of seventeen. For her, life thus far has been comprised of two places, to which a third is added as she returns to the town of Adam’s Rib in search of her lost biological family:

One, the darkest, was a room of fear, fear of everything. . . . And there was the fire-red room of anger I inhabited permanently . . . Now I could feel another room being built, but without knowing it, I was entering silence more deeply than I had entered anything before. (Hogan, *Solar Storms* 26-7)

Entering silence will enable Angel to locate a self-knowledge she has never before experienced. In the introduction to *The Stories We Hold Secret: Tales of*
Women's Spiritual Development, Linda Hogan asserts: “For each of us the direction is different, but for many women the inner voice demands periods of silence and contemplation” (xiv). This certainly holds true for Angel and her inner voice. The process of re-entering her Native American heritage and the silent “room” her search for identity entails will allow Angel to confront the physical scars she sustained during a childhood of abuse, to confront her personal history, and to understand the continuum of time and nature as it relates to her own magical abilities.

As with Hogan’s first and third novels, Mean Spirit and Power, Solar Storms presents a dichotomy between Native and dominant cultures. Hogan’s prevailing theme through all of her fiction has always been the relationship between humans and their natural environment; Hogan’s fictional Native Americans, for the most part, come into conflict with non-Natives through a difference between each culture’s respect for the earth. Linda Hogan can be relied upon to bring her special, accessible brand of social consciousness to each novel through human interaction with the environment. In her first novel, Mean Spirit, Hogan creates a murder mystery centered around the exploitation of Oklahoma Indian reservation land rich with oil. Native American characters in Mean
Spirit are repeatedly forced to defend their land allotments, as well as the land’s animal inhabitants, from enterprising whites looking to get rich quick at the expense of Native American and animal lives. Hogan’s 1998 novel Power, like Solar Storms, presents a young female protagonist’s coming of age while battling environmental issues. While Power compares the diminishing numbers of Taiga Indians to those of the endangered Florida panther, Solar Storms traces Angel’s journey into activism on behalf of diverted waterways—and the environmental destruction such diversion leaves in its path.

The first realization Angel makes at Adam’s Rib is the extent to which her facial scars, inflicted by her abusive mother Hannah Wing, have affected her: “My ugliness, as I called it, had ruled my life” (54). Angel’s mother Hannah is the manifestation of all Indian losses rolled into one character; one tribal elder calls her “the house” and “the meeting place,” for Hannah’s body is the place “where time and history and genocide gather and move like a cloud above the spilled oceans of blood” (101). Hannah comes from a lost tribe called the Elk Islanders, whose story of starvation frames Angel’s own beginning. Both Hannah and her mother before her, Loretta Wing, smell of the “sweet . . . almond odor” of cyanide,
which lingers as a physical reminder of what the Elk Islanders endured—or died from: "She [Loretta] was from the Elk Islanders, the people who became so hungry they ate the poisoned carcasses of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves. The starving people ate that bait" (38). Left alone by the loss of her people that starving winter and marked forever by the smell of their death, Loretta’s life soon became the prototype for Hannah’s own: "But after that [the starvation and poisoning of her people], when she [Loretta] was still a girl, she’d been taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and forced her. That was how one day she became the one who hurt others. It was passed down" (39). The hurt that Loretta passes down registers as scars on Angel’s face, inflicted by Hannah, whose “empty eyes” tell those around her that she is no more than a body inhabited by evil spirits, her own soul lost long ago. Yet despite the soullessness of her mother and grandmother, Angel’s own soul is spared. She reconnects to her father’s side of the family on her return to Adam’s Rib, and through these connections, reconnects to herself.

With her arrival at Adam’s Rib, Angel discovers more than the homes of her grandmothers; she arrives at self-knowledge: “I began to form a kind of knowing at Adam’s Rib. I began to feel that if we had no separate words for
inside and out and there were no boundaries between them, no walls, no skin, you would see me” (54). Angel views her physical scars as a boundary separating her true self from the people and the world around her. The reader learns the depth to which Angel’s physical differences have shaped her life through a particularly telling episode. When Angel cuts her finger, the very smell of the medicine cabinet she has gone to for aid recalls painful memories:

[When I smelled that odor, something inside me began to move around, the memory of wounds, the days and weeks of hospitals, the bandages across my face, the surgeries. . . . the grafts that left my thigh gouged, the skin stolen from there to put my face back together. (52)]

Growing past the physical and mental boundary of her past abuse constitutes no small part of Angel’s coming of age. Hogan reminds the reader in “Women: Doing and Being” that “growth does not come from putting on any spiritual clothing. Growth comes from removing and removing, ceasing, undoing, from letting ourselves drop down, or even fall, into the core of our living Being” (Stories We Hold xiii). Angel does just that: she allows herself to fall into the core of her being she finds among her female ancestors at Adam’s Rib. Upon seeing herself from the loving and protective perspective of her grandmothers and their circle of friends, Angel reaches a self-knowledge
that extends beyond the physical. Indeed, aided by her new “kind of knowing,” Angel removes her own layers until she at last knows that she is as “beautiful as the wolf” (54).

As the significance of her physical difference fades, Angel is ready and able to discern the continuum shared by time and nature. During a journey north that she and her family make from the islands surrounding Adam’s Rib, Angel observes that “we went into another kind of time” (64). On this trek to stop the damming and diversion of the rivers that lead to Adam’s Rib, Angel travels with her ancestors, women who share the spotlight with Angel throughout Hogan’s novel: her grandfather’s wife Bush (and thus the woman she identifies as her grandmother), who fought unsuccessfully for custody of Angel when she was taken away from Hannah as an infant; her great-grandmother Agnes who communicates with the spirit of the last blue bear; and her great-great-grandmother Dora-Rouge, who, through her position as matriarch, holds the group of women together. Angel explains the relationship of the four women: “Dora-Rouge, I think now, was a root and we were like a tree family, aspens or birch, connected to one another underground, the older trees feeding the young, sending off shoots, growing” (48). The natural image of this description easily lends itself to Angel’s
growing knowledge of the world around her. Together this
tree family of women experience a different “kind of time”
that Angel explains from her own perspective: “I was
traveling backward in time toward myself at the same time
I journeyed forward” (64). She learns about the past her
family and the land have shared in a magically timeless
continuum, all the while coming closer to a self-awareness
beyond her physical appearance.

Just as the maps Angel’s family uses disintegrate on
their journey through this timelessness, Hogan notes:
“There are no previous maps or landmarks” for the journey
to discover “the brilliant soul within us” (Stories We
Hold xiii). So, although Angel’s search for a coherent
history, for a reason behind her mother’s abuse, leads her
and the females of her family in a journey north, they
cover more than distance and water: “As we traveled, we
entered time and began to trouble it, to pester it apart
or into some kind of change” (168). As their trip
unfolds, time “beg[ins] to unravel [them] as [they]
ente[r] a kind of timelessness” (170). But the process of
growth differs for each woman on the journey. Angel, her
grandmother Bush, her great-grandmother Agnes, and her
great-great-grandmother Dora-Rouge all experience growth
on their own schedule. Like the women in The Stories We
Hold Secret, “They are in various stages of knowing their
inner truths and seeing the outer world” (x). And, in addition to shaping her concept of self, Angel’s perception of time also shapes her experience of the world around her. In one episode a “gap in time” brings Angel to “a place between worlds,” allowing her to connect with nature (177): “In that moment I understood I was part of the same equation as birds and rain” (79). This connection between the human and the natural worlds is Hogan’s trademark, a theme she reworks time and again through her poetry and prose. Just as Ultima’s magic brings the mysteries of nature to the forefront of Antonio’s consciousness in Bless Me, Ultima, the magical difference in time that Angel experiences as she searches for self-understanding allows her to feel a similar connectedness to nature. She sees herself and her family through their relationship to nature: “We were only one of the many dreams of earth” (170).

Angel’s new relationship with nature brings magical awareness to her everyday life. These extra-sensory abilities begin with vision: “I began to see inside water, until one day my vision shifted and I could even see the fish on the bottom.... ‘How do you do that?’ Bush [her grandmother] wanted to know. I was proud of my new talent. ‘I just look,’ I said” (85). And, leading up to her plant dreams, Angel notices new sensitivities: “In
bed at night there were times I could see in the dark. My fingers grew longer, more sensitive. My eyes saw new and other things. My ears heard everything that moved beyond the walls. I could see with my skin, touch with my eyes” (120). Angel’s newfound supernatural sensitivities imbue her with self-esteem and self-confidence she has never before experienced. Truly, discovering magical abilities also enables Angel to gain insight into herself; magic facilitates her coming of age.

Connecting time and nature to herself brings Angel to the next element in her self-discovery process: dreams. Angel’s dreams are her magic; they impart to her the knowledge of plants for healing, like the healing she has already begun on a personal level and now applies to others in Solar Storms. Angel’s plant dreams come from her new perception of time: “For my own part in this dreaming, as soon as I left time, when Thursday and Friday slipped away, plants began to cross my restless sleep in abundance” (170). And all the magical changes Angel experiences, from supersensitive vision to revelatory dreams, result from the third room of silence: “In silence. . . . New senses came to me. I was equal to the other animals, hearing as they heard, moving as they moved, seeing as they saw” (172). In typical Hogan fashion, Angel’s experience of magical realism creates a
connection with the environment, and Angel learns to trust her dreams as part of the greater powers of earth. The advice of family friend Tulik reinforces this trust: "'Dreams rest in the earth.' By that he meant that we did not create them with our minds" (260). Angel’s dreams and perception of time in turn impart to her a special kind of travel: "And I could tell about my own passing through doors not of this world, how my soul travels at times to the middle of rivers where doctors named stone reside, how I search for the plants of my grandmothers" (345-46). All of Angel’s magical attributes act together for the purpose of healing. As Angel establishes a real relationship with time and nature, her senses expand and her dreams educate. Taken together, Angel’s brand of magical realism transports her not only through a catalog of healing, but also through a clearer understanding of history. Within the ethnic plot structure this chapter has established for analysis, Hogan’s Angel begins Solar Storms having already met the requirements of A, B, and C of the Reilly formula. That is, Angel, as an ethnic character, has conflicted with the dominant culture and been devalued personally by the response her ethnicity, family background, and scars have elicited from the dominant culture. This psychological destruction brings Angel to Adam’s Rib where
she can heal and experience the growth of consciousness, Reilly’s part D, that accompanies coming of age.

**Within the Realm of Possibility: Magical Realism and La Loca**

La Loca of Ana Castillo’s *So Far From God*, a “parody” of “the Spanish-speaking *telenovela* [soap opera],” confirms her relationship with magic at age three, when she is resurrected from the dead (Stavans 37, translation mine)\(^2\). At the same time, this event causes Loca’s separation from all but animals and her immediate family. Therefore, the event which makes Loca a local saint also defines her sainthood: humanitarian, but requiring distance from humanity. Such quirky events and appellations (such as La Loca, or “the crazy woman”) pepper the novel with humor and establish its message of appreciation for Mexic Amerindian (Castillo’s own preferred term for Chicano/a) feminine culture. La Loca’s coming of age occurs via equally quirky means, rather than the usual causal chain of events inherent to the *bildungsroman*. As I have stated in the introduction to this chapter, Loca is not the sole protagonist of *So Far From God*. Rather, she shares the role with the characters of her mother and three sisters. While this is not the traditional format for the coming of age tale, Loca does indeed effect her own *bildungsroman*. 

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Loca’s resurrection opens the novel, establishing the child’s relationship with magical realism and determining her life’s path. At her funeral, Loca opens her own coffin:

The lid had pushed all the way open and the little girl inside sat up, just as sweetly as if she had woken from a nap, rubbing her eyes and yawning. . . . Then, as if all this was not amazing enough, as Father Jerome moved toward the child she lifted herself up into the air and landed on the church roof. (Castillo, So Far From God 22-23)

As Father Jerome’s approach suggests, from the time of her resurrection, Loca is averse to people: “For the rest of her life . . . she was to be repulsed by the smell of humans. She claimed that all humans bore an odor akin to that which she had smelled in the places she had passed through when she was dead” (23). Loca’s peculiar brand of sainthood wields its magic like a punch line: her special powers allow her to literally rise above the stinking masses. In this telling post-resurrection scene (and for the duration of the novel), Loca privileges the simple and honest—her mother and animals—over the stench of the hell-bound townspeople. Despite her inability to deal with people directly, Loca’s purpose after her miraculous return to the living is clear. She tells the crowd at her funeral, “Listen . . . on my long trip I went to three places: hell . . . to pulgatorio [purgatory] and to heaven. God sent me back to help you
all, to pray for you all" (24). But Loca’s aversion to
human smell speaks in a way her God-given purpose cannot.
That is, even if the people don’t believe Loca’s
preaching, they at least recognize that they are repulsive
to the God-like, and, by association, God Himself. Since
La Loca’s first crossing from death into life limits the
souls she can literally touch (reaching others only
through word of mouth as her fame spreads), her existence
thereafter consists of quietly saving her own family.24
But her isolation in and of itself marks a difference in
her place within the Reilly paradigm for the ethnic novel.
As Reilly presents his model, “(A) A character is
established in the context of an American ethnic group.
(B) That character conflicts with the facts of social
organization as they are embodied in the established
patterns of power and discriminatory relationships”
(“Criticism” 5). Loca finds herself, by virtue of her
magical resurrection, not only “established in the context
of an American ethnic group,” but, in fact, confined to
that ethnic group in the microcosm that is her nuclear
family (Reilly, “Criticism” 5). Regarding Reilly’s second
point, Loca’s conflict with “the facts of social
organization as they are embodied in established patterns
of power and discriminatory relationships” are impassable;
her complete aversion to human smell keeps her from
attending church and school, and from participating in any social setting within her own ethnic culture or the dominant culture (Reilly, “Criticism” 5). Loca, therefore, faces conflict and criticism both from within and without her ethnic context.

La Loca and the characters discussed earlier in this chapter come of age over the course of the novels they inhabit. But unlike Antonio Marez, Lipsha Morrissey, and Angel Iron, Loca comes into maturity and understanding of her powers because of the attention her childhood death brings her. Loca’s magical powers take several shapes: healing, intuition, and some rather uncanny practical abilities. Loca’s magical healing, unlike Lipsha’s hand-centered medicine, comes through prayer for the benefit of her family. For example, Loca performs three abortions for her promiscuous sister Caridad (26). The narrator assures us that abortion is indeed healing because life and men haven’t treated Caridad very well: “without exception, healing her sisters from the traumas and injustices they were dealt by society-- a society she herself never experienced firsthand-- was never questioned” (27). And although the society of the fictional town Tome questions Caridad’s morals, no one can question the injustice of the nearly fatal beating Caridad suffers because of an evil spirit, or malogra. Caridad,
the prettiest of the four sisters in *So Far From God*, arrives “home one night as mangled as a stray cat, having been left for dead by the side of the road” (32-33). Even if she survives, it seems unlikely that Caridad’s beauty will ever return, for her “nipples had been bitten off,” she has been “branded like cattle” and “stabbed in the throat” (33). Only her sisters and mother care for Caridad; her reputation prevents the townspeople, law enforcement included, from finding her attacker. Despite these strikes against her, Caridad benefits from her sister’s magical intervention. Although she has been an invalid showing little improvement, Caridad miraculously recovers: “it [i]sn’t the Caridad that had been brought back from the hospital, but a whole and once again beautiful Caridad” who simply wakes and walks across the house to her whole family’s amazement (37). The explanation for the recovery is quite simple: “‘Mom,’ La Loca whispered . . . ‘I prayed for Caridad’” (37).

As if one magical healing were not enough, La Loca manages two at the same time. Loca’s sister Fe is abandoned by her fiancée Tom shortly before their wedding, causing Fe to scream continuously (which earns her the name “La Gritona” [the screamer] and the period of this malady “El Big Grito” [the big scream]). Loca’s first efforts to help Fe are sweet and sisterly (while still
very funny): “She sewed a padded headband for Fe so that when she banged her head against the wall, as she increasingly did while she screamed, she wouldn’t hurt herself as bad” (32). But to these ministries Loca again adds prayer, so that as the newly “whole” Caridad attracts notice, so does the newly healed Fe. The eldest sister Esperanza is “taken aback by Fe’s transformation. She had stopped screaming” (38). Once again, Loca is responsible. “‘I prayed for you’” she tells Fe, who thanks her (38). Restoring her older sisters to health does more than heal physical scars; Loca’s intercession on the part of Caridad and Fe requires her true caring for them. While caring is certainly not a characteristic reserved for mature adults, the effect of Loca’s caring is to bring home to Loca herself the full impact of her magical abilities. She realizes she has been the instrument of healing just as the healings occur. She is as surprised as the rest of the family when both Caridad and Fe emerge from the bedroom, healed. In realizing her own power, Loca also accepts mature responsibility for it. With this acceptance, Loca is one step closer to coming of age.

