

**Postmodern Ethnicity in Sandra Cisneros' *Caramelo*:
Hybridity, Spectacle, and Memory in the Nomadic Text**

Ellen McCracken

Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros poses under a hot-pink parasol for a picture outside her purple house in San Antonio, wearing a flowered Mexican blouse, black short-shorts, and a red *rebozo*. For other appearances she wears Virgin of Guadalupe earrings, an ornate antique Oaxacan skirt, or a *china poblana* costume. She poses in a Mexican folkloric dress in a publicity photo for an appearance at the University of Southern California in 2002, and in a *rebozo* for the back cover of the first edition of *Woman Hollering Creek*. She remakes herself as a Chicana vamp on earlier book covers such as *My Wicked Wicked Ways* and *Loose Woman*, and for Angel Rodríguez-Díaz's "Portrait of Sandra Cisneros" housed in the Smithsonian Museum. In another photo, she lowers her *rebozo* to display her "Buddahlupe" tattoo on her upper arm. Her bright red truck has *zarape* seat covers and a license plate reading "AY TU."^[1]

These visual displays of ethnicity are part of a larger constellation of semiotic performance through which Cisneros deploys hundreds of ethnic signifiers to define and individualize herself. They function as second-degree signifiers of ethnicity, assemblages that creatively mix elements of a Mexican past denied to the children of immigrants who were shaped in the United States by the ideology of the melting pot. The individual signifiers in these displays of ethnicity are removed from their original sources and functions, becoming second-degree signs of ethnicity in the Chicana writer's repertoire. The *rebozo* which covers, warms, protects, and carries objects for the Mexican poor is reconfigured as the central motif of the 2002 *Caramelo*, a metaphor of narrative, family history, and ethnic identity. Cisneros poses in the "caramelo"*rebozo* for the *New York Times* photographer in launching the book.^[2] Language, popular traditions, and cultural artifacts are critically rearticulated in hybrid literary images of second-degree ethnicity.

Cisneros herself and her writing might be understood as a series of nomadic texts in which she continually reconfigures ethnic images as spectacle in order to recuperate memory and identity. If diaspora functioned to erode key elements of her forbears' Mexican culture—her father's exile to the United States in the late 1930s and her maternal grandparents' similar displacement during the Mexican Revolution—and the ideology of the melting pot in the new country further occluded this culture, then Cisneros the Chicana writer would seek in her

writing and her public persona to recapture the eroding cultural memory and identity. We can trace in her early poetry and fiction images of ethnicity that critique class and gender injustice, along with playful, celebratory ethnic representations that reassert ethnic pride. Eventually, as Cisneros becomes a postmodern ethnic commodity for the mainstream with the publication of *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* in 1991, both her public persona and her writing display to a larger degree hybrid ethnicity as spectacle. The nomadic search that both Cisneros and her literary characters undertake to recuperate the components of the repressed ethnic memory and culture has reached a new level in 2002 with the publication of her *magnum opus*, *Caramelo: or Puro Cuento*.

While some in the American mainstream are comforted and assuaged of their fear of the Other by the images of second-degree ethnicity in Cisneros' writing and public persona, she often creates what might be termed ethnic trouble through these hybrid motifs. Her transgressive poetry in *Loose Woman*, for example, challenges gender stereotypes of the passive, pure Mexican woman. The bright purple paint with which she "Mexicanized" her 1903 Victorian house in San Antonio's historic King William district created a two-year standoff with city authorities that received national news coverage. In 1997 the city's Historic Design and Review Commission charged that the color was not historically appropriate for the neighborhood, but Cisneros argued to the contrary: "The issue is bigger than my house. The issue is about historical inclusion. . . Purple is historic to us. It only goes back a thousand years or so to the pyramids. It is present in the Nahua codices, book of the Aztecs, as is turquoise, the color I used for my house trim; the former color signifying royalty, the latter, water and rain"^[3] The debate was widely covered in local and national media including CNN, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the Associated Press. Some accused Cisneros of trying to sell more books through the controversy, but many of her neighbors tied purple ribbons on their trees in support of her. Finally, two years later the dispute was settled when the Commission examined a sample of the paint and agreed that it had faded sufficiently to be acceptable.