La Loca’s magical abilities also extend to clairvoyance. She foresees the breakup of Fe’s engagement with her “sixth sense” and hides in the stove out of fear when Caridad does not come home the night of her mangling
But these intuitive talents are augmented by truly otherworldly events, such as her prediction of the winning lotto numbers to help her gambling father recoup his losses (57), as well her knowledge of her oldest sister Esperanza’s death through communications with the legendary figure, La Llorona. After the latter revelation, Loca is visibly upset. Crying, she tells her mother Sofi: “She [La Llorona] came to tell me that la Esperanza is died, Mama! [sic]” (158). Indeed, the eldest of Sofi’s daughters has “been missing in the Persian Gulf for months and months”; a newscaster sent to cover the Gulf War, Esperanza and her crew have been abducted without any further information about them until Loca’s revelation (158). But just as magical as the news of her sister’s death is the manner in which La Loca receives it, from the figure of Mexican legend, La Llorona. For Loca the visitation is a matter of course in her magical life: “She always comes to see me. I don’t know her name, the lady with the long white dress” (159). What makes the visitation magical rather than a result of an active imagination is that “no one had ever told Loca the legend of La Llorona” (160). Loca’s visit from the beyond, just like her trip to it, is real.

In addition to her healing powers and contact with otherworldly visitors, Loca, who spends her entire life at
home, possesses skills that in themselves are miraculous. These abilities demonstrate ways in which La Loca has matured without the help of school or the influences of the outside world. For instance, Loca's "best friend" is "a beautiful black-with-gray Arabian" horse that she names "Gato Negro [black cat]" (152). Repulsed by the smell of people but not animals, Loca spends much of her time in the barn and becomes "an expert horsewoman" without any outside training (152). Loca's other uncanny abilities are listed with the wit that characterizes the novel:

> And who the heck had taught her to play fiddle? Then there were the things she knew about women's bodies. . . . There wasn't even a medical book around for Loca to have learned from the pictures--since she didn't read very well and didn't like to.

(164)

And, while Loca excels at embroidery, "coming out with the most beautiful pillowcases and ruanas as Cristmas presents [sic]," "Above all, Loca knew how to cook" (164, 165).²⁷ It is clear that Loca's magic includes healing, clairvoyance, and some unique practical abilities. Loca comes of age through her magic, emerging from the pages of So Far From God as a humorous, Chicana version of the Renaissance woman.

Loca's existence is defined by her limited sphere of action; her aversion to the smell of humans keeps her, and
her talents, at home. Her dislike for the outside world is confirmed by the experiences of her sisters:

She had grown up in a world of women who went out into the bigger world and came back disappointed, disillusioned, devastated, and eventually not at all. She did not regret not being part of that society, never having found any use for it. (151-52)

Having seen the effects of dominant culture on her three sisters, Loca adds disillusionment-by-proxy to her established aversion to humans. Taking up the cause of her sisters results from helping them through their personal traumas, but it also gives Loca a version of adult disillusionment, a loss of naïveté, integral to coming of age. The resulting distaste for the outside world keeps Loca from discovering a reality outside of her home until the last Holy Week described in the novel, when Loca is hailed as a saint because she is (again) dying. However, public (and some familial) sentiment toward Loca up to her second death has often been negative. Her entrance into the world during her last days will subject Loca to the negativity from which her isolation has in large part shielded her. Facing unfavorable public opinion further matures Loca, forcing her to rely more than ever on magical realism for adult stability.

Loca’s practical older sister Fe, a teller at the local bank, believes that pronouncing Loca dead at age three was done “out of ignorance,” and Fe herself “did not
remember 'El Milagro,' as her mother referred to La Loca’s resurrection" (28). Fe certainly doesn’t remember or believe in the flying that Loca did just after she returned to life: she “highly suspected that such a thing as her little sister flying up to the church rooftop had never happened” (29). And Fe is not the only member of the family that doubts Loca’s magic. The girls’ estranged father Domingo tries to test his otherworldly daughter: “When he tried to get her to fly to the roof or stick herself in the wood-burning stove, she simply stared at him as if such suggestions were absurd” (41). Sofi’s own neighbor, or comadre, reflects the pity of the outside world regarding Loca: “No, Sofi never did let herself have a good time. Of course, who could blame her, with that strange child of hers with that peculiar affliction of being allergic to people?” (134). The townspeople of Tome generally share the comadre’s opinion of Loca: “Most people around mistook the fact that she showed no apparent social skills to mean she was a simpleton” (151). Those inclined to disbelief, whether they be family or outsiders, view Loca’s unusual life and actions with suspicion or sympathy, unwilling or unable to see the magical present in their midst.

Friendlier perceptions of the magical Loca come from closer to home. In contrast to the cynicism of her
father, Fe, and the townspeople, Loca’s cousin Franky remembers her resurrection with the honesty and open-mindedness of childhood:

And when little Franky, who was really not that little by then, saw the child fly up to the church roof, man! What he wouldn’t have given to know the secret of that trick! To the boy it was a trick, the way all children view the magical, which to them falls within the realm of possibility. (192)

So Far From God succeeds precisely because of this “possibility”; Castillo opens the door between reality and the magical, creating an accessible and engaging cast of characters. The open door of this possibility is key to magical realism, and it is for this reason that I have titled this chapter, as well as the dissertation, with this passage from Castillo. Lisa Sandlin comments on this aspect of magical realism:

Unlike allegory, magical realism represents life through a marvelous tumbling abundance. Its style recognizes the wondrous in the common, reveals the deeply felt life of the soul in its everyday manifestations. But perhaps because its images are so magical, they also must be whole, palpably human. (23)

And while Sandlin believes that Castillo’s characters ultimately fail to effect this “abundance,” I disagree, finding So Far From God a perfect example of the laudable definition Sandlin provides. Loca’s label-free jeans and blue bathrobe attest to her humanity, making favorable perceptions of her wholly believable. The kindest view of
all comes, naturally, from Loca's mother Sofi, who spends her life trying to change people's ideas about "Loquita, her eternal baby" (218). Sofi even passes on information about some blue jeans Loca is boycotting, "in her tireless quest to convince the world (or perhaps herself) that her daughter was not a 'pobre criatura' [poor creature] as she was so often called behind her back, but in her own way a very responsible young woman" (223). Ultimately, whether or not she is viewed favorably, Loca trusts in her personal abilities, magical and otherwise.

Finally, La Loca’s dying realization proves she has come of age, albeit by untraditional means. As she dies in the arms of a magical apparition of the Virgin Mary, Loca is satisfied with herself and the life she has led:

Loca went to sleep in the Lady’s arms thinking that for a person who had lived her whole life within a mile radius of her home and had only traveled as far as Albuquerque twice, she certainly knew quite a bit about this world, not to mention beyond, too, and that made her smile as she closed her eyes. (245)

After Loca’s death and subsequent sainthood, she and her sisters are remembered with the “La Loca Santa and her Sisters Tarot Deck drawn by a lovely and talented artist in Sardinia, Italy,” which is “the all-time favorite” souvenir at the annual conventions of Mother of Martyrs and Saints, an organization founded by Sofi herself after Loca’s death (250). Loca’s likeness appears on the Fool
card, and the connection seems fitting: "The Fool card represented one who walked without fear, aware of the choices she made in the journey of life, life itself being defined as a state of courage and wisdom and not an uncontrollable participation in society, as many people experienced their lives" (250). Loca’s life clearly exemplifies this "courage and wisdom"; the knowledge ascribed to the Fool matches the knowledge of Loca’s comfort with dying. And while this description also befits an innocent’s beginning of the journey through life (for the fool stays innocent), its definition of a mature and aware life experience surely befits the wisdom of one who has come of age: Loca. The conclusion of So Far From God, complete with the combination of Loca’s deathbed revelation and her place on the Fool card, allows the reader to believe that Loca, having used magical realism to reach a mediated maturity, reflects from her deathbed a comfort in the knowledge of life and the magical. Despite obvious differences in their experiences of magical realism, the characters discussed in this chapter, Antonio, Lipsha, Angel, and Loca each reach adulthood by appropriating the magical to fit their individual needs. Coming of age is never an easy process. However, the special circumstances surrounding the Native American and Mexic Amerindian youths in these novels, both fictional
and historical, make mediating between cultures a necessity to maturity. By incorporating magical realism to create a reality that exists through a blending of opposing cultures, the characters of *Bless Me, Ultima*, *Love Medicine* and *The Bingo Palace*, *Solar Storms*, and *So Far From God* make their own reality: a mediated one.

**Notes**

1 Recall from my discussion of this term in Chapter One that Mexic Amerindian is a more accurate term for Chicanos/as, but because it is not yet used in common parlance, this dissertation alternates between Mexic Amerindian and Chicano/a, using them interchangeably.

2 The *künstlerroman*, or coming of age novel “deal[ing] with the development of an artist or writer,” will be discussed in Chapter Four with Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*.

3 *Bless Me, Ultima* won the 1971 Premio Quinto Sol literary award, and has since gone on to be the foundation for Chicano/a studies in fiction. I would liken its impact on Chicano/a fiction to that of N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* on Native American fiction.


5 For those unfamiliar with Native American criticism, the term “breed” may come as a surprise. Breed simply refers to a person who is not a full-blood Native American, or one whose ancestry is comprised of more than one Native American tribe. When reading that Oskison is a “Cherokee breed,” the reader should infer that Oskison is part Cherokee, rather than a full-blood Cherokee.

6 Allen cites Oliver LaFarge’s *Laughing Boy*, Frank Waters’s *The Man Who Killed the Deer*, and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* as examples of this theme.

7 Denise Chávez’s novels *The Last of The Menu Girls* and *Face of an Angel* do not employ magical realism and
are, therefore, not discussed in this dissertation. However, both novels assign stereotypically gender- and ethnicity-specific roles to Chicano/a characters, such as waitress, housemaid, and gopher. Chávez’s aim is not only to turn these stereotypes on their heads, but also into roles that are worthy of esteem.

8 Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references in this section are to this text.

9 In “The Silence of the Llano: Notes from the Author,” Anaya acknowledges his “concern with the primary mystery of the river, water, birth, regeneration, and the subconscious,” which he derives from his own childhood experience (48). Speaking of his own childhood, Anaya notes: “[T]here was always for me the deep sense of the mystery of life which pulsed along the dark green river” (48). Antonio’s sense of mystery regarding the “presence” of the river clearly parallels Anaya’s own experience with the river of his childhood.

10 The Spanish-descended cowboys of the llano, from whom the Márez (paternal) side of Antonio’s family comes.

11 Reed Way Dasenbrock remarks that the bilingualism of Bless Me, Ultima is not “stable” (15). That is, Spanish speakers who learn English come to understand the cultural cachet of the other tongue: “[T]hose who do learn English tend to come to prefer it because, in the world of the novel, it is the higher-status language” (15).

12 Dasenbrock comments on the divisions in the novel: “For the very situation of Anaya’s novel is a bicultural-bilingual society in which almost no one is adequately bilingual. . . . Only the young like Antonio can speak to both worlds. Difficulties in communication and understanding are thus built into the texture of this society, just as they are in the working of Anaya’s novel” (15).

13 All subsequent references to Love Medicine will be designated by LM; references to The Bingo Palace will be designated by BP.

14 James Ruppert holds that because Gerry Nanapush is presented on “all four levels of narrative identity,” psychological, sociological, communal, and mythic, he
operates as a trickster figure (147). Ruppert rightly contends that Lipsha functions "as the son of trickster Gerry" and, "by driving Gerry to freedom, Lipsha concludes a mythic narrative that will live forever in Chippewa imagination" (148, 149).

15 While Lulu Lamartine is Lipsha’s grandmother by blood, Lipsha grew up believing that Marie Kashpaw was his grandmother until he discovered his true parentage.

16 Karla Sanders explores the implications of Nector’s “second childhood”: “Love Medicine suggests that Nector’s white schooling, his enthusiasm for change, and his acceptance of white customs and mores while ignoring traditional knowledge values have denied him the balance necessary for a successful and healthy life” (144). Her article, “A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich’s Love Medicine” emphasizes the importance of balance in Native fiction, much like my own idea of mediation.

17 Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references in this section are to this text.

18 Further discussion of Mean Spirit can be found in the Fall 1994 publication of SAIL (volume 6, number 4), a special issue devoted to Linda Hogan. Six critics, including Guest Editor Betty Louise Bell, discuss the merits of Hogan’s work, especially her first novel.

19 For a more detailed discussion of Power, see my essay, “Linda Hogan’s Two Worlds” in the Winter 1998 publication of SAIL (volume 10, number 4).

20 Loretta’s “very strangeness” attracts Hannah’s father, as well as other men, to her (39). Sharing her mother’s “haunted” way, Hannah also draws men, albeit the wrong sort (39). These attributes of both women, taken in conjunction with Hannah’s arrival into the novel from “out of the water,” create a notable similarity to Louise Erdrich’s character Fleur Pillager of the Love Medicine series, especially as she is portrayed in Chapter Two of Tracks, entitled “Summer 1913, Miskomini-géezis: Raspberry Sun.”

21 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references in this section are to this text.

Lisa Sandlin remarks on the probable model for Loca, “a young Frenchwoman named Christina,” who, in 1172, “flew from her coffin during the funeral Mass and balanced on the roof beams of the village church” (22). Like Christina, Loca possesses “an aversion to the sinful smell of the living” (Sandlin 22).

In fact, her family are the only public Loca can minister to because of her aversion to human smell. In a telling passage, the narrator notes the fickle nature of public praise. Although Loca initially “earned the name around the Rio Abajo region and beyond, of La Loca Santa,” the epithet soon loses its praising tone:

For a brief period after her resurrection, people came from all over the state in hopes of receiving her blessing or of her performing some miracle for them. But because she was so averse to being close to anyone, the best that strangers could expect was to get a glimpse of her from the outside gate. So ‘Santa’ was dropped from her name and she was soon forgotten by strangers. (25)

In this respect, Castillo’s Loca reminds the reader of Gabriel García Márquez’s misunderstood old man in “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings.”

Sandlin finds the “continuous trials” of the four sisters in So Far From God problematic: “Astonishing episode follows amazing occurrence so rapidly that we have no time to feel any of them. The characters don’t reflect long on their lives or afflictions; certainly readers can’t” (23). I would argue that in parodying the telenovela, Castillo’s back-to-back outlandish episodes do exactly the opposite of what Sandlin suggests; that is, the episodic format of the novel creates an onslaught of drama and emotion than functions effectively as both parody and character development.

Certainly Castillo hopes the reader will notice her parody of here of La Llorona, the wailing woman of Mexican legend.

Extraordinary cooking ability is important to characters in other magical realist novels, as well, among
them Tita of Laura Esquivel’s *Like Water for Chocolate* and Eliza of Isabel Allende’s *Daughter of Fortune*.
CHAPTER THREE
MASSACRE OF THE DREAMERS: KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NATIVE AMERICAN AND MEXIC AMERINDIAN FICTION

Moteuczoma called upon the thousands of dreamers who were sharing the same premonitions: the prophesied arrival of Cortés and the subsequent annihilation of the Empire. Moteuczoma’s order to have the dreamers murdered en masse did not stop the landing of those alien ships that were already on their way with those whose intentions were to take whatever riches found at any cost. (Castillo, Massacre 16)

Distinct differences between contemporary Chicano/a and Native American fiction arise when adult characters are considered, and the aim of this chapter is to define these differences and account for them in a meaningful way. To begin, adult characters have three choices when faced with conflict between their own and dominant cultures: to retreat into their own Native or Mexic Amerindian heritage; to reject their own heritage in favor of dominant culture; or to mediate between their own and dominant cultures.¹ My analysis of the third option within Native American and Chicano/a fiction includes three novels. Specifically, I will discuss Ana Castillo’s third novel So Far From God, whose characters (other than Loca, discussed in Chapter Two), despite the presence of magical realism, ultimately fail to mediate between cultures, and two novels whose characters employ magical realism to mediate between cultures: Leslie
Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* and Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*. The latter two novels present Native American protagonists who emerge from literal cultural sickness to lead a healthy existence between cultures because of their trust in the magical. My discussion of these three novels analyzes particular difficulties and differences between Native American and Mexic Amerindian cultures, using textual examples to clarify general cultural beliefs and customs.

**Ana Castillo's Brand of Magic**

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the characters of Ana Castillo's 1993 novel *So Far From God* do not effectively use magical realism to mediate between cultures. However, I have selected this novel for discussion for several reasons. First, the explication of Loca's character in Chapter Two, showing her everyday parlance with magical realism and resultant mediation, certainly qualifies *So Far From God* as a text that merits analysis in a dissertation concerned with cultural mediation through magical realism. As discussion of *So Far From God*’s remaining characters will demonstrate, the presence and experience of magical realism in the life of a character does not necessarily
foment a culturally mediated standpoint. Instead, the characters discussed here—Esperanza, Sofi, Caridad, and Fe—face specifically Chicano/a limitations, problems of homeland, culture, and (ineffective) magical realism preventing them from adequately employing magical realism to mediate between cultures. But the reason these hurdles cannot be overcome is due to a lack of faith (on the part of the character(s)) in magical realism as a true force of change, beyond childhood and coming of age. This adult, Mexic Amerindian context translates into an inability to experience magical realism as the mediating tool it could indeed be. For these reasons So Far From God serves as a wonderfully succinct model for Chicano/a cultural attitudes toward magical realism in fiction.²

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the magical experience in literature, by definition, requires faith of its participants in order to occur. Alejo Carpentier, whose definition of magical realism I have adopted, asserts:

First of all, the sense of the marvellous presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in saints will not be cured by the miracles of saints, nor will those who are not Don Quixotes be able to enter body and soul into the world of Amadís de Gaul or Tirant lo Blanc. (iv)
Therefore, if magical realism cannot assist its audience, in this case the fictional characters of *So Far From God*, the fault lies with the (non)believer, not the magical realist experience itself. For, following Carpentier's logic, if faith is true, the magical occurrence becomes simply another aspect of reality. Castillo's characters (with the exception of Loca) tread a fine line of faith that allows them to experience magical realism, but they fall short of effectively incorporating magical realism into a mediating experience; this experience without faith is unique to the Mexic Amerindian experience.