Ethnicity is a dynamic and evolving presence in Cisneros' texts and public persona. In the epiphany she experienced as a graduate student at the Iowa Writers Workshop in 1978, Cisneros realized that her ethnicity would give her a voice as a writer, that her difference from many of the other students in the program made her unique and would serve well as the subject of her writing.^[4] At this turning point she transformed her economic and ethnic marginalization into a positive tool of identity. By the beginning of her second year at Iowa, her poems about the neighborhoods she lived in as a youth were well received in class. Another of her intentions, after the revelation in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, was to offer a more realistic portrait of the Latino barrio than that offered by the children's television program "Sesame Street." She notes that poor neighborhoods lose their charm after dark or when the garbage is not picked up, rats abound, and people get shot. But her portrait of the barrio would also differ from the accounts men had written: "I was writing about it in the most real sense that I knew, as a person walking those neighborhoods with a vagina. I saw it a lot differently that all those "chingones" that are writing all those bullshit pieces about their barrios" (Rodríguez Aranda 69). Remembered ethnicity in Cisneros' early work is both critical and gendered.

The first stories in *The House on Mango Street*, written in Iowa develop ethnically foregrounded characters that she remembered from her childhood years. Stories such as “Earl of Tennessee,” “Louis His Cousin, and His Other Cousin,” “Meme Ortiz,” “Marin,” “Edna’s Ruthie,” “Sire,” and “Gil’s Furniture Bought and Sold” present initial displays of the ethnicity of the barrios she lived in. After finishing her program at Iowa she worked at an alternative high school in Chicago and began to write about the students she met, hoping to change their lives through her writing. The narratives of these students appear in stories such as: “Alicia Who Sees Mice,” “Sally,” “What Sally Said,” “Darius and the Clouds,” “The Family of Little Feet,” “A Rice Sandwich,” and “The First Job,” and link gender and ethnicity to the critique of social inequities. Cisneros poignantly points to the pain of a female nomad whose ethnicity prevents her from adjusting to the new country in “No Speak English” in which an immigrant family tries to “tropicalize” their apartment by painting the interior walls pink to match the picture of their house in their homeland. Despite wearing brightly colored clothes, listening to Spanish-language radio, and re-painting the walls, the mother still sees the dwelling as a prison, as she is unable to adjust to life in the United States because she does not speak English.

Even the title of the book evokes ethnicity by adapting the name of North Mango Avenue in Chicago. Additionally, Cisneros pays tribute to the important Chicano literary journal and press founded by poet Lorna Dee Cervantes. In 1976 in the first issue of the literary magazine *Mango*, editor and publisher Cervantes told readers, “Aquí, we want to sprout mangos from the tops of your heads while we sing you fine songs” (2). She was alluding to a poem by Víctor Hernández Cruz in which a Puerto Rican who has come to New York singing fine songs drops the strange seeds he has brought with him out his window so that they land on people below. One falls on a policeman’s head, from which a beautiful green mango tree begins to sprout within a few months. Cisneros also pays homage to Cervantes’ important magazine and small press that had published her first chapbook *Bad Boys* in 1980 with the homonymous street in the Chicago barrio that is the center of her first book of fiction. She perhaps also hoped that the hybrid poetic prose pieces in the collection would sprout figurative mangos in the heads of her readers, following Cervantes’ and Hernández Cruz’s image.

The “mangos” that spring to life in *The House on Mango Street* are not simply pleasing pieces of exotic tropical fruit but rather signifiers of ethnic and gender trouble. Cisneros does not describe her Chicago barrio and the flats she lived in as local ethnic color to entice mainstream readers to the book. Instead, the central image of the house in the book points to liberation for the ethnic, gendered subject. It is both a literal lack in the past and present, and a figurative image connected to self-fulfillment through writing in the future. In each time period, the house is intimately connected to narrative or other forms of writing. While the family moves from one inadequate flat to another, the mother of protagonist Esperanza Cordero continues to tell her children bedtime stories about the perfect white house with trees and a large lawn that they will someday buy. Also recounting the past, Esperanza re-tells the story of her school principal and another nun humiliating her on two separate occasions by asking her to tell them exactly which dilapidated flat she lived in. Only when imagined in the future does the image of the house become positive, as Cisneros suggests that

it is the prerequisite for a woman to be able to write: “Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man’s house. Not a daddy’s. A house all my own . . . Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (100). Cisneros also communalizes her future imagined house, thinking against the grain of American individualism and the notion of private property. She imagines that she will invite bums to live in the attic of her future house, and that their creaking noises upstairs will replace the sound of rats in previous dwellings.^[5]

Later, in poetry and in several stories in *Woman Hollering Creek*, Cisneros deploys ethnicity more playfully. In “You Bring Out the Mexican in Me” from the collection *Loose Woman*, she subtly invokes the Catholic ritual of the litany in which repeated praiseworthy titles are uttered in praying to saints and other religious figures. Here the poetic persona of Cisneros is herself the object of this adulatory language, describing in line after line characteristics of Mexican culture that her lover brings out in her such as “the Dolores del Río in me” and “The Agustín Lara hopeless romantic in me” (4-5). The modified ritualistic incantations praise the poet’s ethnic self that the lover helps to validate. Here, instead of the religious supplicant praising the dozens of titles of the Blessed Virgin in asking repeatedly for intercession, the Chicana poet valorizes herself through the aspects of her Mexicanicity that the U.S. melting pot has traditionally undervalued. In *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, “La Cucaracha Apachurada Pest Control,” the name of Flavio Munguia’s business in the story “Bien Pretty,” plays with sound, language, and ethnicity in a manner similar to Cisneros’ special license plate with the words “AY TU.”

Cisneros’ playful ethnicity becomes more dominant after her move to San Antonio in 1984 and when her work begins to enter the mainstream. In this stage of her writing she starts to combine hegemonic multiculturalism with populist multiculturalism. Two forms of multiculturalism developed in response to the militant social movements of ethnic minorities in the United States that demanded an end to the myth of the melting pot. First, populist multiculturalism or multiculturalism from below, involved grass-roots groups of disenfranchised ethnic and racial minorities who militantly rejected the pressure to assimilate in order to attain the American dream. The response of U.S. institutions to this social unrest can be termed hegemonic multiculturalism, or multiculturalism from above. In an attempt to contain and even to profit financially from the large-scale protests of minorities, corporations and institutions sought ways to pacify and limit the social unrest. Departments, centers, and courses focusing on ethnic studies and multiculturalism were established on university campuses, for example. Mainstream publishing houses, many owned by large media conglomerates, also promoted multiculturalism from above primarily because they wished to make money from these social movements. One by one, they offered book contracts to selected Latino writers in the late 1980s and 1990s, aware that there was now a large audience of minority and non-minority readers interested in ethnic fiction. They often marketed these writers and their works as postmodern ethnic commodities, visually romanticizing folkloric ethnicity on book covers.^[6] When in the late 1980s Sandra Cisneros became the first Chicana writing about Chicano themes to receive a lucrative contract from a mainstream publisher, the perceived expectations of this larger mainstream public that would now be her audience began to shape her work. The ethnicity she deployed in her writing and her public persona became a

hybrid of both forms of multiculturalism. Cisneros merges elements of ethnicity emphasized during the periods of Chicano nationalism in the 1970s and early 1980s with the commercial expectations of ethnic representation that emerged in the age of multiculturalism in the late 1980s and 1990s.