The title of this chapter and opening epigraph, taken from Ana Castillo's own doctoral dissertation, published as *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*, encapsulates what I believe to be the key to this special Chicano/a brand of faith and magic. That is, dreaming the arrival of Cortes did not stop his arrival and Spanish exploitation of Central and South America. Nor did the ability to foresee this catastrophe, through clairvoyance (a personal experience of the magical), preclude the dreamers from being murdered by a fearful leader. The experience of the magical ultimately harmed the believers— the dreamers—
rather than assigning the dreamers greater value or status, or even helping their own people. We are all conditioned by punishment not to repeat a certain action; the Chicano/a people may have become wary of accepting the magical experience for fear of its consequences. Therefore, the present-day descendants of the dreamers, today’s Mexic Amerindians, represented in fiction through such works as So Far From God, may experience magical realism without buying into its potential. They are the dreamers, psyches massacred by generations of conditioning. This is precisely what Ana Castillo so clearly puts forth in the characters of Esperanza, Sofi, Caridad, and Fe.

The eldest of the four sisters in So Far From God, Esperanza experiences her youngest sister Loca’s resurrection from the dead (as discussed fully in Chapter Two), and, after her own death, Esperanza’s spirit returns to converse with Loca, as well as with her other sister Caridad, a spiritual channeler. Because of conflicts specific to her Mexic Amerindian heritage, Esperanza, whom critic Lisa Sandlin dubs “the family’s social conscience,” does not use magical realism to mediate between cultures, despite her active afterlife
(22). Esperanza and her family live in the fictional suburb of Albuquerque: Tome, New Mexico. Although her family has lived in Tome for generations, Esperanza does not feel a significant connection to the land, which ultimately affects her faith in magical realism.

From a historical perspective, the lack of a Chicano/a connection to the land they inhabit, just like that experienced by Esperanza, has resulted in part from living between two cultures, but belonging wholly to neither. The homeland of the Chicano/a people, who are descended from Mexican citizens annexed by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, was “almost half” of Mexico, and is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California. When this new southern boundary of the United States was imposed, Mexican citizens became American ones, officially straddling two cultures. Luis Leal and Pepe Barrón detail the consequences of this barrier:

Some of the Spanish-speaking inhabitants decided to go south to Mexico, but most refused to move and automatically became American citizens. According to the treaty [of Guadalupe Hidalgo], however, they were to be allowed to keep their language, culture, and traditions. Thus, a new minority was created. (9)
As the legal barrier between the United States and Mexico created difficulties moving back and forth across the border, Mexic Amerindians soon developed their own American subculture, belonging to neither Mexican nor American dominant culture.

The new Chicanos/as quickly realized that "the dominant English-speaking majority considered them outsiders and that America was not willing to share the good life with them" (Leal and Barrón 9-10). But, by the same token, they no longer felt they belonged in Mexico. One effect of this placement—being on home soil without the rule of their original mother country—was to create an unstable identity, which is exactly the predicament in which Castillo’s Esperanza finds herself. Emily Hicks addresses the otherness inherent to this position: "‘in the U.S.-Mexico border region, there is no need to ‘become-other’; one is ‘other’ or ‘marginal’ by definition, by virtue of living between two cultures and being ‘other’ in both’ (qtd. in D. Castillo 151).

Leal and Barrón verify this idea: “Finding themselves caught between two cultures, the Chicanos developed an ambivalent attitude that was to influence their thinking for some time” (19). Indeed, this ambivalence continues
to appear in Mexic Amerindian fiction, affecting the Chicano/a perception of and ability to use magical realism as a mediating factor. In **Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma**, Ana Castillo clarifies the nature of this ambivalence through the example of her personal experience:

> I am commonly perceived as a foreigner everywhere I go, including in the United States and in Mexico. This international perception is based on my color and features. . . . And by U.S. standards and according to some North American Native Americans, I cannot make official claims to being indía. (21)

Not only are Mexic Amerindians outsiders in the dominant cultures of Mexico and the United States, but their Native American blood is discounted as well. In her poem “Everywhere I Go,” Castillo reiterates this idea in verse:

> Everywhere i go  
> i am asked my origin  
> as if i bore antennae  
> or the eye  
> of the Cyclops. (**My Father Was a Toltec** 65, 6-10)

Clearly, the perpetual feeling of marginalization can be found throughout Chicano/a fiction, and, in this analysis, **So Far From God**.

With her background of instability, Esperanza searches for a meaningful sense of home and self through education, career, and religious experimentation in the
Native American Church. Esperanza is the only sister of the four in *So Far From God* “to get through college,” receiving “her B.A. in Chicano Studies” (SF 25). But, even after earning a Master’s in communications, Esperanza feels personally unfulfilled: “These were transitional years where she felt like a woman with brains was as good as dead for all the happiness it brought her in the love department” (SF 26). And, regarding “the love department,” Esperanza’s search for a satisfying sexual relationship doubles as her search for religious fulfillment. In this respect, Castillo’s characterization of Esperanza acts as a humorous allusion to the Chicano/a activism of the 1960s, which grew out of the industrial needs of the United States during the first World War. In the early twentieth century, many more Mexicans crossed their northern border in search of work; the Mexican Revolution of 1913-1915 “coincided with the outbreak of World War I and the consequent expansion of American industry and agriculture” (Leal and Barrón 20). Many of the new immigrants “never returned to their native land . . . and their sons and daughters became American citizens by birth, although still attached to the traditional way of life of their parents” (Leal and
These American-born Chicanos/as began early efforts at group awareness (LULAC was founded in 1929), but “la causa” [the cause] gained momentum in the late 1960s, led by publications such as Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales’ 1967 manifesto of a uniquely Chicano/a identity, *I Am Joaquin*.

Esperanza’s on-again-off-again boyfriend Rubén, “who, during the height of his Chicano cosmic consciousness, renamed himself Cuauhtemoc,” in an attempt to recapture his Native American ancestry, encourages this 60s brand of activism and soul-searching, joining Esperanza in attempts to find meaning in the Native American church (*SF* 25). Rubén recalls, “You remember, vieja [old lady], when we used to go to the peyote meetings together, when we sweat together at the lodge back in the days when we were in college?” (*SF* 35). Even after her college days Esperanza finds Rubén and the Native American church enticing enough to put her blossoming broadcasting career on hold for an entire year. Esperanza even allows herself to be subjugated by Rubén’s own, newly discovered brand of Native American machismo (Rubén loves to take that from each culture that will give him the greatest personal gain). He insists
that Esperanza learn “his interpretation of lodge ‘etiquette,’” and she falls for his deception: “[S]ince Esperanza had no Native women friends to verify any of what was being told to her by Rubén about the woman’s role in what they were doing, she did not venture to contradict him”-- yet she still hopes to stumble upon meaning through her Native American side (SF 36). But Esperanza keenly feels the emptiness of this situation: “She needed to bring it all together, to consolidate the spiritual with the practical side of things” (SF 37). Her failure to do so is, of course, the problem. She cannot reconcile the spiritual elements of her life with practical, everyday living. Although Esperanza’s character embodies magical realism by visiting her family and providing them with insights after her death, she does not allow herself to use magical realism to mediate between cultures during her life.

Castillo heightens the conflict between faith in magical realism and the experience of magical realism that Esperanza (and other characters) experiences through the thought encapsulated by the title of the novel, which comes from a quotation about Mexico by its former dictator, Porfirio Díaz: “So far from God— so near the
United States” (SF 15). By adopting this idea for her novel, Castillo sets forth her characters' distance from the supernatural, in terms of the faith necessary to experience magical realism. While Castillo's characters experience magical realism on a regular basis, they nonetheless do not allow magical realism to sway them to the faith necessary to mediate between cultures, as the characterization of Esperanza exemplifies. These characters relegate magical realism to the didactic, effectively keeping magical realism from influencing their lives in anything more than a transitory way. Their experience of magical realism is distant from faith, from God. Their experience of magical realism is, quite literally, far from God in a critical sense; their experience of magical realism prevents their mediation.

The character Sofi, the matriarch of So Far From God, provides another apt example of this difficult relationship to faith, and, thereby, to magical realism. For while Sofi can deftly handle any magical event that her daughters undergo, she separates her own welfare from any benefits such supernatural intercessions might provide. Her youngest daughter Loca, who arises from her own coffin after a premature death at age three, uses
powers acquired beyond the grave to cure her sisters Caridad and Fe of their respective ailments. Sofi believes in Loca’s abilities, taking them in stride. When Caridad gets up from her deathbed after being maimed by a malogra, a folk version of the boogey man within Mexic Amerindian culture, and Fe ceases a full year of continuous screaming after being jilted by her fiancé, Loca is responsible: "‘Mom,’ La Loca whispered . . . ‘I prayed for Caridad.’ ‘I know you did, ‘jita, I know,’ Sofi said” (SF 37). But instead of relying on her daughter’s special abilities, Sofi takes her personal and economic troubles into her own hands. She declares herself mayor of Tome and creates a community cooperative that quite efficiently provides jobs, goods, and services to the townspeople of Tome, including herself. Later, after the deaths of all four of her daughters, Sofi again reacts with her characteristic practicality. She forms MOMAS, an organization for Mothers Of Martyrs And Saints. Within MOMAS, Sofi can commiserate with other women who have or have had exceptional children like her own. Yet Sofi’s self-made support group still leaves her undaunted with respect to magical realism: she treats her daughters’ supernatural powers and experiences with as
much aplomb as her abandonment by her husband Domingo. Lisa Sandlin holds Sofi up as a paradigm of the "miraculous," if not of magical realism: "She loves, she accepts; in the face of loss, she creates. Nothing is quieter or more difficult than that, and not much more in life is more miraculous" (23). Miraculous, perhaps, but certainly not magical.

Sofi does not permit herself to rely on magical realism; life seems to have taught her to trust only herself. Sofi's reaction to magical realism, like Esperanza's, separates magical realism from practical living. But, unlike Esperanza's unrealized recognition that the magical and the everyday should somehow come together, Sofi's intense pragmatism makes magical realism seem like old hat. Indeed, Sofi seems inured to magical realism, perhaps from repeated exposure.

Sofi's "repeated exposure" to magical realism brings up a crucial aspect of Castillo's storytelling, which, I believe, has affected the use of magic in the body of Mexic Amerindian fiction. Rather than being taken in by the novel's miracles, Lisa Sandlin feels quite the opposite. In a review of So Far From God Sandlin remarks:
Sofi's daughters endure continuous trials. That's the problem. Astonishing episode follows amazing occurrence so rapidly that we have no time to feel any of them. The characters don't reflect long on their lives or afflictions; certainly readers can't. (23)

What Sandlin finds unsympathetic writing I believe to be a deliberate attempt on the part of Ana Castillo to undermine magical realism. Instead of offering a more "felt" magic, complete with further characterization, Castillo presents us with a magic that is ultimately unable to effect the mediation of any of the major adult characters of the novel. The novel closes with the solitary Sofi, abandoned anew by Domingo, heading up MOMAS as a way to remember the lives of her four dead daughters. She has outlived all of them, as well as the magic that surrounded them.

While So Far From God has more in common with magical realism than not, it certainly contains a variety quite different from the genre as a whole, one that I believe is indicative of the unique Mexic Amerindian cultural position as expressed in fiction. Sandlin calls on Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude as an example of true magical realism, citing "the cloud of yellow butterflies" that follows Mauricio Babilonia as an effective magical device because of its juxtaposition
to “his broken nails” and “his thready linen suit” (23). In contrast, Castillo seldom offers the reader as much time as needed to absorb the impact of the magical realism she propels with such great speed. While Castillo’s details of each character are many, her pacing does not allow the reader to feel as great an attachment to the characters as she or he may feel in One Hundred Years of Solitude. And that is exactly the point.

Ilan Stavans offers another review of So Far From God that clarifies Castillo’s intentions. Calling Castillo “the most daring and experimental of Latino novelists,” Stavans nonetheless reminds the reader that “experimentalism has its costs” (37). And these costs are felt a great deal by readers more inclined to Sandlin’s aforementioned point of view. Viewing Castillo’s work from another angle, Stavans finds Castillo an “accomplished parodist” with an “obsession, it seems [for turning] popular and sophisticated genres upside down” (37). This ability, as I have previously stated, allows Castillo to undermine magical realism in So Far From God to the point that mediation between cultures for adult characters is no longer possible. For instance, Castillo undermines her characters through the
very language they employ. In her ground-breaking 1987 publication *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Chicana poet and activist Gloria Anzaldúa addresses the devaluation of the Chicano/a tongue:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for “talking back” to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. “If you want to be American, speak ‘American.’ If you don’t like it, go back to Mexico where you belong.” (53)

English-speaking teachers have been responsible for only part of the prejudice against Chicanos/as and their language. Chicanos/as face criticism within their own ranks as well:

“Pocho, cultural traitor, you’re speaking the oppressor’s language by speaking English, you’re ruining the Spanish language,” I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish. (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 55)

Castillo’s characters, as well as the narrator, communicate in Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, a combination of Spanish and English peculiar to those living between cultures, complete with words that cannot be found in either a Spanish or English dictionary. While it is humorous and engaging to learn that Sofi’s quinceañera (fifteenth birthday, typically a coming out party for
Hispanic girls) “queque [cake] was strawberry filled” or that Caridad’s landlady keeps her “traila [trailer] just as she had left it” Castillo’s use of this hybrid language nonetheless possesses undertones that are not so pleasant (SF 107, 114, emphasis mine).

Castillo herself, born in the United States, expresses a sense of socioeconomic disparity inherent to using the English language, in keeping with the devaluation that I have found in the Spanglish of So Far From God and that Anzaldúa explains from a personal point of view. In “A Christmas Gift for the President of the United States, Chicano Poets, and a Marxist or Two I’ve Known in My Time,” a poem from Castillo’s 1995 collection My Father Was a Toltec, the speaker confesses to the lack of authority she feels when writing in English:

My verses have no legitimacy.  
A white woman inherits  
her father’s library,  
her brother’s friends. Privilege 
gives language that escapes me.  
Past my Nahua eyes  
and Spanish surname, English syntax  
makes its way to my mouth  
with the grace of a clubbed foot. (63, 41-49)

Ana Castillo capitalizes on the prejudices inherent to Chicano/a Spanish through the language her novel employs, reminding the reader that nothing in So Far From God, not
even the apparent humor of Castillo’s Spanglish, can be taken at face value; the reader must consider the "illegitimacy" with which the language is typically associated. Yet, even though the Chicano/a language brings criticism, it is also the reason for pride. The Mexic Amerindian tongue represents the distinct, multicultural identity of its people. Anzaldúa remarks, “For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest” (Borderlands 55). And this point, while somewhat reassuring from a linguistic standpoint, serves to reinforce the true absence of a physical homeland for Mexic Amerindians, the characters of So Far From God included.

Returning to Ilan Stavans’ review of So Far From God, we find that her description of Castillo’s style in the novel is in keeping with my assertion that Castillo’s ability to undermine magical realism is responsible for her characters’ lack of mediation between cultures: “The terrain is overtly sentimental and cartoonish. Magic realism is combined with social satire: whores, miracles, prophecies, resurrections, and a visit to the Chicano activism of the late sixties intertwine” (37). Although I agree with Stavans that the “novel’s intent is
original: to parody the Spanish-speaking telenovela [soap opera],” I disagree that “Castillo loses control of her marionettes” (37). Instead, I find that Castillo intentionally parodies magical realism to make her point: using magical realism to mediate between cultures is not a valid option for adult Mexic Amerindian characters. Castillo’s characters are the dreamers who have had the dream vision, that is, the magical realist experience, but because of their cultural background, the dream, the magical, itself is massacred, rather than fully employed to aid in mediation between cultures. Castillo’s satire of magic realism drives this point home. The mixture of genres and rapidity of pace employed in So Far From God ensure that no adult character will ever successfully marry the magical to the mundanity of the real.