This hybrid ethnicity is central to Cisneros' novel *Caramelo* released in September 2002 in both English- and Spanish-language hardcover editions. Both the writer and several of her characters are nomads wandering between the two worlds of Mexico and the United States in search of survival and identity. Spectacles of ethnicity abound in the novel, hybrid images that both define the self and display a distinct identity for heterogeneous mainstream audiences. These textual elements are polysemous, allowing the public distinct points of entry and interpretive nuances.

The front cover, for example, introduces the spectacle of ethnicity with the Edward Weston's photograph "Rose, Mexico" (1926) framed with a decorative flower-motif from a Mexican *retablo* [ex-voto]. Evoking variations of the red, white, and green of the Mexican flag, the artwork and Spanish word "Caramelo" overcode the female image in the black-and-white photograph with Mexican ethnicity. Beyond the aesthetic pleasure of the photograph, the image of the young woman's closed eyes and happy, smiling face might signify female docility to some, and an unthreatening, safe image of Mexicanicity to others. Some might at first mistake the image for Sandra Cisneros herself, accustomed to her sartorial role-playing in so many public venues. But the photograph takes on additional meanings in the context of the novel itself. The image of the smiling young woman on the cover alludes as well to the way the grandmother Soledad might have looked in that time period. The novel attempts to tell what a photograph cannot—the complicated story of the long life of the "awful grandmother," a term belied by the beautiful image on the front cover, and ultimately shown to be part of a complicated constellation of the both good and bad characteristics of the grandmother. Similarly, the first chapter visually describes a souvenir photograph taken when the children were young visiting Acapulco. The narrator corrects the ostensibly accurate image of the past by noting that she herself has been left out of the photo, like the photographer himself. What is to follow, the chapter suggests, is the untold story that the Acapulco photograph fails to tell, in which the author herself becomes a key character. Already on the first page Cisneros foreshadows the hidden family secret revealed at the end as if the book were a *telenovela* [soap opera]: "Here is Father squinting the same squint I always make when I'm photographed" (3). The foreshadowing advances to prolepsis on page 78, and finally to revelation on page 404.

Thus, the hybrid image of ethnicity on the front cover is open to various interpretations, and directs readers forward to several key elements of the novel that turn on the notion of the visual simulacrum. Ethnicity in the novel is linked to spectacle, to memory, and to the nomadic wandering of the text and its characters as they struggle to recover traces of the past. It is a particularly postmodern ethnicity on several levels, not only because it can never be entirely anchored or secured, but also because of its hybridity, and the literary techniques through which it is invoked.

Caramelo combines the carefully honed language of Cisneros' poems and short stories with the discursive length and vision of an epic saga. On one level *Caramelo* is an expansion of Cisneros' earlier stories "Mericans" and "Tepeyac" about her paternal grandparents in

Mexico City in *Woman Hollering Creek*, and “Papa Who Wakes up Tired in the Dark” from *Mango Street*. Now, these snapshot narratives of her grandparents and father are extended to longer biographical texts and intertwine with the stories of three generations of the family on both sides of the border. Wishing to pay tribute to her father and the immigrant generation he was part of, Cisneros discovered that his story was interconnected with many others. Narrative tributaries and imbricated layers continued to evolve as she combines fiction, family lore, and historical research to imaginatively recreate the milieu of her father’s generation. The multiple, complicated layers of the story and the sense that her audience is not well-versed in the history and customs of Mexico and Mexican-Americans led Cisneros to innovative narrative techniques such as lengthy footnotes in most chapters and even footnotes to footnotes.

The story of the Reyes clan, loosely based on Cisneros’ own family history, is the excavation project of Celaya Reyes, who attempts to uncover the repressed secrets of both her family and the larger historical master narrative. The “awful grandmother,” previously portrayed in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, is now given the dignity of a name-- Soledad Reyes, and is a contradictory figure who takes a hand in telling the involved story of her life. The stories of Celaya’s father, grandparents, and mother are situated within both the broad sweep and the everyday minutiae of Mexican and U.S. history. Cisneros recounts poignant scenes of the father Inocencio Reyes soaking his hands in bowls of water while eating dinner after working all day as an upholsterer, and being asked in an immigration raid to prove his citizenship after having risked his life for the U.S. in combat in World War II. Strong political and humanist images such as these are woven together with forgotten mass cultural figures such as Spanish ventriloquist Wenceslao Moreno who appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show and who meets Inocencio in a Chicago police station holding tank. Although Celaya promises her dying father that she will not reveal the family secrets he has told her, she is compelled to tell the family story (both truthfully and fictitiously) in the novel *Caramelo*.

Among the numerous postmodern strategies of the novel is the narrator’s dialogue with the character representing her grandmother, Soledad, who participates in the telling of her story and sometimes complains about the way it is told. In chapter 25 the power relationship briefly changes, and Soledad temporarily takes over the telling of her own story. Reminding readers that they are reading a fictive construct, not an unmediated version of reality, the narrator Celaya accepts a certain degree of participation from her character, but insists on her own ultimate control of the narrative. Ethnicity often overlays these postmodern strategies. Beginning with her childhood memories of her extended family’s long summer drives to Mexico in a nationalistic caravan of red, white, and green cars, the nomad Celaya digs back into her family’s history in an attempt to recapture the country she is homesick for but which in fact never really existed: “A country I invented. Like all emigrants caught between here and there” (434). Named after a Mexican city, Celaya weaves thousands of elements of Mexican culture and history in the *caramelo* colored rebozo/story, the final unfinished knots of which are tied by the characters’ tales. Like the *rebozo*, the *caramelo*-colored skin of the mysterious, exiled figure Candelaria is a key element of the spectacle of ethnicity that the nomad Celaya tries to recapture. The double figure of Celaya/Cisneros is an

ethnographer of her communities on both sides of the border, frequently presenting the images of ethnicity she deploys in telling the story as spectacles.

Celaya/Cisneros takes us with her as she crosses the border into Mexico on the long trip from Chicago. Despite the careful aesthetic language, Celaya's first impressions also play at being the observations in the field notes of the ethnographer: "Little girls in Sunday dresses like lace bells, like umbrellas, like parachutes, the more lace and froufrou the better. Houses painted purple, electric blue, tiger orange, aquamarine . . . Above doorways, faded wreaths from an anniversary or a death till the wind and rain erase them. A woman in an apron scrubbing the sidewalk in front of her house with a pink plastic broom and a bright green bucket filled with suds" (18). The colorful spectacle of ethnicity that Cisneros carefully reconstructs here decades after her childhood visits to Mexico merges the present and the past, popular and hegemonic multiculturalism, as the outsider describes a culture that has been partially lost to her through diaspora.

We might also speak of the deployment of linguistic spectacles of ethnicity, wherein language playfully displays itself. Frances Aparicio terms this literary technique tropicalized English, "a transformation and rewriting of Anglo signifiers from the Latino cultural vantage point" (796). Such techniques invite bilingual readers to recognize the Spanish subtexts beneath the English signifiers in Cisneros' experiments using false or invented cognates. "It's the hour of the nap" (39) may appear to be slightly drawn out English for many readers, but bilingual readers recognize the Spanish syntax that tropicalizes the sentence. Even monolingual readers can enjoy some of the humor in the bilingual puns such as "Estás deprimed?" or "What a barbarity!" (238, 256). Such linguistic spectacle allows the nomadic subject to reclaim memory and identity through hybrid, second-degree ethnicity, aesthetically reconfigured through inventive word play.

Cisneros engages in creative ethnography in one of the footnotes whose pretense is to explain the Spanish expression "Mi vida": "*My life. That's what Father calls Mother when he's not mad. —My life, where did you hide my clean calzones?*" But the footnote almost uncontrollably expands to a discussion of the "incestuous confusion" of Spanish terms of affection:

Mijo, my son. What Mother calls him when she isn't angry. . .