Analysis of Esperanza and Sofi aside for the moment, let us pause to explore Castillo’s characterization of the screaming sister, Fe. Although Esperanza attempts to better herself and her socioeconomic situation through education, receiving both bachelor’s and master’s degrees, Fe takes what she believes to be self-improvement to the extreme of self-contempt: she tries to become Anglo. As So Far From God opens, the reader
finds an engaged Fe happily preparing for her wedding: she has her wedding dress fitted at Bernadette’s Bridal Gowns, and her attendants, “the three gabachas (my term, not Fe’s)\(^8\) she had chosen from the bank as her bridesmaids, instead of her sisters, had met that Saturday to have their pink-and-orchid chiffon gowns fitted too” (SF 29). But, before the first chapter of the novel concludes, Fe has received a Dear John letter from her fiancé Tom, breaking off their engagement. Clearly, Fe’s ensuing screaming jaunt results in part from her embarrassment and anger at being jilted, for, as her mother Sofi puts it, “She has people at work that she can’t even face no more”— the gabachas among them (SF 31). But Fe is ashamed of her family long before her relationship with Tom ends. For although she “had a little something to talk to Esperanza about, she kept away from her other sisters, her mother, and the animals, because she just didn’t understand how they could all be so self-defeating, so unambitious” (SF 28). Fe’s attitude toward her family exemplifies yet again Castillo’s ability to undermine established patterns and genres. In this case, Fe’s attitude reinforces her self-hatred with racism, for she finds her family members
guilty of the stereotypes typically assigned to Hispanics by the Anglo community: lazy and shiftless (despite Esperanza’s status as a career woman and Sofi’s self-propelled cooperative). Employing this stereotype within the framework of the novel allows Castillo free rein to comment on, as well as to undermine, the traditional racial beliefs that govern Mexic Amerindian culture in general.

Living between nations and cultures, Mexic Amerindians, as well as Castillo’s fictional counterparts, ultimately confront a brand of racism quite different from that experienced by other minorities of the United States. Although some effort has been made to redress the grievances suffered by African Americans and Native Americans in the U.S., according to Castillo, Mexic Amerindians “are viewed less sympathetically” than these other groups (Massacre 22). Castillo argues:

Racism [in the United States] has generally polarized into a black-white issue. U.S. mestizo/as of Mexican background, therefore, are viewed by many white people, by many African Americans and yes, by some Native Americans as having the potential to “pass” for white, in theory, at will. (Massacre 22)

Because Chicanos/as could pass, the general public believes they should pass. And, despite the fact of Mexic Amerindians’ birth in the United States, “The
general public assumes that all Mexicans are immigrants and therefore, obligated to assimilate just as European immigrants did and do” (Castillo, Massacre 23). Fe’s own need to assimilate results in a brand of racism that shows the extent to which the values of dominant culture can shape the lives of those they touch.

Fe’s racism turns in on her family and herself, and perpetuates her ability to devalue any and all magical realism that she comes in contact with, writing off such occurrences as folksy and ignorant. Fe, whose name, ironically, translates in English to Faith,9 has no memory of (or, one could argue, no faith in) “‘El Milagro,’ as her mother referred to La Loca’s resurrection that day in front of the church, and highly suspected that such a thing as her little sister flying up to the church rooftop had never happened” (SF 28-29). She even fears that Loca’s “obvious ‘mental illness’” is “hereditary, despite everyone’s protest to the contrary” (SF 29). Even though Fe literally possesses the faith necessary to experience magical realism, she does not allow herself to— despite the fact that the luxury of such faith would ultimately bring her closer to the members of her family.
With Fe, or Faith, considered, let us approach the significance of the second part of the Diaz epigraph, “So near the United States” (SF 15). Location, as previously discussed, is key to the Mexic Amerindian sense of identity. And, beyond this, the American locale itself is key to magical realism. In his Prologue to The Kingdom of This World Carpentier compares Haiti to the Americas:

But I also thought that the presence and prevalence of this marvellous reality was not a privilege unique to Haiti, but the patrimony of the whole of America, where there has yet to be drawn up, for example, a complete list of cosmogonies. (vi)

Carpentier extends his contention of American “privilege” with reference to dance:

. . . whereas in Western Europe folk dance, for instance, has lost all magical or invocatory character, rare is the collective dance in America that does not incorporate a deep ritualistic meaning, becoming almost a ceremony of initiation: such as the dances of the Cuban santería, or the extraordinary Negro version of the festival of Corpus Christi, which can still be seen in the town of San Francisco de Yare, in Venezuela. (Kingdom vii)

Ultimately, Carpentier finds that America is the primary source for magical realism, what he terms the “marvellous in the real” (Kingdom viii). Carpentier emphasizes the multi-cultural aspects of the Americas, in conjunction with its very landscape, as particularly conducive to the
creation of the supernatural. Carpentier’s definition of magical realism closely parallels definitions of the Chicano/a homeland, Aztlán, in which a renewed interest arose with the heightened ethnic pride of the 1960s and 70s. Mexic Amerindians trace their ancestry to the Aztecs, whose homeland, called Aztlán, is the present-day American Southwest. Ray Gonzáles asserts that the “search for this idealistic state of Aztlán reached its peak in the early seventies” (xvi). Like Chicana feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa, Gonzáles calls Aztlán “edenic”; but while Gonzáles holds that the concept of Aztlán is “adopted from Aztec mythology,” Anzaldúa claims that archeological proof of Aztec existence in the Southwest has been found (Gonzáles xvi; Anzaldúa, Borderlands 4). Ana Castillo’s second novel Sapagonia, named for her own interpretation of Aztlán, identifies this homeland as “a distinct place in the Americas where all mestizos reside, regardless of nationality, individual racial composition, or legal residential status— or perhaps, because of all these” (qtd. in D. Castillo, 148). Debra A. Castillo’s explanation is quite similar to Carpentier’s “marvelous” American reality, and she adds duality to her definition of Aztlán:
It is a place both spiritual and physical that recognizes and celebrates the overlapping of two realities, two myths, two cultures, two ways of living and dreaming, two different political and economic modes of perceiving the world. Thus, the two-thousand-mile political boundary drawn between the United States and Mexico . . . identifies a notional truth, a reality that is . . . a fiction. (148)¹⁰

For modern Chicanos/as, the idea of Aztlan exists as a utopian, if fictional, model, a refuge from the border culture that devalues Mexic Amerindians as a people. Aztlan provides the most accurate idea of home for the Chicano/a. But it is a home that cannot be physically inhabited apart from dominant culture.

Therefore, as a result of both parts of the Diaz quotation Castillo employs, “So far from God-- So near the United States,” the characters of So Far From God not only fail to mediate between cultures, but their failure to do so creates a satire of magical realism which I believe unique to the Mexic Amerindian situation in fiction. That is, Castillo’s adult characters are not only distanced from faith (and, therefore, magical realism), but they are distant from faith in a land where, according to the definition of magical realism, it is nearly impossible to construct this distance. They are all the more poignant because of this; their locale--
the land of enchantment—falls nothing short of dramatic irony. It is as if Castillo’s adult characters are agnostic nuns. This is precisely why their lack of mediation is so compelling to the reader.

Following from this point, the characters’ lack of faith combined with the magical realism inherent to the Americas makes So Far From God a novel that turns magical realism on its head by shifting it to parody. While the comic element of so much well written magic realist fiction (like that of García Márquez) is at its best in So Far From God, Castillo’s magic realism includes comedy, parody, folktale, and caricature. So Far From God offers a brand of magical realism that differs dramatically from magic realist fiction written about younger Mexic Amerindian characters, such as Rudolfo Anaya’s Antonio of Bless Me, Ultima and also those works by Native American authors. Castillo offers a rare view into adult Chicano/a characters’ use of magical realism. In so doing, she shows us that this particular brand of magical realism is unique to the adult Mexic Amerindian situation. It has no counterpart, standing instead as proof of the very unique position of the mature Mexic
Amerindian view of magical realism— and why magical realism cannot aid in mediation between cultures.

To explain fully this special kind of magical realism employed in *So Far From God*, let us consider Caridad, the second oldest daughter of Sofi and Domingo. Caridad uses her personal gift of clairvoyance to lead a career as a curandera and channeler. But instead of using her clairvoyance to mediate the conflicts of homeland and culture, Caridad jumps off a cliff with her lover Esmeralda in an unplanned reenactment of the tale of “the Invisible One who had nourished the first two humans, who were also both female,” Tsichtinako, the female spirit of the Acoma Indian creation myth (SF 211). In *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, Werner Sollors notes the prominence of jumping off cliffs in Native American lore (Castillo’s Chicana characters are, of course, partially Native American in ancestry): American folklore is especially rich in making the connection between Indians and love in the countless tales of lovers’ leaps” (114). Bystanders look over the edge after Caridad and Esmeralda jump:

But much to all their surprise, there were no morbid remains of splintered bodies tossed to the ground, down, down, like bad pottery or glass or old bread. There weren’t even whole bodies lying peaceful.
There was nothing. Just the spirit deity Tsichtinako calling loudly with a voice like wind, guiding the two women back, not out toward the sun’s rays or up to the clouds but down, deep within the soft, moist dark earth where Esmeralda and Caridad would be safe and live forever. (SF 211)

Called by her creator, Caridad leaps straight into Chicano/a mythology, subsumed by magical intervention, without mediating between cultures.

Before moving on to analysis of adult Native American characters in fiction, let us describe the differences between Chicano/a and Native American characters as I have described them thus far. From a cultural standpoint, Chicano/a adulthood differs from Native American adulthood in some very important ways. First, Mexic Amerindians possess no actual homeland to return to, their native lands having been appropriated and infiltrated by dominant culture. Next, while their heritage imbues them with the oral traditions of the past, they belong fully neither to Mexican nor American culture. They make up their own border culture, complete with the difficult identity of shared white and Latino/a ancestry. The concept of Aztlan, though held up as a homeland, is not an attainable refuge. Third, the spiritual and magical aspects of Mexic Amerindian cultural traditions do not adequately cross into the
Generations of oral tradition have failed to empower Mexic Amerindians in contemporary society, leaving them at a loss in the face of mixed identity and cultural conflict.

Given the nature of the Mexic Amerindian situation, it follows that Mexic Amerindian fiction will reflect similar trials. The lack of a separate homeland leaves Chicano/a characters in search of roots that are sometimes difficult to discern. Straddling cultures makes Mexic Amerindian characters a culture apart, possessing a language apart. The ambivalence instilled by this uneasy position has served to devalue Chicano/a culture. And, with regard to adult characters, the powerful magic of their traditions fails to cross over to everyday life in a meaningful way. Adult characters are unable to enlist magical realism as they mediate between cultures because magical realism has not been afforded the status necessary to effect such aid. And this last point comes down to a matter of faith.

While the use of magical realism to mediate between cultures never happens for Esperanza, Sofi, Fe, or Caridad, adult Native American characters typically
follow a pattern of rejection or lack of heritage, only to return to magical realism and embrace an updated brand of cultural understanding.\textsuperscript{14} I will show the use of this leaving-homecoming-healing pattern, discussing Leslie Marmon Silko’s \textit{Ceremony} and Paula Gunn Allen’s \textit{The Woman Who Owned the Shadows}.

\textbf{A Universal Healing: Silko’s Ceremony}

I will tell you something about stories
\begin{quote}
[he said]
They aren’t just entertainment.
Don’t be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
al we have to fight off
illness and death.
\end{quote}

You don’t have anything
if you don’t have the stories.
(Silko, \textit{Ceremony} 2)\textsuperscript{15}

Leslie Marmon Silko’s 1977 novel, \textit{Ceremony}, offers just such a story for both its Native American protagonist Tayo and the reader: a ceremonial ritual of healing that “fight[s] off/illness and death” as it unfolds on the page (2). The structure of the novel has fomented much discussion in literary circles, for Silko constructs an alternate text to the storyline of the novel, one written stanzaically and imbued with the portent of true ceremony. Each episodic entry into this subtext offers a parallel to the novel’s narrative
action, the two texts ultimately serving to complement each other and reach resolution. In “An Act of Attention: Event Structure in Ceremony,” Elaine Jahner describes these alternating formats:

These two types [of narrative] are the contemporary and the mythic tellings, the timeless and the time-bound narratives. The two are not independent of each other in that they constantly shape each other, but finding out how they interact is complicated by the fact that all which occurs in the time-bound framework is confused because the ways of knowing, the various kinds of narrative are all entangled. Reader and protagonist alike must learn to untangle, and the reader can follow Tayo from event to event by moving from poetry to prose and back again to poetry. Silko juxtaposes the mythic portions of the novel and the story of Tayo’s efforts by stating the myth in poetic form to contrast with the prose that carries forward contemporary realizations of the meaning stated in poetic sections. (39)

To use Jahner’s terminology, Silko’s combination of genres involves not only Tayo, but also the reader, in the “untangling” process necessary to understand and experience the novel. Paula Rabinowitz also notes the significance of Silko’s unconventional format and its bearing on the theme of the novel:

Silko reworks the origin myths of the Laguna [tribe] through Tayo’s dreams and activities. His project is quite literally to remake the world, a world already overdetermined. The forces which formerly governed the Laguna world have radically altered and must thus radically alter the stories which create the universe—new information, new substance, must be incorporated into the sacred narratives . . . (34)
There is something about *Ceremony* that we cannot ignore, and I will argue that this something is more than just a unique format. By combining genres, poetry and prose, to create the theme of blending, Silko taps into the reader’s sense of the sacred. The popularity of *Ceremony* is itself noteworthy; James Ruppert argues, “The wide cross-cultural attention [Ceremony has received] is testimony to the novel’s richly textured and mediational character” (74). That is, the novel itself is mediational; it is not just the story of one man’s fight to live between cultures. This is a story about the monumental task at hand—what Rabinowitz dubs “remak[ing] the world” (34). The epic proportions of *Ceremony* create a universality of appeal precisely because the implications of the novel are universally meaningful. What Silko presents in *Ceremony* can be explained as a chain of events: 1) the novel’s structure, by invoking creation myths, leads the reader to images of the sacred, regardless of his/her personal belief system; 2) the sacred must be altered or updated to effectively serve the modern world; 3) the sacred implies a higher power whose abilities are greater than that of humans; 4) through Tayo’s finding access to this power, which is
perceived as magic by himself and those around him, he and the world are saved.

Over the course of the novel, Tayo employs magical realism to dispel his feelings of alienation from his culture and post-war despair, ultimately arriving at the mediated role of healer. As a mixed-blood Laguna/white male, Tayo inhabits both Native and white cultures, never fully accepted within either. But, as the novel’s theme makes clear, in Tayo’s difference lies his power, his personal magical realism. In fact, I will argue that Silko has created a novel in which the very kind of difference that Tayo possesses allows for a cultural mediation through magical realism, as well as being a necessity for wholeness and continued, meaningful ceremony in the modern world. For, the ethnic difference that shapes Tayo’s character makes him the ideal vehicle for effecting the transition from the old world to a remade one. Because of his multi-faceted identity, Tayo himself represents the fusion between cultures that will be reflected in the newly remade world. That is, Tayo himself is a paradigm of Silko’s theme, succinctly defined by James Ruppert: “Silko’s novel circles around the critical, personal, and cultural decisions about what
to fuse from the old and the new” (74). To recapitulate, *Ceremony* employs both structure and theme to engage the reader in an active text, a ceremony in itself. Tayo, as vehicle for this theme, necessarily uses magical realism as a catalyst to his own remaking, as well as the remaking of the world. The remainder of this section will examine the mediational role of magical realism in Tayo’s remaking, while also detailing the corresponding “mythic” (Jahner 39) or stanzaic parallels in the remaking of the earth, as we follow Tayo through three major phases: dealing with depression, learning new methods to heal himself and the earth, and performing the new ceremony.

As the novel opens, Tayo, a returning World War II veteran, finds himself in a hospital, a desperately ill man who needs healing and reconciliation. During the war, Tayo’s life is controlled for him by the army, and, therefore, lacks the ceremony and custom necessary—let alone magical realism—to unite him with the earth in a spiritually fulfilling way. In “The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*” Paula Gunn Allen asserts: “Tayo’s illness is a result of separation from the ancient unity of person, ceremony, and land, and
his healing is a result of his recognition of this unity” (Sacred Hoop 119).

Juxtaposed against descriptions of Tayo’s deep depression, the alternative text to the opening sections of Ceremony offers hope from the outset. Before the novel’s real-time story begins, the reader finds reassurance: “The only cure/I know/is a good ceremony” (3). And as the reader learns of Tayo’s nearly complete estrangement from ritual and reality, the alternative text explains why he must return to ritual to find healing. That is, ceremonial activity will atone for wartime killing (Tayo is unsure whether or not he has killed, and this constantly disturbs him) and keep natural cycles intact: “They had things/they must do/otherwise . . ./Maybe the rain wouldn’t come/or the deer would go away./That’s why/they had things/they must do/The flute and dancing/blue cornmeal and/hair washing” (37-38). Even though Tayo doesn’t specifically remember killing anyone during the war, the memory of mass slaughter haunts him.