Mijo, even though she's not his mother. Sometimes Father calls her mija, my daughter.—Mija, he shouts. Both Mother and I running and answering,—What?

To make things even more confusing everyone says ma-má, or !mamacita! when some delightful she walks by. . .

If the delight is a he,—!Ay, qué papacito! Or,—!papasote! for the ones truly delicious to the eye.

A terrible incestuous confusion.

Worse, the insults aimed at the mother,—Tu mamá. While something charming and wonderful is—!Qué padre!

What does this say about the Mexican?

I asked you first. (307).

Caramelo's ethnography is a site of humor, playfulness, and social critique. Explaining her recuperated culture to outsiders, Cisneros at the same time bonds with Latinos about the linguistic idiosyncrasies of their culture. The dual audience she invokes with this polysemous footnote allows her to participate at the same time in hegemonic and populist multiculturalism.

Many of the over-one-hundred footnotes in the novel and the entries in the chronology at the end are ethnographic counter-narratives that correct the gaps in the master narrative of U.S. and Mexican history. Cisneros rescues little known cultural, historical, and political facts in her alternative documentation. "The marvelous Café Tacuba on Tacuba, number 28, still operates today, serving traditional Mexican fare, including Mexican candy desserts hard to find anywhere else in the capital, though I always ask for the same thing—the tamales and hot chocolate. Señor Jesús Sánchez, of Oscar Lewis fame, once worked there as a busboy" (275). The entry for 1994 in the chronology at the end of the novel reads: "Zapata is not dead, but rises up again in Chiapas" (438). I would argue that these forms of documentary hybrid ethnicity directed both to insiders and outsiders, although qualitatively different from the spectacular visual displays in Cisneros' clothing, tattoos, and house color, also function as do these displays to recover ethnic memory for the nomadic subject whose parents and grandparents endured exile.

Cisneros' use of the scholarly devices of the footnote and the chronology to document elements of her narrative of ethnic memory and identity draws us once again into the postmodern nature of her fictional enterprise. Not only do such techniques situate readers in the liminal space between genres, but also between fiction and truth, invention and documentation. In postmodernist fashion, Cisneros breaks down the borders between genres by merging techniques of scholarly documentation with fiction. This collapse is central to the novel's desire to call into question the stable distinction between fact and fiction. In so doing, however, Cisneros in effect undermines her ethnographic authority at the same time that she displays it.

One of the central epistemological issues of the novel is the destabilization of the fixed dichotomy of truth and lies, or history as opposed to fiction. From the outset Cisneros disrupts these comfortable distinctions, telling readers that the book is "puro cuento" [pure invention]: "The truth, these stories are nothing but story . . . I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies. If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, *perdóneme*" (np). Cisneros celebrates the postmodern erosion of the border between fact and fiction, and the questioning of fixed notions of the truth.

Audiences who read *Caramelo* can never be certain if they are reading facts about Cisneros and her family or imaginative inventions. Playfully insisting that we remain in this uncertain liminal space, Cisneros protects the members of her family from the exposure of their private life to the public, yet at the same time reveals and preserves their story for posterity. She invites readers to question the ostensible objectivity and truth of historical documents by coming to terms with the subjectivity and fictionality of such records.

But just as Cisneros has it both ways with respect to her family's story—ostensibly recounting certain "truths" about their life but also able to deny having done so beneath the disclaimer that the book is "puro cuento" [all lies]—so too does she undermine her role as an ethnographer who tells the "truth" about a culture. Again she wishes to have it both ways—to provide information about the culture she wishes to retrieve and to spectacularly display it—

yet at the same time insist that readers remain uncertain in postmodernist fashion about the reliability of the information she presents. Narrated within this liminal space between truth and fiction, second-degree ethnicity functions as ethnic trouble. “Authentic” ethnicity questions and destabilizes itself.