This poetic section of Ceremony also introduces the idea of false magic, what Silko calls witchery. According to the story presented in the alternate text,
false, or “Ck’o’yo,” magic so entrances the Native people that they fail to follow their own ceremonial restorative practices. Silko writes, “[T]hey neglected the mother corn altar. . . . /They didn’t know it [the witchery] was all just a trick” (48). As a result, the earth mother Nau’ts’ity’i becomes angry when her children neglect her: “‘If they like that magic so much/let them live off it.’ /So she took/the plants and grass from them./No baby animals were born./She took the/rainclouds with her” (48–49). Paula Gunn Allen interprets the relationship between the land and witchery: “The land is not really a place, separate from ourselves, where we act out the drama of our isolate destinies; the witchery makes us believe that false idea” (Sacred Hoop 119). The condition of the unattended earth in the alternate text parallels that of the reservation land Tayo returns to after the war: parched by drought. Through the alternate text, Silko has introduced the idea that peoples’ involvement with witchery directly affects the world around them. Allen also makes this connection between the drought and the people: “The land is dry because earth is suffering from the alienation of part of herself; her children have been torn from her in their
minds; their possession of unified awareness of and with her has been destroyed" (*Sacred Hoop* 119). The significance of this relationship between human action and the land becomes clear as the reader learns that Tayo believes he is responsible for the drought on the reservation. Having cursed the rain in the Japanese jungle for its ill effects on Rocky’s deteriorating health, Tayo is convinced that his actions backfired; while the rain in Japan never lessened, the rain on the reservation certainly heeded Tayo’s wishes, and stopped altogether. In “What Josiah Said: Uncle Josiah’s Role in Ceremony,” Tom Lynch argues that, despite Tayo’s belief, he cannot be responsible for the lack of rain:

> If in fact [as Josiah taught him] “nothing is all good or all evil,” and if “this was not the rain he and Josiah had prayed for,” then Tayo is free to damn this jungle rain without incurring the displeasure of the rain back at Laguna. Nevertheless-- either paradoxically or inconsistently-- he does feel responsible for the drought. (143)

However, Elaine Jahner asserts that Tayo’s guilt “derives from the fact that he knows or intuits the power of words in relation to myth but he follows the results of his powerful words to the wrong mythic prototypes” (39). Likewise, Paula Rabinowitz finds that in the “Laguna cosmology” under which Tayo operates, “both nature and
social relations are constituted by language” (30).
Therefore, “Tayo is certain that when he cursed the rain in an Asian jungle after Rocky’s death, he caused the seven year drought plaguing the Laguna land” (Rabinowitz 30). Moreover, Tom Lynch has found that “Tayo faces a dual trauma”; that is, “the psychic disintegration he experiences in the war is a heightened version of the large scale cultural disintegration occurring at home in Laguna” (142). Between the damage done to his land and his psyche, Tayo can barely function in reality-- again underscoring his deep need to return to ritual and its accompanying magical realism.

While false magic is destructive, true magical realism is exactly what Tayo will need to be healed. Including references to the many influences in Tayo’s life, Paula Gunn Allen arrives at a large-scale picture of what Tayo’s ultimate healing through magical realism will encompass. Allen not only calls upon the strong influences of Tayo’s mother and Uncle Josiah, but also those of the clairvoyant cantina singer Night Swan, Tayo’s lover the “mountain spirit” Ts’eh, the spotted cattle symbolic of Tayo’s and Josiah’s fight against white regulations, and even Betonie, the medicine man who
leads Tayo to begin his own healing (Sacred Hoop 120).

Allen's own view of magical realism and healing concurs with my own:

The healing of Tayo and the land results from the reunification of land and person. Tayo is healed when he understands, in magical (mystical) and loving ways, that his being is within and outside him, that it includes his mother, Night Swan, Ts'eh, Josiah, the spotted cattle, winter, hope, love, and the starry universe of Betonie's ceremony. (Sacred Hoop 120)

When Tayo is capable of including all elements of his identity into a whole picture, his healing will be complete— but not before Tayo painstakingly learns the methods necessary for his meditative ceremony.

Following the optimism of the alternate text, the prose narrative returns to Tayo, who finds temporary and frequent relief in drinking binges, allowing himself to be carried along for the ride with his fellow Indian war veterans, now drinking buddies, awash in self-pity for their loss of status that came with the end of the war. For a time it seems that these drinking binges, these exercises in self-hatred, are the only ceremony available to Tayo and his fellow Native veterans. Silko deftly refers to their drunken nostalgia as ritual, driving home how poorly this term fits what Tayo and his friends engage in: "Tayo starts crying. They think maybe he's
crying about what the Japs did to Rocky because they are to that part of the ritual where they damn those yellow Jap bastards" (43, emphasis mine). Only pages later, Silko again uses this term in reference to the men’s drinking. Describing the memories Tayo’s drinking buddy Emo always chooses to talk about while drinking, Silko writes: “The night progressed according to that ritual” (61). But, clearly, this is not the kind of ritual they need.

To heighten the effects of the emotional abuse of Tayo’s childhood, as well as the psychosis brought on by the horrors of war, the significance and power of tribal stories have also been discounted. During Tayo’s youth, school takes away one of the few sources of solace Tayo possesses, the traditional Native American stories of creation, power, and history: “He had believed in the stories for a long time, until the teachers at Indian school taught him not to believe in that kind of ‘nonsense’” (19). Recall from the opening of this section that stories are “all we have to fight off/illness and death” (2). Therefore, without the reinstatement of the stories, Tayo’s adult healing ceremony cannot take place. Fortunately, each action
Tayo takes revives the stories deep within him; it is as if by resurrecting the power of the stories, Tayo resurrects himself. Indeed, Paula Gunn Allen holds that Tayo only begins to understand the connection between body and earth because the stories themselves magically act upon him:

This understanding occurs slowly as Tayo lives the stories—those ancient and those new. He understands through the process of making the stories manifest in his actions and in his understanding, for the stories and the land are about the same thing; perhaps we can best characterize this relation by saying that the stories are the communication device of the land and the people. Through the stories, the ceremony, the gap between isolate human beings and lonely landscape is closed. (Sacred Hoop 120)

Elaine Jahner also notes the significance of story in Tayo’s healing: “Through the ceremonies . . . Tayo realizes a little more about how to allow story to shape his experience as event so that both he and the story remain alive” (43). The magical realism of story is apparent especially in the alternate text, as Tayo finds himself doing exactly what the stories foretell, becoming the living embodiment of their power.

Despite their shared post-war disillusion, Tayo and his fellow veterans are not alike; Tayo’s ethnic difference sets him apart. As the stories of the
alternate text magically direct him, Tayo makes attempts to reconnect to the earth and himself through ritual. While the rituals Tayo tries are performed instinctively—he does what feels right because he does not know the proper, prescribed methods—they nonetheless bear witness to Tayo's desire for health and healing, as well as the supernatural influence of the stories on his actions. Believing his wartime prayers backfired, resulting in the deaths of Rocky and Josiah, as well as the drought his homeland is suffering when he returns, Tayo's ceremonial actions are initially tentative in addition to being untraditional. But, as the healing ceremony takes shape around and within him, Tayo's confidence allows him to perform even the smallest of ritual actions with zeal and reverence. Tom Lynch remarks that Josiah "has indeed passed on to Tayo his ritual objects as well as the spiritual attitudes they represent" (143). As the journey toward healing gains momentum through the magical realism of the alternate text, Tayo grows comfortable with the performance of ritual, and the memories of his ritual training with Josiah give his actions new confidence. These rituals are another way that Tayo separates himself; he stands
apart from the despair and witchery of those around him as the magical realism of the traditional stories shape more and more of the real-time text.

Silko’s verse text for this part of Ceremony presents a paradigm of the many trials Tayo must undergo to find atonement not only for the stress and depression he has endured, but also for the separation from the land the people have allowed to happen through their carelessness with witchery. After the people have dabbled in Ck’o’yo magic and lost the support of their earth mother, they are starving, for she has taken rain and food with her. The people call on Hummingbird for help, and the alternate text outlines the many steps in Hummingbird’s process: creating Fly, going to old Buzzard, getting tobacco for Buzzard, going to caterpillar for tobacco, having Buzzard cleanse them, and reaching atonement. Tayo’s own process is no less complex as it mirrors the preceding story, and he fumbles for each nuance with the magical realist intervention of the spirit woman Ts’eh and the medicine man Betonie. In perhaps the most chilling section of the alternate text, Silko describes the kind of destruction that Tayo must guard against in the creation story of whites: “they
[whites] see no life/When they look/they see only objects./ The world is a dead thing for them/the trees and rivers are not alive/the mountains and stones are not alive./The deer and bear are objects/They see no life” (135). This stanza foretells that much more will soon be demanded of Silko’s protagonist before the ceremony is complete.

After the war, personal ceremonies help reconnect Tayo to reality. Upon revisiting the former home of Night Swan, the clairvoyant cantina dancer who foretells Tayo’s involvement in the healing ceremony, Tayo marks his hands with “a fragment of fallen plaster,” in the same way “ceremonial dancers sometimes did, except they used white clay” (104). In so doing, Tayo discovers the reason behind the ritual, whether it be enacted with plaster or clay: “then he knew why it was done by the dancers: it connected them to the earth” (104).19 It is precisely this connection that Tayo needs to reawaken in order to perform his personal healing, as well as the larger healing of which he has become a part: the earth’s.

Yet Tayo continues to want wholeness, and to work for his own healing. And the more he works at it, the
more the process works for and with him for the greater good. After his first encounter with Ts’eh, the mountain woman whose clairvoyance and knowledge of healing medicines guides Tayo through his ceremony, Tayo is obviously more comfortable with his own brand of ritual. He chants a sunrise song:

He repeated the words as he remembered them, not sure if they were the right ones, but feeling they were right, feeling the instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all things together—the last stars, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds—celebrating this coming. (182)

This ritual marks the beginning of Tayo’s comfort with ceremony. Tayo puts “pinches of yellow pollen into the four footprints” of the mountain lion he encounters while herding Josiah’s lost cattle (196); he repeats the sunrise ritual to feel close to Ts’eh in her absence (216); and he “fill[s] the delicate imprints” of a snake with pollen along the cliffs (221). Tayo grows into this self-started ritual, realizing that as part of the changing ceremony, he is doing the right things even as he invents. His expertise has come with practice as well as with faith.

The magical realism of this novel is the ceremony, working on Tayo and the earth even as he is participating
in and discovering it. Tayo is now comfortable with the fluidity of time, which is the magical way of thinking about time that is familiar to him from his childhood, before he was taught by dominant culture to doubt the stories and their magic. In rediscovering magical realism,\textsuperscript{20} magical realism saves him, as well as the dry earth around him. So, Tayo learns a spiritually immersed path, mediating not between Indian and white worlds but between different inheritances. In so doing, Tayo chooses the best each culture has to offer the spirit, which is then incorporated into the ongoing ceremony, a ceremony much larger than himself. Allen reminds us that Tayo’s ceremony holds “cosmic significance,” arguing that “only a cosmic ceremony can simultaneously heal a wounded man, a stricken landscape, and a disorganized, discouraged society” (\textit{Sacred Hoop} 123). As the reader notices Tayo’s immersion in the ceremony, our sense of his and the earth’s healing grows. Allen finds this loss of outward self essential to the larger ceremony of the novel: “Only total annihilation of the mundane self could produce a magic man of sufficient power to carry off the ceremony that Tayo is embroiled in” (\textit{Sacred Hoop} 123). The medicine man Betonie explains the necessity of
updating or shifting the ceremony through the example of a boy who went to live with bears:

But don't be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. It is very peaceful with the bears; the people say that's the reason human beings seldom return. It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely. You would do as much for the seedlings as they become plants in the field.

(130)

Betonie and Ts'eh watch closely over Tayo's own becoming, treating him as the seedling that will ultimately save the field.

The final episodes of the stanzaic, alternate text merge with the narrative as Betonie performs the healing ceremony with Tayo. As Tayo enacts the ritual physically, Betonie chants:

I will bring you back through my hoop,
I will bring you back.

Following my footprints
walk home
following my footprints
Come home, happily
return belonging to your home
return to long life and happiness again
return to long life and happiness. (143)

Even after this process, more healing remains to be done. We learn that "The rainbows returned him to his/home, but it wasn't over./All kinds of evil were still on him" (144). In fact, Gretchen Ronnow believes that at this
point Tayo “must attempt to reestablish some sort of continuity for the living . . . by revitalizing the language and reviving the myths” (85). And with such revival Betonie and Tayo finally complete the ritual:

The dry skin
was still stuck
to his body.
But the effects
of the witchery
of the evil thing
began to leave
his body. (153)

Although Tayo has clearly turned to magical realism to cure his illness, he is only able to be cured because of his willingness to alter the ceremony to fit contemporary needs. Lynch shares this view, finding that “a key element in the novel is the theme of adaptation to changing circumstances”— the definition of mediation (145). Lynch describes Silko’s purpose: “Silko attempts to demonstrate that finding a balance between complete assimilation to modern white ways and strident traditionalism is the best way to cope with the changing world” (145).

From this climactic point, Tayo still faces the challenge of dealing with his Native war buddies, each of whom is infected to some degree with witchery. Not only must Tayo learn not to retaliate against them, thus
strengthening the witchery, but he at last discovers the connection between himself and the earth, his sanity and the earth’s ongoing ceremony. In these final moments the magic of the stories Tayo has prized since childhood merge with the fluid sense of time that so troubled him at the opening of the novel:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together—the old stories, the war stories, their stories—to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time. (246)

With this protective and redeeming pattern in place, the witchery quickly loses ground. Finding that through a foretold pattern of stars “[h]is protection was there in the sky,” Tayo is confident that he can complete the ceremony that saves the earth as well as himself: “He had only to complete this night, to keep the story out of the reach of the destroyers [those infected by witchery] for a few more hours, and their witchery would turn, upon itself, upon them” (247). Completing the final night of the ceremony with himself and the stories intact is among Tayo’s most difficult tasks in the novel. But it is also among the most important; without Tayo’s completion of the ceremony, witchery will infect all of creation:
The witchery would be at work all night so that the people would see only the losses— the land and the lives lost— since the whites came; the witchery would work so that the people would be fooled into blaming only the whites and not the witchery. It would work to make people forget the stories of the creation and continuation of the five worlds; the old priests would be afraid too, and cling to ritual without making new ceremonies as they always had before, the way they still made new Buffalo Dance songs each year. (249)

The magical connection Tayo has established with the earth through ritual averts this calamity. The reader takes great satisfaction in the penultimate episode of the alternate text: "Every evil/which entangled him/was cut/to pieces" (258). The reader, like Tayo, is ready to move into the newly restored earth the ceremony has created. Our reading has been part of the ceremony itself; we emerge anew from the pages of the novel. But Silko’s final words, repeated four times, caution us to emerge with no small trepidation:

   It is dead for now.
   It is dead for now.
   It is dead for now.
   It is dead for now. (261)

For we are always at risk of barrenness and alienation if we fail to make transitions. Tom Lynch emphasizes the importance of mediation for Tayo:

   A world of absolute tradition or absolute assimilation really has no place for him. With Josiah’s help, Tayo transforms the seeming liability
of mixed ancestry into an asset by his openness to the best elements of many cultures and his shrewd combination of diverse forces. (146)

Tayo’s ceremony—indeed, our own—must be a mediated one to succeed. Therein lies the magic.

**Emerging from Shadow in Paula Gunn Allen**

> “the dead walk among us
we whisper in dark corners
stories about the light”

(Allen, *Shadow Country* 109, 10-12)

In her 1983 novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, Paula Gunn Allen creates a novel patterned very much like Silko’s *Ceremony*. Preceding each major section of the novel is a separate prologue, detailing a specific tale from Native American mythology. As with the alternate text of stories and chants in *Ceremony*, the myths Allen presents act as paradigms to the sections they precede. Allen terms these alternate texts her “‘heritage and lore’ sections,” explaining that “each kind of story relates to and illuminates the rest” (*Sacred Hoop* 153). As a result, the reader is able to see the timelessness and universality of the main text, the story of an individual woman’s fight for sanity and wholeness. And, like *Ceremony*, the story of *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is larger than one person’s struggle; both Allen and Silko use an individual’s story to illuminate the
human condition. Because of its format as well as its theme, *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* can be viewed as a counterpart to *Ceremony* from the female perspective. Analysis of *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* alongside that of *Ceremony* ultimately serves to further the reader's understanding of both texts, especially his or her understanding of the significance of magical realism in overcoming the alienation inherent to "breed" status. Tracing the chronological progression of Ephanie, Allen's protagonist, from alienation to wholeness demonstrates the positive and mediating effects of magical realism on this character.

Ephanie begins the novel in a state of paralysis not unlike Tayo's, although hers is not due to the trauma of war. Instead, we find Tayo's female counterpart in Ephanie; like Tayo, she is the unlikely rescuer of her Native people. She has been chosen-- or compelled-- to carry on the message of mediation for survival to the Native population. And, like Tayo, Ephanie is of mixed blood, so her burden is that much more difficult to bear, for she brings a message that is difficult for full-blood Indians to hear. In the Foreword to Allen's 1982 collection of poems, *Shadow Country*, Kenneth Lincoln...
describes his perception of Allen’s own “mixed” existence: “Paula Allen lives somewhere in between American norms and Native American closures” (vii). In her critique of Allen’s 1991 work, Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman’s Sourcebook, Tracy J. Prince Ferrell also remarks on the dilemma of unclear identity, finding that “Grandmothers . . . suggests the many complications which arise with identity formation and colliding cultures. Allen’s writing evidences the impact of this collision as she sifts through the cultural rubble to attempt to claim an identity of her own” (78). Ferrell traces the progression of this theme through both Shadow Country and The Woman Who Owned the Shadows:

Struggling against imposed expectations from the beginning, Paula Gunn Allen’s status as a ‘breed’ insured that she would be in the margins of Native American and ‘mainstream’ communities. Similar to her sister Laguna writer, Leslie Marmon Silko, Allen’s earlier works of poetry [including Shadow Country] and first novel [The Woman Who Owned the Shadows] deal with conflicting emotions arising from this status. Her picture of the West is, therefore, one of disharmonious existence as two communities meet and are baffled by differences in ideology, language, and thought structures. (79)

Allen is no stranger to the “shadow country” of mixed ethnicities, having come from a “Laguna mother, Lakota grandfather, [and] Lebanese father” (Lincoln, Foreword vii). Lincoln defines shadow country: “SHADOW COUNTRY:
that marginal zone of interfusions, neither the shadower, nor the shadowed, both and neither, in liminal transition" (Foreword vii). Indeed, shadow country is Allen's Native American concept of Gloria Anzaldúa's borderlands, even Ana Castillo's Sapogonia. The Woman Who Owned the Shadows provides a welcome addition to this dissertation precisely because of its Native American, female rendition of this "country" inhabited by Native Americans and Mexic Amerindians alike.22

Within their respective novels, both Tayo and Ephanie must fight to be heard by the people with whom they are trying so hard to communicate, because their respective Native communities have ridiculed their mixed heritage, and, as a result, relegated them to the periphery of Native existence. Allen describes Ephanie's childhood situation:

Ephanie's family had lived in the village, but they might as well have lived in Timbuktu, as her mother used to say. People didn't come to their house on Feast Day, not even the relatives who would have been expected, required by duty, to come and eat on that certain, central day. They were shunned. Not overtly denied, confrontation was not the people's way. But covertly. (Woman 150)23

Despite these obstacles, the revelation and magical realist experience that Ephanie awaits the entire novel has much in common with Tayo's realization of the
necessity of altering ceremonies to fit contemporary needs. That is, the final enlightening message from the spirit world tells Ephanie: "'The time of ending is upon the Indian'" (209). But, rather than despairing, Ephanie must, like Tayo, convey these changes to her generation so that the people may endure: "'The work that is left is to pass on what we know to those who come after us. It is an old story. One that is often repeated. One that is true'" (209). Ephanie has been assigned the task of continuing the story, just as Tayo has continued the ceremony. And while the presence of magical realism is always just below the surface of the text in The Woman Who Owned the Shadows, it is not until the final two episodes, entitled "Kurena. Sunrise" and "And There Was The Spider," that Ephanie has a magical realist experience, telling her the message she is to bring to the people. But, to be able to understand her personal mission, Ephanie must first uncover her old, heroic self, which has been submerged by years of fear and guilt resulting from a childhood fall from a tree. Thus, The Woman Who Owned the Shadows traces Ephanie's journey back to understanding after her childhood injury and misunderstanding of its meaning.
Having misunderstood the meaning of her fall from a tree (by incorrectly comparing it to the story of The Woman Who Fell From the Sky24), Ephanie has spent her entire adolescence and adulthood shying away from her own brave spirit. She reasons that courage resulted in her fall and physical injury, so courageous acts must be avoided. Having practiced this cowed demeanor through adulthood, when the reader meets Ephanie at the opening of the novel, she has spent so long avoiding herself that she is in danger of never recovering (it). The methods Ephanie employs to uncover the source of her adult neurosis and reach happiness form the basis of the novel and this discussion. But just as important to this analysis is Ephanie’s discovery, as the novel closes, of the message intended for her by Spider Grandmother or Thought Woman (creator of all things in the Native American belief system), to whom Allen dedicates the novel: “And to Spider Grandmother, Thought Woman, who thinks the stories I write down” (vii). In her various attempts to find answers and fulfillment, Ephanie alternately immerses herself in either dominant or Native culture, both to no avail until she can finally understand her fall from an adult perspective. Each attempt
will be analyzed in its inability to satisfy Ephanie’s needs, until she is at last able to allow magical realism, and mediation, into her ken. The admission of magical realism and mediation are key here because of their role in Native American literature. In The Sacred Hoop, Allen enumerates “major themes or issues that pertain to American Indians,” among them “Indians and spirits are always found together,” and the fact that Native Americans experience “the inevitable presence of meaningful concourse with supernatural beings” (2,3). From this perspective, in a novel by a Native American woman about a Native American woman, the presence of magical realism is nearly a given. Ephanie need only locate that within her which is open to this magical discourse, to start listening to spiders rather than sweeping them out her door.

As the novel opens, Ephanie lives like an automaton, regulated by her childhood friend and now lover, Stephen. She cannot care for her children, Agnes and Ben, much less for herself, her despair is so deep. She feels disassociated from everything around her, even her own name:

Ephanie. Too strange a name, deranging her from the time she first understood its strangeness. . . .
But like her it was a split name, a name half of this and half of that: Epiphany. Effie. . . . Proper at that for her, a halfblood. A halfbreed. Which was the source of her derangement. Ranging despair. Disarrangement. (3)²⁵

Although Ephanie’s depression results from suppressed memories of her fall, her “halfbreed” status certainly plays a large role in her alienation. Allen affirms this idea in The Sacred Hoop:

What is the experience that creates this sense of alienation? The breed (whether by parentage or acculturation to non-Indian society) is an Indian who is not an Indian. That is, breeds are a bit of both worlds, and the consciousness of this makes them seem alien to traditional Indians while making them feel alien among whites. Breeds commonly feel alien to themselves above all. (129)

Kenneth Lincoln reminds us that Allen has gone through this experience herself: “Allen knows only too well the tribal sense of alienation, the corresponding necessity for mutual assimilation, America and Native America” (Foreword vii). Likewise, everything about Ephanie at this stage in the novel bespeaks alienation, not only from family and community, but from herself as well. Her black hair is “disorderly,” and “vagueness hunch[es] her round shoulders” (3). Time especially is difficult for Ephanie, for she is so out of touch with reality that she cannot give herself any frame of reference: “Clocks evaded her. When she looked at one she forgot to
register what it said” (3-4). Allen remarks about this particularity of Ephanie’s character: “Time is a central theme of the book, and understanding temporality and chronology is an obsession that moves Ephanie through every experience she has” (Sacred Hoop 153). By the end of the novel, Ephanie will have (re)learned what time means from an Indian standpoint, so she is able to understand her past difficulty with it. Allen defines Indian time as it relates not only to The Woman Who Owned the Shadows, but also to the body of Native American writing:

Ultimately, Indian time is a concept based on a sense of propriety, on a ritual understanding of order and harmony. For an Indian, if being on time means being out of harmony with self and ritual, the Indian will be “late.” The right timing for a tribal Indian is the time when he or she is in balance with the flow of the four rivers of life. (Sacred Hoop 154)

Time, then, is yet another element of Ephanie’s life that reinforces her alienation from herself, keeping her from hearing the message Spider Grandmother and the spirits have for her.

In her precarious emotional state, it is easy for Stephen to control Ephanie, and for her to let him. She does not yet possess the strength, self-confidence, or personal magic necessary to stand on her own. In her
thoughts, Ephanie reviews the hold Stephen has on her:
"And did not realize that it was he who told her often,
every day, more, that she would surely die without him to
secure her, to make her safe" (10). She surrenders to
him completely, not having the stamina to fight.

The character of Stephen is the wolf in sheep’s
clothing that preys on the weakened Ephanie. Seemingly
comforting and familiar because of his upbringing
alongside Ephanie in the Native American community of
Guadalupe, Stephen takes advantage of his long-time-
family-friend status to invade Ephanie’s personal world
and psyche. Though Native by heritage, Stephen’s
personal relativism serves to further disconnect Ephanie
from anything or anyone but him. In this way, his
character represents the logic of dominant culture.
Because of this, he is dangerous to Ephanie; he seems
like home, but is only a shell of Indianness himself.
Caught by the despair of relativism, Stephen only exists
by controlling others, namely Ephanie. He undermines
Ephanie’s tenuous hold on reality constantly, barraging
her with apparently innocuous aphorisms that are all too
damaging: "Consciousness is the essential lie. . . .
The last superstition built into memory is that you exist
as you think you do" (4). And when Ephanie sits with Stephen, "understanding nothing," it is the perfect invitation for her to slip further away from reality (5).

When Ephanie at last breaks free from her indebtedness to Stephen, who claims he has "remade" her, she leaves her own Native community to find another (17). Upon relocating to San Francisco, Ephanie attempts to climb aboard the Native bandwagon, hoping its popular spirituality will mend her broken spirit. Instead of being controlled by Stephen, who has foregone Native traditions for those of dominant culture, she allows herself to be controlled by the mores of the Indian community. But, all the while she is taken in, Ephanie realizes there is no true hope for her in this citified Native reawakening:

So she began to pluck at the fringe of her dance shawl, remembering the first time she had come to a powwow. She had never been to one and she had been in culture shock. The dances at home were nothing like this. There [Guadalupe] they were doing serious business. Here [San Francisco] everyone was preening and puffing, looking around to see who to score with, who to gossip about, who to snub, who to be sure to talk to. (55)

Even if the powwows are insincere, Ephanie nonetheless wants to fit in with any group to end her feelings of isolation. Her search for a way out of her depression
lets her forgive the urban Indians' shortcomings, if only briefly. Soon, however, she turns back to dominant, white culture for a third attempt at personal understanding-- still without the intervention of magical realism.

As she slowly loses contact with the Indian community, Ephanie reimmerses herself in the expectations of dominant culture: "She joined a therapy group. Everyone in it was white" (59). Although the members of her therapy group have very different worldviews from her own Native one, Ephanie nevertheless subscribes to their beliefs in an effort to achieve fulfillment, just as she wanted to belong with the San Francisco Indians: "But over the months she grew to believe that the world was like they described it to be. That it was mostly safe, mostly within her control. How she longed that it be that way, and the rest just her interpretation, her bad dream" (60). Assigning herself this seemingly safe position within dominant culture leads Ephanie to marriage and more children, hoping that the picture-perfect lifestyle she craves-- and that seems to be the norm of dominant culture-- will at last come together. She marries Thomas Yoshuri, a Nisei man whose own ethnic
identity has long been eroded by the prejudice and internment camps he experienced as a child. In marrying Thomas, Ephanie sees herself as a missionary; if she can save him, perhaps she can also save herself. But Thomas is not to be saved, leaving Ephanie no closer to mediation or happiness.

As Ephanie tries to be the perfect wife to Thomas and mother to their children, she receives blame and misunderstanding from the dominant culture she is trying so diligently to fit into. Her non-Native acquaintances feel let down by what they view as her lack of Indianess:

Once one of her friends had told her, "You don't seem Indian to me. You talk like a New York Jew, not like an Indian at all." He was disappointed in her lack of romantic appeal. She always forgot to keep her eyes cast down, to say nature loving things. She ground her chili in an electric blender and made jokes about her electric metate that made nobody laugh. (67)

Later on, Ephanie finds similar sentiments echoed by other women, liberal whites who have taken up the Native American cause: "They told her about how Indians were dying of booze and lousy working conditions and ignorance and squalor" (138). Ephanie's response to their stereotypical victimization of all Native peoples is outrage: "She found herself getting mad. Madder.
Because she had wanted to like them. To be understood. To understand. And all they knew was what they read” (138). Describing a white tourist in her poem “Diné,” Allen reflects this same rage: “Her eyes hold/a nation’s birthright in their gleam, set/in arrogance, the certitude of fools” (Shadow Country 11, 6-8). Indeed, in The Sacred Hoop, Allen shows the roots of such seemingly liberated western thought. That is, “Americans divide Indians into two categories: the noble savage and the howling savage” (Allen, Sacred Hoop 4). Allen goes on to term this the “Progressive Fallacy” which “allows American Indians victim status only” (Sacred Hoop 5). In another poem from Shadow Country, “The Legend,” Allen refines this idea to verse:

It is important
  to know how they thought,
  the white ancestors of the woman
  I walk beside: they
  needed something to fear,
  something frightening to name,
  to speak about their inner sense
  of things.
  And so it was.
  Someone else reaped
  their despair. (145, 72-82)

Although today’s Americans may no longer believe that Indians are hostile savages who capture white ladies and torture them. . . . In contemporary times those who view
Indians as hostile savages paint modern Indian people as worthless, alcoholic, and lazy, unwilling to join in the general progressiveness and prosperity that is the final index of the righteousness of the American dream. (Allen, Sacred Hoop 5)

This same victim stereotype put forth by Ephanie’s “enlightened” white acquaintances infuriates her. It is certainly no accident that Allen includes such incidents in The Woman Who Owned the Shadows. In so doing, Allen insures the outrage of nearly all readers when they follow Ephanie’s logic, and, by the same token, these readers come to see the stereotype inherent in much contemporary thinking about people of color/ethnic minorities. When Ephanie tries to be more Indian, she is surrounded by Indian poseurs and tempted by the stability and affluence that dominant culture offers. When she tries to fit into a white worldview, she comes under attack for not embodying a Native American stereotype. These conflicting messages hold sway over Ephanie precisely because she belongs partially to both worlds; her mixed ethnicity has, thus far, left her without a true sense of belonging in either group.

Having bounced back and forth between the ideologies and outward expectations of both Native and dominant cultures, Ephanie recoils into solitude in a last attempt
to make peace with herself. What she learns is that she exists fully in neither the Native nor the white world, but must create her own balancing act. Ferrell notes the same idea: "Semi-autobiographical, The Woman Who Owned the Shadows focuses on this precarious balance a 'breed' is expected to maintain" (79). She cannot fully buy into Native ways: "One thing she could not go back to, though she had tried symbolically, in dreams, in books, was the old heathen tradition" (148). Nor can she fully partake of white culture; the luxuries of dominant existence make it too easy to forget her Indian side. In "Diné" Allen presents the Native longing to be accepted by dominant culture, to possess this seemingly wealthy lifestyle:

    in summer when they [whites] came to buy and sell
    and steal
    bad children, grandma used to say. Nose
    pressed to gate, I watched them,
    hoping I had not been good, so beautiful their way,
    those days. (Shadow Country 11, 13-17)

And it is because Ephanie understands the seduction of wealth versus the alternative of tribal obliteration that she knows she cannot fully exist within the dominant framework of white culture. Ephanie is left to balance between worlds as best she can.

    Yet, knowing that she must balance between worlds
    and being able to do so are two quite different things.
Misinterpreting the ramifications of her childhood fall from an apple tree has caused Ephanie to forget her former, braver self. She will be unable to balance, and, therefore, to communicate a message of endurance to Native people, as long as she continues in her misunderstanding. After years of living in hiding from her own psyche, Ephanie at last reawakens to her accident from an adult perspective. And, with her adult perspective comes mature understanding. She is able to trace her withdrawal from youthful confidence into adult timidity: “After she fell she gave up teasing her city cousins for being sissies when they were afraid to climb the trees or jump the wide crevices in the high mesas where she had such a short time before leaped and danced from rock to rock” (203). Ephanie trades in her zest for living without ever analyzing why: “[she] Learned to prance and priss, and did not notice the change, the fear behind it. The rage. And did not ever say aloud, not even in her own mind, what it was all about” (203).

Because the fall shakes Ephanie’s faith in herself, her faith in traditional Native stories and magical realism is shaken as well. She feels she can no longer trust herself, her own body, and she receives no reinforcement.
from her immersion attempts into either Native or dominant cultures. So, as a result of a fall from a tree, Ephanie grows up doubting herself and her traditions, as well as her sanity. But with maturity comes the ability to reshape her idea of the past.

When at last Ephanie understands the story of The Woman Who Fell From the Sky, it is because she finally realizes that she has been using this story as a mnemonic trigger for her own memory of falling. With this realization Ephanie knows that her childhood fall and subsequent transformation were not a dream, not a story like that of The Woman Who Fell From the Sky. The fall was her own, real experience, and the story can now take on the power and reference appropriate to it. Ephanie is not The Woman Who Fell From the Sky; she is an adult, mixed-blood Native American woman who once fell out of a tree. Ephanie is no longer afraid of myth because she no longer believes her own life story is myth. She can exist outside of the story, using its lessons to shape her judgments and to learn about her future path.

Recognizing a future path is something Ephanie has been unable to do thus far in The Woman Who Owned the Shadows. The idea that she can now look ahead bespeaks a
new personal comfort level and confidence. With comfort and confidence in place, Ephanie can finally experience magical realism. The last two episodes of the novel detail Ephanie’s awakening to magical realism. In “Kurena. Sunrise” Ephanie is visited by a spirit woman, in what she initially believes is a dream. The “shadowy form” in a white shawl chants, bringing understanding to the formerly confused Ephanie, especially regarding her mixed ethnicity: “‘Two face outward, two inward, the sign of doubling, of order and balance, of the two, the twins, the doubleminded world in which you have lived,’ she chanted” (206, 207, emphasis mine). As the chant continues, images swirl around Ephanie, visually reinforcing what the shawled woman explains: “Ephanie saw moving patterns that imaged what the woman was saying” (207). What seem like chaotic flurries of sound and image impart understanding to Ephanie: “She understood the combinations and recombinations that had so puzzled her. . . . Ephanie found what she so long had sought” (207, 208). The magical realist visitation and the flood of comprehension it brings also reveal to Ephanie her own role, the role that Thought Woman has intended for her: “Ephanie understood that Kochinnenako
was the name of any woman who, in the events being told, was walking in the ancient manner, tracing the pattern of the ancient design" (209). Ephanie is indeed one of these women. The spirit woman explains further: "Your place in the great circling spiral is to help in that story, in that work. To pass on to those who can understand what you have learned, what you know" (210). Allen's poem "The Blessing" echoes this sentiment, encapsulating Ephanie's realization of her own "ancient disposition" as a Kochinnenako: "Yet/we return, immortal/in our ancient disposition" (Shadow Country 9, 12-14). The understanding the spirit woman and her visit impart ready Ephanie for the task of telling. Finally, after this dream-like encounter, Ephanie truly does sleep, only to awake and find physical evidence that the magical experience was reality: "She saw a white, hand-woven shawl, heavily embroidered with black and white designs lying crumpled on the bottom of the bed" (212). In Grandmothers of the Light Allen clarifies her perspective on magical realism: "What are called 'myths' in the white world, and are thought of as primitive spiritual stories that articulate psychological realities, are in the native world the accounts of actual
interchanges," or magical realism (6). Ferrell suggests that Allen’s non-linear writing style accentuates the rapid movement between supernatural and natural, forcing the reader to meet Allen on her own ground: “[Allen] insists that the obligation of crossing cultures to attempt understanding rests on the reader” (82).