Although Cisneros’ use of second-degree ethnicity in *Caramelo* and her previous texts may also be reappropriated by some Americans as a “safe” non-threatening version of the ethnic Other, this does not diminish its importance as a contestatory response to the ideology of the melting pot. The covers of several of her books can be decoded as stereotypical images of Mexican women’s passivity that are far removed from the appearance of Chicana and Mexican women in the United States. The two million copies of *The House on Mango Street* that have sold to date, and Random House’s use of similar art on other ethnic texts, attest to American society’s current need for safe images of the ethnic Other.^[7] However, many of the hybrid images of ethnicity in *Caramelo* and other books create what might be termed “ethnic trouble” by compelling readers to engage with dense details about the overlooked historical agency of *mexicanos* and Chicanos. The hybrid nature of Cisneros’ second-degree ethnicity enables it to be pleasurable at the same time that it creates “trouble,” teaching readers many important elements of the history and culture of *mexicanos* on both sides of the border, but insisting on continuous postmodern questioning.

Works Cited

- Aparicio, Frances R. “On Sub-versive Signifiers: U.S. Latina/o Writers Tropicalize English.” *American Literature* 66.4 (1994): 795-801.
- Cervantes, Lorna Dee. [Editor’s Note.] *Mango*. 1.1 (Fall 1976): 2.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *Bad Boys*. San José, CA: Mango Publications, 1980.
- . *Caramelo: or Puro Cuento*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- . *The House on Mango Street*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1984. Republished New York: Random House, 1991.
- . *Loose Woman*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- . *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Jussawalla, Feroza and Reed Way Dasenbrock. “Sandra Cisneros.” In *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Ed. Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock. Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 1992: 286-306.
- McCracken, Ellen. “Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*: Community-Oriented Introspection and the Demystification of Patriarchal Violence.” In *Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writings and Critical Readings*. Ed. Asunción Horno-Delgado, et.al. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989: 62-71.
- . *New Latina Narrative: The Feminine Space of Postmodern Ethnicity*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999.
- Rodríguez Aranda, Pilar E. “On the Solitary Fate of Being Mexican, Female, Wicked and Thirty-three: An Interview with Writer Sandra Cisneros.” *Americas Review* 18.1 (Spring 1990): 64-80.

^[7] To view some of these images see: <http://images.google.com/images?q=sandra+cisneros&ie=ISO-8859-1&hl=en>.

^[2] See the photo by Vincent Laforet accompanying Mireya Navarro's article, "Telling a Tale of Immigrants Whose Stories Go Untold," *New York Times*, 2 November 2003, B-1+.

^[3] See www.accd.edu/sac/english/mcquien/htmlfiles/kingwill.htm. Many articles and documents about on the controversy are reproduced in "Case Study: On Painting a House Purple" in *In Context: Participating in Cultural Conversations*. Ed. Ann Merle Feldman, Nancy Downs, Ellen McManus. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2002: 300-326.

^[4] Cisneros has recounted on many occasions the circumstances of her epiphany at the Iowa Writers Workshop. During a discussion of French theorist Gaston Bachelard's book *The Poetics of Space*, the other students in her seminar spoke freely about their nice houses and their vacation homes on Cape Cod or in other resorts. Cisneros realized at that moment that her family's lack even of an adequate first home was what distinguished her from the other students and that she would find her unique voice precisely by writing about such differences. That evening she began the stories that would become her first book of fiction, *The House on Mango Street*. See Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 301-303.

^[5] For an analysis of ethnic and gender trouble in Cisneros' 1984 text, see McCracken, 1989.

^[6] For further discussion of these two forms of multiculturalism and an analysis of some of the images on the covers of Latina fiction, see, McCracken, *New Latina Narrative* 11-33.

^[7] See, for example, F. Sionil José's *Three Filipino Women* (New York: Random House, 1993). Here Random House markets a male writer from the Philippines with cover art by Nivia Gonzalez, the same Chicana artist whose work appears on the covers of Cisneros' successful books. I term this phenomenon "minority metaphoricity," hegemonic multiculturalism's notion that one minority can substitute for another in the marketing of the postmodern ethnic commodity.