The novel closes as Ephanie enters the magical realism she has waited for so long:

And in the silence and the quieting shadows of her room... she thought. And the spiders in the walls, on the ceiling, in the corners, beneath the bed and under the chair began to gather. Their humming, quiet at first, grew louder, filling all of the spaces of the room... And around her the room filled with shadows. And the shadows became shapes. And the shapes became women singing. Singing they stepped, slowly, in careful balance of dignity, of harmony, of respect... And she began to sing with them. With her shawl wrapped around her shoulders in the way of the women since time immemorial, she wrapped her shawl and she joined the dance. She heard the singing. She entered the song. (212-213)

By first attempting immersion in both Native and white culture, Ephanie prepares herself for the magical realism of the last episode, “And There Was A Spider.” Ephanie has come to realize the truth behind Allen’s poem “What We Know,” which began this discussion: the dead walk among us/we whisper in dark corners/stories about the light” (Shadow Country 109, 10-12). That is, Ephanie has
come to understand the timelessness of the message she will bear. When, as the novel closes, Ephanie achieves maturity, health, and mediation, she has earned them.

Notes

1 In “A Stranger in My Own Life: Alienation in American Indian Poetry and Prose” Paula Gunn Allen determines three similar options available to Native Americans. First, there are “‘apples,’ who categorically reject the Indian culture they were born to”; others realize “that one cannot reject one’s race and culture,” so they “choose the other course of self-rejection”; third are what Allen calls “people caught between two cultures . . . almost paralyzed in their inability to direct their energies toward resolving what seems to them an insoluble conflict” (Sacred Hoop 134-35). The option I explore assumes that characters can resolve this “insoluble conflict” and mediate between cultures.

2 Chapter Four explores what I have termed the “nearly magical” in Mexic Amerindian literature, which is another twist on magical realism (for it is magical realism unrealized because of the same lack of faith explored with respect to So Far From God) unique to Chicano/a fiction.

3 Castillo has cleverly situated her novel in the “Land of Enchantment,” as well as in a town called Tome, or book.

4 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

5 Rubén refers to the Native American practice of finding direction and clarity by spending time in a sweat lodge, where traditionally only males are allowed.

6 Twenty years after Sofi has kicked Domingo out, he returns to his wife and now grown daughters. Sofi continues her household and work duties around him, unfazed (just as she is when he departs again, feeling that his wife no longer needs him, which she doesn’t).
Lisa Sandlin concedes that the section of the novel detailing the third sister Fe’s illness as a result of working for an unscrupulous chemical company finally slows down enough for the reader to become involved: “By the time she [Fe] finally barges into a supervisor’s office demanding the technical manual on the chemical she scrubbed with, we care about her . . . she moves us. And that is the magic of words on a page” (23).

Castillo’s quite opinionated narrator (gabachas being a derogatory term for white women) enters the text of the novel often, adding the feeling of a folk retelling to the events that transpire.

The other sisters’ names are also interesting within the context of the novel, Esperanza meaning Hope, Caridad meaning Charity, and Loca meaning The Crazy One.

In her article, “Borderliners: Federico Campbell and Ana Castillo,” Debra A. Castillo finds that the concept of home for Ana Castillo’s character Teresa of The Mixquiahuala Letters, “functions best in dreams and is too fragile to stand up to waking reality” (153).

For a complete discussion of young characters’ use of magic for mediation, see my analysis of Bless Me, Ultima, Solar Storms, Love Medicine, The Bingo Palace, and So Far From God in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

The different appropriation of Native American lands will be discussed later in this chapter.

Younger Chicano/a characters, such as Rudolfo Anaya’s Antonio of Bless Me, Ultima, and their use of magical realism are discussed fully in Chapter Two.

Susan Scarberry-Garcia discusses Joseph Campbell’s similar idea of separation-initiation-return at length with respect to N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn in her critical work Landmarks of Healing.

I have used the Penguin edition of Ceremony. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references in this section are to this text.
16 N. Scott Momaday’s novel *House Made of Dawn*, winner of the 1969 Pulitzer Prize, offers the starting point for contemporary stories of Native alienation and homecoming, such as Silko’s. Momaday’s protagonist Abel is a veteran of World War II who, within eleven days of returning from war, murders the evil figure of an albino Indian. Convinced of the albino’s supernatural evil status, Abel exercises what he believes to be his only option: “They must know that he would kill the white man again, if he had the chance, that there could be no hesitation whatsoever. For he would know what the white man was, and he would kill him if he could. A man kills such an enemy if he can” (Momaday, *House* 102-3). Like the later novel, *Ceremony*, *House Made of Dawn* details its protagonist’s journey back to wholeness from alienation and disintegration. However, Abel’s reintegration relies less on magical realism than Tayo’s, making *House Made of Dawn* an important background text to this chapter, rather than one I will explicate in detail.

17 The reader cannot help but be reminded here of Yeats’ “A Prayer for my Daughter”: “How but in custom and in ceremony/Are innocence and beauty born?” (11.76-77). The idea behind Silko’s ceremony bears the same hope, for a return of innocent appreciation of nature and ritual.

18 Unlike Tayo, Abel does know the correct rituals to perform for his own healing; however, he is, until the novel’s final pages, unable to perform them. Susan Scarberry-Garcia remarks: “Like the Stricken Twins, Abel needs music as medicine, but unlike them, he is incapable of singing” (*Landmarks* 103). That is, Abel cannot sing until, according to Scarberry-Garcia, his grandfather Francisco has helped him by imparting his own hunting stories from his deathbed:

So Francisco functions as Abel’s guide to the healing process in the closing scenes of the novel. The cumulative effect of bear stories leads to a sense of urgency and a compression of bear consciousness for Abel. Francisco’s bear hunting story symbolically serves to bring bear power to Abel. (*Landmarks* 82)
In the Navajo belief system, "bear power" is one of the strongest healing powers (Scarberry-Garcia, Landmarks 40).

19 In House Made of Dawn, Abel smears himself with ashes before beginning the ritual run that will launch his personal healing. Susan Scarberry-Garcia explains the purpose of this act:

When Abel prepares to run with the other men at dawn, as the novel circles back to its beginning, he rubs his upper body with ashes. This ritual action is connected to bear healing ritual, for ashes purify and ward off witches whether they are sprinkled from a bear paw or dusted onto a person’s flesh. (Landmarks 82)

Clearly both Abel and Tayo would experience a stronger connection to the earth by this ritual donning of natural substances, but Abel’s case seems different in its preventive nature. That is, Abel’s character needs protection from evil in a way that Tayo’s increasingly does not; the reader believes in Tayo’s ability to overcome witchery because of his devotion to the ceremony and healing. At this point in House Made of Dawn, Abel has only begun his own healing process, and the reader has no past action on which to found belief.

20 Ephanie, the protagonist of The Woman Who Owned the Shadows, experiences a similar discovery, as I will discuss in the next section of this chapter.

21 Paula Gunn Allen’s stance as a lesbian and militant feminist also keeps her between “norms and . . . closures.”

22 In her article, “Transformation, Myth, and Ritual in Paula Gunn Allen’s Grandmothers of the Light,” Tracy J. Prince Ferrell describes the theme of Allen’s 1991 work (Grandmothers) in terms not unlike those found in the earlier novel I am discussing here:

Paula Gunn Allen’s Grandmothers of the Light guides the reader into the ‘void’— the Great Mystery— where the power of female thought is essential to
creativity. This assertion of Native American myths concerning the origin and processes of life, a metaphorical return to the womb, is, for Allen, an affirmation of gender and cultural identity, a reclamation of personal and cultural self-awareness which results in a transforming energy. (77)

23 I have used the Aunt Lute edition of The Woman Who Owned the Shadows. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references in this section are to this text.

24 The story of The Woman Who Fell From the Sky parallels the Sky Woman story of the Seneca, which Allen notes in The Sacred Hoop:

Sky Woman is catapulted into the void by her angry, jealous, and fearful husband, who tricks her into peering into the abyss he has revealed by uprooting the tree of light (which embodies the power of woman) that grows near his lodge. Her terrible fall is broken by the Water Fowl who live in that watery void, and they safely deposit Sky Woman on the back of Grandmother Turtle, who also inhabits the void. On the body of Grandmother Turtle earth-island is formed. (15)

25 Allen’s stream-of-consciousness writing style has continued through her later works, bringing Ferrell to comment on its nature and significance in her study of Grandmothers of the Light:

Allen has developed a distinctive, emphatic, and didactic style, although at times she seems to be frantically trying to make sense of her writing to herself as well. The exploratory style is an example of Allen’s continuing efforts to emancipate her own thinking and writing—claiming the healing which she believes to be possible in the words of Native American myth and ritual. (81)

26 Paula Gunn Allen’s poem “Powwow 79, Durango” presents an equally unfulfilling portrait of a powwow: “my daughter arrives, stoned,/brown face ashy from the weed,/there’s no toilet paper/in the ladies room she
accuses me/ there’s never any toilet paper/in the ladies
room at a powwow she glares” (Shadow Country 27, 17-22).

27 Just after her upsetting encounter with these
white women, Ephanie has a disturbing dream:

She had dreamed one night of a grey-striped kitten
that in the dream had been skinned by Teresa’s
Colorado friends [the white women]. The pitiful
little thing had bled, its bare flesh pink and
oozing. But it had roused itself and walked to its
dish. It had begun calmly to eat. That described
the nature of her peculiar dilemma, she supposed.
To not understand that she had had enough. (147)

The poem “Paradigm” from Shadow Country describes an
earlier version of this image.

28 This attitude recalls that of the Native American
war veterans in Ceremony, who revel in being victims and
hating those they blame.
CHAPTER FOUR
A BALLOON TIED TO AN ANCHOR: THE LIMITS OF MAGICAL
REALISM IN MEXIC AMERINDIAN FICTION

In previous chapters, I explored magic realism and
mediation, as well as their effects on fictional Native
American and Mexic Amerindian characters. To recap, this
study holds that faith is the only prerequisite for the
experience of the marvelous in the real, or magical
realism. Catherine Bartlett concurs, finding that “any
approach to ‘magical realism’ presupposes a distinct
faith” (28). Next, mediation defines the state of
negotiating conflicts between cultures and/or ethnicities
to form a new conglomerate, enabling movement between and
within cultures by employing the best each culture has to
offer.

While Chapter One presented definitions of magical
realism and mediation, Chapters Two and Three analyzed
their instances in fiction. Characters explored in
Chapter Two included Antonio Márquez of Bless Me, Ultima,
Angel Iron of Solar Storms, Lipsha Morrissey of the Love
Medicine series, and La Loca Santa of So Far From God.
These characters relied on magical realism in a way that
enhanced their ability to interact with the world around
them as they came of age. Following this point, I have
argued in Chapter Three that the youth of the characters in Chapter Two may have been responsible for their ability to use magical realism to mediate between cultures. Chapter Three explored successful mediations through magical realism for Native American adult characters, namely Tayo of _Ceremony_ and Ephanie of _The Woman Who Owned the Shadows_, contrasting them with the unsatisfactory results magical realism yielded for adult Mexic Amerindian characters (Esperanza, Fe, Sofi, Caridad). Chapter Four uses these unsatisfactory results (that is, lack of mediation between cultures) as a springboard for discussion of the nearly magical, an offshoot of magical realism in which magical realism is presented to ethnic characters, but they are unable to use it (magical realism) to mediate between cultures.

For centuries, Native Americans have used the oral tradition to continue the life of their tribal stories. Native American authors have taken on the same task in writing, continually updating the stories and rituals necessary for the continued existence of their cultures in contemporary society. From the fiction I have analyzed thus far, the reader finds that adult Native American characters who successfully mediate between cultures (such
as Tayo) continue to hold tribal stories in high esteem, believing in their power. For these characters, separation from the stories and/or tribal way of life results in pain, depression, and even self-destructive tendencies. These negative results force Native characters to acknowledge the power of the traditions they have abandoned, crediting the stories anew with the power they have always possessed. This is not to say, however, that Native traditions are prized to the exclusion of other traditions. Instead, mediated characters have successfully updated ancient traditions by responding to (and, at times, integrating) elements of the dominant, surrounding culture.

Mexic Amerindian characters, in contrast, are always already separated from a physical homeland; there is no counterpart to the Native American reservation (which has existed in Native culture long enough to provide a sense of home, despite its original aim as housing for the displaced). I do not mean to imply that the Mexic Amerindian character possesses no community; however, his or her idea of home fluctuates with the location of family members and has long been subject to the transitory nature of migrant farming and other contract labor, which has
historically employed many Chicanos/as. The Mexic Amerindian sense of home has also always been annexed, not a place apart, like the reservation. Thus, ethnic group isolation provides another difference between Mexic Amerindians and Native Americans. For while Native Americans have had their own reservations, boarding and tribal schools, and governing policies, Chicanos/as have been expected to assimilate into the dominant culture of the United States since their annexation by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, despite the treaty’s written aim of legal separatism.

By virtue of his or her mixed ethnicity, the Chicano/a character is, again, always already separated from a single informing tradition; she or he may draw from many traditions, including Native American, African American, and Catholic. Perhaps because of this always already mediated tradition, adult Mexic Amerindian characters find themselves unable to adapt their brand of magical realism to cultural mediation in contemporary society. Or, perhaps, the updating that occurs with Native American traditions is ineffective for Mexic Amerindians, instead dating stories, relegating them to lore or legend. But very few adult Chicano/a characters
place the faith in magical realism that Native Americans
do. Latin American authors, such as Carlos Fuentes,
Isabel Allende, or Gabriel García Márquez, operate on a
different plane. With these writers, magical realism is
unquestioned, as comfortable as their own skin. Mexic
Amerindian writers definitely express tension with magical
realism; they are skeptical of its power.

Esperanza's Balloon

Sandra Cisneros' acclaimed novel, *The House on Mango*
Street, provides example after example of tethered dreams
and possibilities. The protagonist Esperanza finds her
potential physically hindered by her circumstances, like
"a balloon tied to an anchor" (Cisneros, *Mango Street* 9).
Esperanza uses this phrase to describe her relationship to
her younger sister Nenny, and I have employed it in order
to show the adult limitations that Cisneros' young
protagonist shoulders. This metaphor perfectly describes
the limitations on the use of magical realism for adult
Mexic Amerindian characters; the possibility of magical
realism and the imagination it requires are tethered by
the brutal weight of reality.¹
Woman Hollering for Magic

"About the truth, if you give it to a person, then he has power over you. And if someone gives it to you, then they have made themselves your slave. It is a strong magic. You can never take it back."

-Chac Uxmal Paloquin" (Cisneros, Woman Hollering Creek 27)²

This epigraph precedes "One Holy Night," a short story from Cisneros' 1991 collection of stories Woman Hollering Creek. The narrator, a young female known only to the reader as Ixchel, is a young girl who I will argue functions as an adult, and, therefore, cannot employ magical realism to mediate between cultures. Even though Ixchel's personal narrative holds the seeds of magical realism, no magical realism occurs. But, unlike Esperanza,³ Ixchel does not effect her own rescue, creative or otherwise, from her confining existence. Instead, Ixchel retreats into adult pessimism, telling her cousins about adult relationships in the following terms: "'It's a bad joke. When you find out you'll be sorry'" (35). I would like to offer Ixchel's story in "One Holy Night" as a prototype for a possibly emerging pattern in Chicano/a fiction, for Ixchel exemplifies the Mexic Amerindian character who cannot use magical realism to mediate between cultures because her adult reality conflicts with her personal longing for change, for any
possibility other than the life she has. In this respect, "One Holy Night" functions as nearly magical fiction. While Lois Parkinson Zamora never goes so far as to name a new offshoot of magical realist writing as I have with the nearly magical, her comparison of United States and Latin American magical realist writing in "Magical Romance/Magical Realism: Ghosts in U.S. and Latin American Fiction" expresses the precise idea I am applying to Chicano/a magical realist (here nearly magical) fiction:

I would argue that most contemporary U.S. magical realists find a way to bring their ghosts above ground, that is, to integrate them into contemporary U.S. culture in order to enrich or remedy it. . . . Latin American magical realists, on the contrary, refuse such consolation: magical resolutions are considered, then canceled by crushing political realities. (542-543)

Indeed, Ixchel's own "magical resolutions" are "crushed" by the realities of her gender and socioeconomic status, resigning "One Holy Night" to the category of nearly magical fiction.

Ixchel's crushed possibilities are all the more poignant because of Cisneros' use of magical realism later in Woman Hollering Creek, namely in the story "Eyes of Zapata." In this historical fiction account, the narrator Inés, the lover of Mexican general Emiliano Zapata, shape-
shifts into a bird at night, following her lover and finding him in the beds of other women. Although Inés uses her supernatural powers to harm these women and their families, she insists that her true power lies in her ability to keep Zapata coming back to her: "You [Zapata] always come back. In between and beyond the others. That’s my magic. You come back to me" (99). Given Cisneros’ willingness to employ magical realism elsewhere in the same text (in “Eyes of Zapata”), the reader must ask the question of “One Holy Night”: in a story so full of the potential for magical realism—ranging from Boy Baby’s ancestry and vision to Ixchel’s notions of love and sex—why doesn’t Cisneros permit a magical realist intervention? The answer may be as simple as Cisneros’ own aim as a writer; she must have intended to create a realist text without a rescue of any sort. But I believe that Ixchel finds no magical realism to assist in her struggle to mediate between cultures and truths because she is incapable of doing so. “One Holy Night” differs from “Eyes of Zapata” in the era of its setting; “Eyes of Zapata” details the time of the Mexican Revolution, from 1911-1917, while “One Holy Night” employs a contemporary context. This difference of setting is crucial, for I
have argued that mediation through magical realism is unavailable to contemporary Mexic Amerindian adult characters precisely because of their lack of faith in traditional, magical realist stories (like those which have continued to be held in esteem in contemporary Native American fiction), stories of the same ilk as “Eyes of Zapata.” Contemporary Chicano/a adult characters have progressed beyond the period wherein they could employ magical realism; for them, as for Ixchel, magical realism is a component of childhood. Ixchel, a contemporary protagonist, has moved beyond magical realism as a result of her premature assumption of adult financial responsibilities and sexual pressures. Ixchel’s reality and the possibilities she yearns for take two sides, forcing her to live with the perpetual inner conflict that nothing in her life is black or white. This duality not only exemplifies the frustration of magical realism unrealized, but the broader issue of the Mexic Amerindian border identity as well. My aim in this discussion is to show Ixchel’s status as an adult character (who subsequently cannot use magical realism to mediate between cultures), as well as to study the duality of themes that underlies the entirety of “One Holy Night.”
In her analysis of "Never Marry a Mexican," another story from *Woman Hollering Creek*, Katherine Rios describes Cisneros' narrative as one that "challenges received definitions of cultural authenticity" (201). Rios' view of the two-sided nature of these stories also supports my own: "*Woman Hollering Creek* offers a collection of stories about 'crossing over' in all its manifestations" (202). While Ixchel's border crossing from the United States to the Mexican town of San Dionisio de Tlaltepeango is meant to hide her pregnancy from the prying eyes of her American neighbors, her life is nonetheless full of other "manifestations" of crossing borders, such as moving from child to adult, and from naivété to knowing. Rios has even gone so far as to comment on the guilt inherent to crossing borders, especially for the Chicana character, like Ixchel:

Hers [Cisneros'] is a self-reflexive, self-critical analysis of the utterly transgressive nature of 'crossing over' even as it is a distressingly routine way of life for border people--not just people located in or on a physical, geographical border, but as [Gloria] Anzaldúa puts it, those who are the cultural outcasts. (202)

In addition to providing many instances of crossing borders, "One Holy Night" also provides an example of
nearly magical fiction, in that Ixchel has outgrown the
effective use of magical realism.

Ixchel relates her story as a flashback to the time
she met, fell in love with, and became pregnant by Chaq
Uxmal Paloquín, a man known around town as Boy Baby.
Ixchel longs to exist in a different kind of world, one
where love is dramatic enough to release her from the
mundanity of her life. She longs, in short, for some
brand of mediation, perhaps even a magical realist one.
Boy Baby offers her exactly the drama she craves: “He
said he would love me like a revolution, like a religion”
(27). For the young narrator, “a revolution” seems a
welcome relief: “I don’t think they understand how it is
to be a girl. I don’t think they know how it is to have
to wait your whole life” (34). And being worshipped,
being loved “like a religion,” fulfills Ixchel’s dreams as
well. Clearly, Ixchel longs for something significant,
larger than her present life. Boy Baby’s promises to
Ixchel are extreme, holding within them the suggestion of
grandeur, or even the supernatural. Ixchel’s yearning for
these possibilities does not, however, bring magical
realism into the text of “One Holy Night.” Instead,
Ixchel’s adult financial and personal responsibilities
hold any possibilities—magical realist or otherwise—in check.

The reader first learns about Ixchel’s adult behavior through her job; she earns money by selling juices, fruits, and vegetables from a pushcart. It is while selling these items that Ixchel first meets Boy Baby, and by their fourth meeting, the young woman is in love:

I’d park the pushcart in front of the Jewel food store Saturdays. He bought a mango on a stick the first time. Paid for it with a new twenty. Next Saturday he was back. Two mangoes, lime juice, and chili powder, keep the change. The third Saturday he asked for a cucumber spear and ate it slow. I didn’t see him after that till the day he brought me Kool-Aid in a plastic cup. Then I knew what I felt for him. (28)

Ixchel’s memories lie in recounting the exact items of Boy Baby’s purchases and his method of payment. But underneath her detailed, rather unemotional, listing of his visits, she veils the greater issue, saving it for the last item on her list: “Then I knew what I felt for him” (28). In saving the most meaningful item for last, as well as relating it with the same directness as the buying of mangoes and cucumber spears, Ixchel shows the reader her conviction in her own emotional state. Yet beyond this, the narrator has woven together the two major components of her life as seamlessly as she feels them:
the necessity of making money and her romantic aspirations. And, the fact is that Ixchel’s life is so consumed with wage-earning that romantic dreams have no real chance of reaching fruition. Ironically, the mature protagonist is mature precisely because her life does not permit romance.

In addition to her financial responsibility to her family, Ixchel has some degree of adult autonomy, hence her ability to be secretly involved with Boy Baby. This autonomy combined with the emotional confidence described above—recall that Ixchel knows “what [she] fe[els] for him” after a cup of Kool-Aid—create a character who is certainly more adult than child, especially in her own estimation (29). Ixchel bluntly refers to the time when she first met (but had not yet been intimate with) Boy Baby, telling the reader, “But you must know, I was no girl back then” (28). Yet, while Ixchel is quick to defend her maturity, knowingly telling us that she is “no girl,” her claim immediately follows what I interpret as a romanticized notion of sexual intimacy for a young woman who perceives herself as experienced: “I wanted it come undone like gold thread, like a tent full of birds. The way it’s supposed to be, the way I knew it would be when I
met Boy Baby" (28). Here again we find the fundamental conflict for Ixchel; her personal longing for transformation and romance opposes her reality at every turn. For, this is Ixchel’s actual experience of lovemaking, for the first, and only, time: “Then something inside bit me, and I gave out a cry as if the other, the one I wouldn’t be anymore, leapt out” (30). The narrative shifts instantly as Ixchel becomes the more experienced girl she has modeled herself after all along: “The truth is, it wasn’t a big deal. It wasn’t any deal at all. I put my bloody panties inside my T-shirt and ran home hugging myself” (30). She uses her sole sexual experience as a defense against the emotional turmoil her resulting pregnancy later causes her, taking solace in her new knowledge:

Then I understood why Abuelita [grandmother] didn’t let me sleep over at Lourdes’s house full of too many brothers, and why the Roman girl in the movies always runs away from the soldier, and what happens when the scenes in love stories begin to fade, and why brides blush, and how it is that sex isn’t simply a box you check M or F on in the test we get at school.

I was wise. The corner girls were still jumping into their stupid little hopscotch squares. (30-31)

Ixchel has never believed she is one of the “stupid little” girls, and her sexual encounter with Boy Baby simply confirms this personal belief. What matters to
Ixchel are emotions and action, which she conveys with succinct conviction, knowing she is in love after a cup of Kool-Aid. Ixchel emerges from sexual intimacy as the mature woman she always thought she was before, instantly jaded and knowing.

Although Ixchel is forced into mature pragmatism by the life she leads, she wants to believe in the exotic, revolutionary possibilities Boy Baby offers. To do so, she must hold two truths within her mind and heart at once, living torn between them. I have already pointed out the difference between love and sex for Ixchel, arguing that her dreams of "gold thread" contrast sharply with the experience of intercourse, which she likens to being bitten. Also key to the story is the conflict between the Boy Baby Ixchel knows and the one known to the world. For Ixchel, he is Chac Uxmal Paloqún, "of an ancient line of Mayan kings," and destined to restore his people to greatness with her as "his queen" (27,30). Within his king's name, the reader finds clues to Boy Baby's multi-layered identity; Chac is the name of the Mayan rain god, while Uxmal is the name of a Mayan city near Chichen Itza, meaning "thrice-built," in reference to the Mayan custom of building new temples over existing...
ones ("Chac"). Boy Baby himself is "thrice-built," having three names: Boy Baby, Chac Uxmal Paloquin, and his given name, Chato, or fat-face. And, as a part of Boy Baby’s personal mythology, the narrator herself is mythologized. The name Ixchel, like Chac Uxmal, is itself telling, for it is the name of the Mayan moon goddess, patroness of pregnant women (like the narrator). She provides the reader with this explanation of her lovemaking with the "king": "So I was initiated beneath an ancient sky by a great and mighty heir—Chaq Uxmal Paloquin. I, Ixchel, his queen" (30). This is the only time the reader is able to attach a name to the female narrator (and, for ease of understanding, the name by which I also refer to her), and it is a name that, like Chac Uxmal Paloquin, is false, assigning Ixchel a role in Boy Baby’s personal fantasy of greatness, which, despite its majestic connotations, does not involve magical realism.

In addition to his illustrious-sounding name, Boy Baby doesn’t know his age, claiming, "The past and the future are the same thing" (28). But the truth, defined by Boy Baby himself in the epigraph to this section, is mundane as well as ghastly. For, Boy Baby has made sure not to make himself a "slave" by giving the truth to
anyone, including his young lover. First Ixchel learns basic facts after her lover disappears, leaving her pregnant: “Boy Baby is thirty-seven years old. His name is Chato which means fat-face. There is no Mayan blood” (33). Just as this is sinking in with the pregnant (and approximately twelve- to thirteen-year-old) Ixchel, there is more:

The next thing we hear, he’s in the newspaper clippings his sister sends. A picture of him looking very much like stone, police hooked on either arm...on the road to Las Grutas de Xtacumbilxuna, the Caves of the Hidden Girl...eleven female bodies...the last seven years...

Then I couldn’t read but only stare at the little black-and-white dots that make up the face I am in love with. (34)

Ixchel still expresses her love in the present tense, despite the fact that the object of her affection has been revealed as a serial murderer. On some level, even after she discovers the “real” truth, Ixchel still clings to the sense of possibility love brings. In this respect, she is a floating balloon for wanting to believe in Boy Baby’s liberating story, which, to her, represents the freeing balloon of destiny, of grand-scale revolution, of possibility for anything other than her restrictive lot. Instead, her balloon is anchored by her gender, socioeconomic status, and pregnancy; her own misguided
hopes have led her into isolation, unrequited love, and unfulfilled dreams. Ixchel is anchored by the horrific truth of Boy Baby’s past, though she lives with the balloon of previous hope bouncing against the confines of her mind.⁸

For the entirety of the story, Ixchel never allows her balloon of hope and love to burst. For example, she remains known to the reader only as the moon goddess Ixchel, forever tying herself to Boy Baby’s personal mythology, whether she believes it or not. Further proof of her need to hold fast to possibility comes from her calling her story “One Holy Night.” Clearly this is Ixchel’s reference to the night of her “initiation,” the same night she was engulfed by something which, at the time, seemed bigger than herself. The reality of the encounter was wholly different; it felt like being bitten by a man whom she loves, but nonetheless feels obliged to justify: “Maybe you wouldn’t like him. To you he might be a bum. Maybe he looked it. Maybe. He had broken thumbs and burnt fingers. He had thick greasy fingernails he never cut and dusty hair” (28). Yet Ixchel clings to the dream of Boy Baby’s Mayan blood in spite of, perhaps even because of, knowing that there are two truths to
(every) his story. One example of this can be found in her personal reflections on Boy Baby, even after she has been sent to Mexico to live with "sixteen nosy cousins" until her baby is born (27). She recalls the adult maleness that enralls her:

They [her cousins] don't know what it is to lay so still until his sleep breathing is heavy, for the eyes in the dim dark to look and look without worry at the man-bones and the neck, the man-wrist and man-jaw thick and strong, all the salty dips and hollows, the stiff hair of the brow and sour swirl of sideburns, to lick the fat earlobes that taste of smoke, and stare at how perfect is a man.

I tell them, "It's a bad joke. When you find out you'll be sorry." (34-35)

Ixchel doesn't share the "perfect" part of her lover with her cousins; that's the truth she keeps for herself, for the part of her that's in love, the part that believes in magical realism, attainable or not.

For the best illustration of Ixchel's reality, the reader need look no further than her definition of love, which concludes the story:

There was a man, a crazy who lived upstairs from us when we lived on South Loomis. He couldn't talk, just walked around all day with this harmonica in his mouth. Didn't play it. Just sort of breathed through it, all day long, wheezing, in and out, in and out.

This is how it is with me. Love I mean. (35)
Ixchel’s definition of love results from her real experience of it; love for her has been transformed from the “gold thread” ideal to the wheezing of a harmonica. The shift in her perception begins when she learns the real identity of her lover, but Ixchel continues to love him and hold the “perfect” part of their relationship close. The result is a description of love that is akin to chronic disease. Ixchel ultimately resigns herself to “wheezing” for the rest of her life, for she has no other options.

Ixchel’s story in “One Holy Night,” through its use of language and magical realist possibility, exemplifies “a balloon tied to an anchor,” not only with respect to the lack of magical realism, but also regarding the restrictive life of its protagonist. Sandra Cisneros’ poetic style in “One Holy Night” conjures images beyond those found in contemporary realist fiction, allowing “One Holy Night” to emerge into a special, in-between category of writing: nearly magical. And, even though this dissertation has shown the positive fulfillment that mediation through magical realism can bring to characters ranging from Antonio Marez to Tayo of Ceremony, I have, hopefully, brought attention to the unique situation of
unrealized magical realism in contemporary Mexic
Amerindian fiction.

Notes

1 I am not arguing that any Chicano/a text having
mature characters and no magical realism is nearly
magical. In fact, the sense of magical realist potential
is wholly absent from other contemporary Mexic Amerindian
texts involving adult characters, such as Ana Castillo’s
Loverboys and The Mixquiahuala Letters, and Denise
Chávez’s The Last of the Menu Girls and Face of an Angel.

2 Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references
in this section are to this text.

3 Esperanza finds creative release and rescue from
her confining situation through writing.

4 Recall the idea from Chapter Two that for children,
magic is “within the realm of possibility” (Castillo, So
Far From God 192).

5 Ixchel is not the first woman in her family to
cross borders to hide her condition:

I [Ixchel] could hear Abuelita and Uncle Lalo talking
in low voices in the kitchen as if they were praying
the rosary, how they were going to send me to Mexico,
to San Dionisio de Tlaltepeango, where I have cousins
and where I was conceived and would’ve been born had
my grandma not thought it wise to send my mother here
to the United States so that neighbors in San
Dionisio de Tlaltepeango wouldn’t ask why her belly
was suddenly big. (33)

6 The reader cannot help but recall Carlos Fuentes’
story “Chac-Mool” from his 1980 collection, Burnt Water.

7 Perhaps Boy Baby believes he is committing the
ritual sacrifice of Mayan maidens.

8 Balloons are a recurrent image of freedom in
Cisneros’ fiction. Aside from Esperanza’s “balloon tied
to an anchor” from which this chapter takes its title,
many instances of this motif can be found in Woman Hollering Creek. For example, the narrator of “Eleven” wants “to be far away already, far away like a runaway balloon” (9), and Salvador of “Salvador Late or Early” has a body “too small to contain the hundred balloons of happiness” (11). “Mericans” describes the inside of a church: “The ceiling high and everyone’s prayers bumping up there like balloons” (19). “Woman Hollering Creek,” the title story of the collection, depicts men who are unable to communicate with each other: “But what is bumping like a helium balloon at the ceiling of the brain never finds its way out” (48).

Certainly Ixchel is remembering the time in her relationship with Boy Baby before she knew enough to worry about his past.

In an interesting sequence of parallels, Ixchel has much in common with Esperanza of The House on Mango Street. While awaiting the birth of her child, Ixchel selects the names of the five children she one day hopes to have, among them Lisette and Maritza (35). In “My Name,” Esperanza wishes her name were Lisandra or Maritza (11). And, in her description of the crazy man with the harmonica “who lived upstairs from us when we lived on South Loomis” (35), Ixchel names one of the streets that Esperanza’s family also lived on before they moved to Mango Street.
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